

Media Release

To be embargoed until 1pm (SGT) on 7 October 2021

SOCIAL-HEALTH-COMMUNITY INITIATIVE LAUNCHED TO TACKLE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF SINGAPOREANS IN A PANDEMIC

1. **Thursday, 7 October 2021** – The COVID-19 pandemic has affected not only the physical health of the community, but also the mental, social and emotional well-being of Singaporeans. Many are worried about their jobs and the safety of their loved ones, while others may feel isolated due to social restrictions and adjusting to life in the “new normal”, while adapting to safe management measures to keep one safe.
2. Recognising this, a group of social-minded innovators have formed a compact to tackle issues impinging on the mental health and well-being of seniors, caregivers and youths in Singapore, by designing solutions that are pragmatic and easy to execute.
3. Called Design4Impact (D4I), the platform brings together diverse stakeholders to co-create and test sustainable and community-owned solutions for health and social needs of Singaporeans amplified by COVID-19. The initiative emphasises the creation of simple and feasible solutions from the outset, such that they can be realistically adapted, implemented and scaled. D4I traverses the social, health and community care sectors, recognising that social, behavioural and environmental factors play a big role in one’s health and well-being.
4. This year’s edition of Design4Impact will focus on the issue of mental health. Specifically, it aims to improve the mental health and well-being of 3 key target groups: Seniors, Caregivers and Youths, framed around the following challenge statements:
 - i. Meeting the mental health and well-being needs of seniors,
 - ii. Empowering caregivers with the skills and resources to improve their mental health and well-being,
 - iii. Facilitating youths’ help-seeking behaviour for mental health and well-being.
5. The increase in the prevalence of mental health conditions and how it affects a person’s emotional and interpersonal well-being is particularly relevant and important in our current circumstances. A study by the Institute of Mental Health (IMH)¹ found that 8.7% of the surveyed Singapore population met the criteria for clinical depression. The same study found that 9.4% met the criteria for anxiety and 9.3% met the criteria for mild to severe stress. A separate study commissioned by The Straits Times in April 2021² found that more than one in

¹https://www.imh.com.sg/uploadedFiles/Newsroom/News_Releases/24Aug2021_Novel%20Coronavirus,%20Population%20Well-being%20and%20Resilience%20A%20Cross-Sectional%20Study.pdf

² <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/health/one-year-after-circuit-breaker-people-in-spore-socialising-less-working-more-mental>

three Singaporeans experienced a decline in their mental wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Led by MOH Office for Healthcare Transformation (MOHT) and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) and supported by DesignSingapore Council (Dsg) and Institute of Systems Science at National University of Singapore (NUS-ISS), the inaugural edition of D4I last year was met with overwhelming support, culminating in an ecosystem of socially motivated alumni, a pipeline of good ideas, and 3 winning solutions accelerated into impactful solutions to address citizens' needs.
7. Similar to last year, MOHT and NCSS are providing the problem statements, insights, research, networks and content experts from the health and social care sectors for this year's edition.
8. Said Dr Tan Weng Mooi, Co-Head (Integrated Health Promotion), who leads MOHT's mental health programme: "There are many good ideas percolating in the health-socio-community space in Singapore, in an environment where we increasingly recognise the need to start difficult but necessary conversations. But translating a good idea into a feasible solution isn't always easy. Which is why we recruit participants of D4I who have the lived experience to design solutions to problems that they have the best understanding of."
9. Dsg and NUS-ISS have conceptualised a design-centric approach to implementation, which will involve community providers and users at every stage.
10. Said Mr Mark Wee, Executive Director, Dsg: "The D4I initiative is not just a meaningful initiative, it is very relevant to our existing times when mental health issues are coming to the fore and affecting more people of all age groups. The pandemic has not been kind to vulnerable groups like the seniors and youths, and even their caregivers. Hence, now more than ever, design thinking should be leveraged to find innovative solutions, and through D4I, people from diverse walks of life can come together to tackle this prevalent issue, appreciate the impact and value of design on our society, and develop a design mindset for their future needs."
11. Echoing the sentiment, Mr Khoong Chan Meng, CEO, NUS-ISS, added: "Our Smart Health Leadership Centre is pleased to partake in D4I for the second year running. In its 2nd edition, the focus on mental health for seniors, youths and caregivers are of paramount importance and cannot be overlooked. We look forward to the many creative and implementable solutions as we take the teams through an innovative and comprehensive learning journey to improve the lives and well-being of Singaporeans in the community."
12. Prudential Singapore has also returned as a partner for a second year to provide \$30,000 in implementation funding for the top 3 teams to bring their solutions to fruition.
13. Mr Dennis Tan, CEO, Prudential Singapore, said: "Since the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, mental health issues have exacerbated. According to a recent Prudential study³, more than a third of Singaporeans said their mental health worsened in the past year. Deterioration in emotional wellbeing can affect physical health and one's quality of life in the long term. Vulnerable groups, who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, are now at greater risk. By coming together to develop effective solutions for them, we can enable our community to achieve better health outcomes."

