

More needs to be done to aid the elderly

Mavis Toh

Voluntary welfare organisations in Singapore will have to do more to take care of the ageing population, said Mr Lim Boon Heng, who is the minister in charge of ageing issues.

In the coming years, the number of people living alone will only rise, he said.

Mr Lim, the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, gave three reasons: There will be more singles, more surviving spouses, and more divorces.

Today, one in 12 Singapore residents is aged 65 years and above. By 2030, the ratio will be one in five.

"There will be a lot more singles in future, so the work you have to do can only increase," said Mr Lim, who was speaking to about 700 volunteers at the Lions Befrienders Appreciation and Awards Presentation 2009 last night.

The Lions Befrienders Association currently reaches out to about 2,000 lonely seniors through weekly visitations.

Association chairman David Lee told *The Sunday Times* that the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports has asked it to raise the number covered to 8,000 in six years' time.

It now has about 1,000 volunteers. "We need to train more volunteers to do this and the biggest challenge is recruitment," Mr Lee said.

Mr Lim said that besides the association's reaching out to more seniors, different organisations need to come together to provide a more "person-centric" and "holistic" service to seniors.

Most organisations now work separately, he noted.

"Imagine you're a senior and require different services but you have to approach different organisations for help. I think it is difficult for the senior," Mr Lim said.

He also noted a problem with nursing homes where "those who go in, don't go back home".

"We have to look at the social and emotional aspects of service, to make sure ties of the elderly and their families are maintained during their stay in nursing homes," he said.