

# Speech by DPM Teo Chee Hean at the 2013 Marriage and Parenthood Package Press Conference

**2013 MARRIAGE AND PARENTHOOD PACKAGE PRESS CONFERENCE  
OPENING REMARKS BY MR TEO CHEE HEAN, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, COORDINATING  
MINISTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS, AND MINISTER IN  
CHARGE OF NPTD ON MONDAY, 21 JANUARY 2013, 1030 HRS**

Good morning. Thank you for joining us at today's press conference which will touch on the latest enhancements to the Marriage and Parenthood package.

## **Introduction**

2012 was a very significant year for Singapore's population. Our first cohort of post-World War II Baby Boomers born in 1947 turned 65 in 2012. Over the next 18 years, 900,000 Singaporeans, or one quarter of our current citizens, will cross the age of 65.

Our total fertility rate has been below the replacement rate of 2.1 for more than three decades. And if our birth rates remain at this level, our citizen population will start to decline by around 2025, and our citizen workforce will start to decline by 2020. This assumes that there is no further immigration.

In 2012, our total fertility rate improved slightly from 1.20 in 2011, and is estimated to be in the range of 1.28-1.30. Now, this is only a mini-Dragon Year effect compared with previous Dragon Years, and we have to see whether this can be sustained in the coming years.

## **Marriage and Parenthood**

Singaporeans are the core of our society, and the best and most fundamental way to build a stronger Singaporean core is to encourage marriage and parenthood.

This is regardless of whatever else we do to deal with our population challenge. The starting point, and the most fundamental thing that we want to do, is to encourage Singaporeans to marry and have more children. The benefit and welfare of Singaporeans are also our priority as we seek to encourage marriage and parenthood.

Everything else we do to tackle our demographic challenge builds around this. Hence, this Marriage and Parenthood Package is the first component, the most fundamental component of our population roadmap that we will be presenting. Subsequently, we will put out two other components. The second component is about providing good education and good jobs so that Singaporeans will continue to fulfil their hopes and aspirations, while meeting our social and infrastructure needs as our population ages. And the third component is, how we can continue to have a high quality living environment.

So the core is still the Singapore citizen population, making sure it is sustainable and stable in the

long term. Then how to provide Singapore citizens, who have high aspirations, with good education and good jobs while still looking after our ageing population. And thirdly, how to ensure that we continue to have a high quality living environment.

So Marriage and Parenthood continues to be a key priority. We recognise that getting married and having children are very personal decisions. Nevertheless, based on the feedback that we have been collecting for the past year, these decisions are affected by factors such as societal values and expectations, work-life balance, childcare, housing and affordability. We are thus making further enhancements to our Marriage and Parenthood measures to address these issues.

But more fundamentally, our overall aim is to strengthen our family-friendly environment. And we want to encourage society as a whole, including individuals, families, friends, employers, businesses and stakeholder groups, to build a more profamily environment and family-friendly mindset in Singapore. So this is something which needs to be done even beyond the Marriage & Parenthood Package. It involves all of us.

### **Summary of the 2013 Enhancements**

The presence of my colleagues here today from a wide range of Ministries illustrates the comprehensive review that we have taken, and the range of measures that are being proposed or enhanced. Many of the measures are cross-cutting and involve many different Ministries and agencies. So we have Minister for National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan, Minister for Health Minister Gan Kim Yong, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office from the National Population and Talent Division, Minister Grace Fu, Acting Minister for Social and Family Development Minister Chan Chun Sing, and Minister of State for Manpower and Health Amy Khor.

The 2013 enhancements to the Marriage and Parenthood Package focus on the following 5 key areas:

- First, housing. We will make it faster and easier for couples with children to have access to housing, in order to support earlier marriages and childbirths.
- Second, conception and delivery. We will defray more of the cost of delivery, and assisted conception.
- Third, healthcare costs. We are making significant initiatives in medical coverage for children from birth. This was also an issue that was raised in Our Singapore Conversation as an area of concern among parents, especially young parents. I will ask Minister Gan Kim Yong to speak about this later. MOH will also be releasing the details tomorrow, together with other announcements on helping families with children's healthcare costs.
- Fourth, we want to promote better work-life balance. So, we will enhance work-life measures to help working couples balance work and family commitments.
- And fifth, signalling that fathers have an important role to play in raising and caring for their children. I think this is something which both mothers and fathers want – more involvement of fathers in raising their children.

We have also received quite a lot of feedback about the importance of having affordable and accessible good quality pre-school. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social and Family Development are reviewing the pre-school sector, which will include measures to address infant and child care fee affordability. These are very helpful for marriage and parenthood, but they also serve a larger purpose. So these will be announced on a separate occasion on Wednesday so that that they are not seen just as marriage and parenthood measures.

I will now invite Minister Grace Fu, to provide more details about the key measures in the package.

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A sustainable population is really the most crucial aspect of ensuring that Singapore's long-term future is assured, and Marriage and Parenthood is a key plank of our population policies. And that is why we have chosen to start at this point – Marriage and Parenthood, building a strong Singaporean core.

The Marriage and Parenthood package, that we have just announced, will bring the annual budget from an estimated \$1.6 billion a year to \$2 billion a year. But it is not really the amount of money that is important, it is really the kind of signals we are sending, the kind of help and support we are giving to families. And we need all parts of society to help in this effort.

For the rest of this week, we have 2 other announcements which are linked but we have kept them separate because there are broader objectives to achieve and we don't want them to be seen purely as Marriage & Parenthood issues. They are linked because healthcare as well as infant care and childcare are concerns of young parents. But they are also separate pieces with a broader objective beyond just purely marriage and parenthood. So those will be dealt with tomorrow and the day after.

For the population challenge as a whole, the next major piece has to do with how to meet Singaporeans aspirations for jobs. We are having a better educated population, with aspirations for good jobs. So how do we meet those aspirations for good jobs, while at the same time, meet the social and infrastructural needs of Singapore, particularly when we are facing this very rapidly ageing population. So that's the second piece.

And the third piece is how to ensure a high quality living environment for Singaporeans. So these are the 3 major pieces of the population challenge. We hope to address these next 2 pieces next week, and to have a good debate in Parliament before Chinese New Year.

Thank you very much