³ Please refer to [Re-imagining 100: The pandemic's impact on longevity](#)

14. The premise of D4I is simple. A diverse group of participants come together and learn user-centred research and design thinking skills to jointly create simple and feasible solutions that can be realistically adapted and scaled. They will then be connected to mentors, resources, funding and networks to implement their pilots within the community.

15. The D4I strategy is centred around the following tenets:

- Capability Building

Participants are guided by a facilitator skilled in design thinking, a buddy from the healthcare or social service sector, a panel of industry content providers and mental health experts to ensure that solutions created are feasible and relevant to the needs of service users.

- Citizen at the Centre

Key to the design process is the involvement of citizens: understanding their different challenges, whether it is social or health or other issues, and then designing the most effective interventions that work best from the citizen's perspective, to deliver the greatest impact for them.

- Whole-of-society

D4I brings together community partners with a wide range of skills and backgrounds - health and social care practitioners, IT professionals, designers, academics, data scientists, volunteers of different ages. D4I also works with government agencies to innovate better ways of supporting vulnerable groups. The involvement of public service champions facilitates the opportunity for research and findings that could impact practice and policy.

- Innovation Ecosystem

D4I leverages existing networks in the health/mental health and social services ecosystem, using data sets, research, insights and existing digital platforms. Participants are linked up with implementation partners, mentors, funders, incubators and accelerators for a leg-up in their innovation journey.

- Feasible and Implementable solutions

D4I is not just a theoretical exercise. Projects that are crafted through the programme will be tested in Boon Lay, for a start, and then scaled to other precincts in Singapore. This will build on existing efforts in Boon Lay, as one of MOHT's upcoming Healthy Precinct pilot sites.

16. Said Ms Tan Li San, CEO, NCSS: "The COVID-19 situation is still evolving, and we all have a part to play in supporting the mental health needs of the community that have been brought to the fore by the pandemic. For this to happen, we need to be innovative, collaborative and intentional in designing services with the user in mind. Earlier this year, NCSS launched the Social Innovation Starter Kit which contains innovation and design thinking tips, tools, and frameworks as well as case studies contextualised to the social service sector. The starter kit will also be used as part of the Design4Impact programme to guide participants on how to incorporate service users' perspectives in the design process and collaborate with others for sustainable solutions.

17. Minister for National Development and Minister-in-charge of Social Services Integration Desmond Lee said: “Social and health issues are closely intertwined, particularly for the most vulnerable members of our society. So, to better support vulnerable families, we need to take a holistic approach. Focusing only on their health, or only on their social challenges, in isolation, is not enough; we need to tackle both the health and the social issues in tandem.”

“The solutions don’t just lie with the government. In fact, community partners have a significant role in integrating social-health service delivery. With their expertise in various areas, and their extensive local networks, they can help us to better identify where the needs and gaps really are on the ground, and meet these needs more quickly.” Mr Lee added, “We must keep pressing on together to emerge from this pandemic, and work toward a future where we can learn to live with the virus, as it becomes endemic. But along the way, we must also keep finding better ways to support each other – socially, mentally, emotionally – as we get through these tough times.”

About the Organisers

MOH Office for Healthcare Transformation (MOHT)

MOHT is an innovation office established by MOH in 2018 to lead, facilitate and accelerate system-level changes needed to transform healthcare delivery, and the empowerment of health and self-management of disease. We collaborate with partners to implement strategic initiatives and develop key enablers of scaling, and work with MOH to mainstream these as nationally scaled programs that contribute to the reshaping of Singapore's health system. Our vision is a transformed health system that is patient-centric, data-driven and digitally enabled to better empower health, prevent disease and provide excellent value-based care. Key to this mandate is our Healthy Precinct initiatives, aimed to improved health of the population through sustained change in health behaviours by working with the people, public and private sectors to pilot and test initiatives in precincts, and scale them across Singapore. To do this, we forge whole-of-Government and partner collaboration, drive community activation and develop frameworks, tools and platforms to facilitate integrated health promotion through clusters and partner agencies.

National Council of Social Service (NCSS)

NCSS is the umbrella body for over 450 member social service organisations in Singapore. Its mission is to provide leadership and direction in enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our members, advocating for social service needs and strengthening strategic partnerships, for an effective social service ecosystem. Community Chest is the fundraising and engagement arm of NCSS and Social Service Institute (SSI) is the human capital development arm of NCSS.

Design Singapore Council (Dsg)

DesignSingapore Council's (Dsg) vision is for Singapore to be an innovation-driven economy and a loveable city through design by 2025. As the national agency that promotes design, our mission is to develop the design sector, help Singapore use design for innovation and growth, and make life better in this UNESCO Creative City of Design. The Dsg is a subsidiary of the Singapore Economic Development Board.

Institute of Systems Science, National University of Singapore (NUS-ISS)

Established in 1981, the Institute of Systems Science (ISS) at National University of Singapore (NUS) develops digital talent for the industry through graduate education, executive education programmes, consultancy and research services. ISS is widely recognised as a champion of industry transformation, future jobs and future skills, enabling a digital economy that is always learning and always leading.

For more information, visit www.iss.nus.edu.sg

About Prudential Assurance Company Singapore (Pte) Ltd (Prudential Singapore)

Prudential Assurance Company Singapore (Pte) Ltd is one of the top life insurance companies in Singapore, serving the financial and protection needs of the country's citizens for 90 years.

The company has an AA- Financial Strength Rating from leading credit rating agency Standard & Poor's, with S\$49.3 billion funds under management as at 31 December 2020. It delivers a suite of well-rounded product offerings in Protection, Savings and Investment through multiple distribution channels including a network of more than 5,000 financial consultants.

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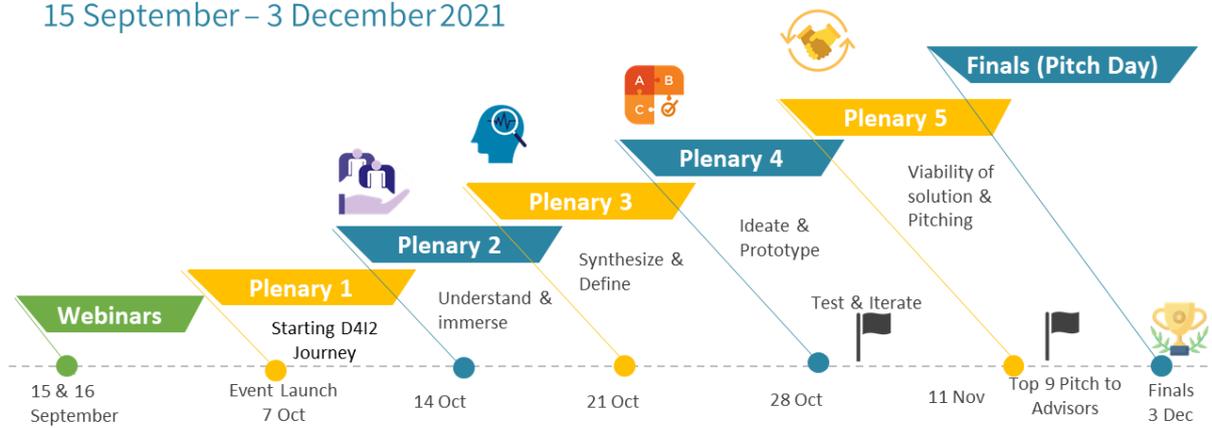
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Annex 1: Design4Impact 2 Timeline

Design4Impact 2 Timeline 15 September – 3 December 2021



- 15 and 16 Sep: Webinars
- 7 Oct to 3 Dec: D4I2 Design Challenge
- Jan 2022 onwards: Implementation of pilots for top 3 teams



Annex 2: Winners of Design4Impact 2020

1) BlockBox

Team members: Sheikh Izzat, Alden Tan, Caitlin O'Hara, Koh Ying Ying, Jaymee Justiniano, Ho Ding Heng

“How might we improve chronic disease management for seniors through inclusive community engagement in the face of social distancing measures?”

A 2-pronged solution, called BlockBox, comprising:

1. BlockBoard - Converting the void deck into a community space with health progress boards and personalised display boards for photos and artworks by participating seniors
2. KitBox, a senior-friendly monthly health subscription box with emergency contacts, simple exercise equipment, healthy snacks and recipes, postcards and materials for art therapy

Goal: To recreate the social media experience for seniors with an inclusive, community driven way of to manage their chronic disease. The solution draws on the features of social media – minus the technology—making it an inclusive solution for seniors who might find the use of technology challenging.

BlockBox was piloted at Yuhua Senior Activity Centre (SAC) from January 2021 to March 2021 with 32 seniors with hypertension with the aim to improve support for seniors with chronic disease management and to address issues of social isolation due to COVID-19. Seniors with chronic diseases need to adhere to specific lifestyle modifications including diet and exercise recommendations. Due to social distancing, the seniors' usual community activities are disrupted, resulting in a lack of motivation and loss of opportunities for seniors in managing their chronic diseases.

To tackle this issue, a group of undergraduate students from NUS and Yale University – created a community space (BlockBoard) at Yuhua SAC to track senior residents' health habits and rolled out monthly health subscription boxes (Kitbox) to keep seniors engaged.

Each elderly participant was paired with one of 16 trained youth volunteers, who would carry out various activities with the elderly based on a weekly theme, along with updating their individual Board where simple information about themselves including a “health report” on what they ate, how much they exercised in a day, their weight and blood pressure measurements are included.

After the pilot period, the team carried out a study to evaluate the changes in the participants' behavioural and health outcomes. The program received positive feedback both from the residents and the volunteers. From the program, 81% of residents saw an improvement in blood pressure, and two-thirds reported improvement in their health behaviours.

Said Team Lit member Mr Sheikh Izzat, a 4th year medical student: “Looking back at our journey, we're humbled at how a group of like-minded individuals could come together to create something that we never thought we'd be able to come up with individually. We are happy that what we're doing can potentially have a wide impact. In the future, we would love to share our idea and learning points with other groups who are interested in replicating this approach.”

Silver Buddy

Team members: Dr Lin Zhiying, Dr Matthew Chen, Dr Francis Ho

“How might we better transition a post-discharged isolated a senior from hospital to home?”

Summary of solution: A post-discharge Silver Buddy initiative with an accompanying Buddy Aide app that matches keen volunteers to seniors who live alone.

Goal: Enlisting volunteer befrienders as Buddy, and a caregiving app to help seniors adjust to post-hospitalisation life independently and confidently

One of the key challenges faced by older people staying alone after a hospital discharge is adjusting to a new daily routine after multiple changes have been made to their medications, diet and follow-up appointments. The strict circuit breaker and social distancing measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic have increased the restrictions that community services face in being able to extend their support to these socially isolated older persons, compounding the difficulties encountered during the transition period from hospital to home. This results in an increased risk of mental health issues such as depression, and hospital readmissions due to inability to cope in the community.

Team St Luke’s Eldercare’s mooted the idea of a Silver Buddy initiative as a solution to target single older persons (aged 65 years and above) living alone, who have been admitted to the hospital. It aims to promote a smooth transition for the patient post-discharge from hospital to home by pairing patients up with a buddy volunteer staying in their vicinity, who will be able to keep track of the changes that have been made during the hospitalization. Prior to discharge from the hospital, the volunteer buddy will be introduced to the senior in the ward and will receive direct instructions from the medical team, and post-discharge will continue to monitor the senior via phone calls as well as home visits.

The Silver Buddy initiative will be piloted at the National University Hospital (NUH), as a collaboration between the NUH Geriatric Department and trained volunteers. The pilot will be carried out in 2 phases, with the first focusing on piloting the senior-buddy post-discharge protocol and the second the development of a Buddy Aide app, with features such as medication instructions, information on follow-up appointments, and therapy reminders to aid the buddy in the caregiving process.

Team member Dr Francis Ho, who is also the head of radiation oncology at NUH said that the team is at a stage of working through what the journeys of buddies and patients might look like, and making sure that the two journeys were able to “seamlessly interface with each other”.

The team plans to pilot the initiative with 5 to 10 patients, and will continue to fine-tune and evaluate its feasibility before scaling up.

2) Block vs Block Bingo

Team members: Yong Limin, Lim Jieying, Prof Alan Wong

“How might we leverage the community to motivate HDB residents to develop healthy lifestyle habits?”

Summary of solution: Two selected HDB blocks in Jurong will participate in a month-long Block vs Block Bingo challenge where residents will join forces with family members and neighbours in tackling sports and wellness tasks, in exchange for prizes.

Goal: Using gamification to galvanise residents, their families and their neighbours to pick up healthy habits and health-seeking behaviours while forging family bonding and neighbourliness.

Team Z1-5 came up with an inter-block competition called Block vs Block Bingo to motivate residents living in HDB flats to develop healthy lifestyle habits, such as eating healthily and exercising regularly. Challenges were designed such that they required both individual and the combined effort from many residents within each block, in a bid to strengthen family bonds and neighbourliness. Attractive rewards will be given to individuals, units and blocks who complete the challenges.

Through such community-scale gamification, the team hopes to generate healthy competition, motivate healthy behaviours, and ultimately strengthen the “kampung spirit”.

Said Z1-5 member Ms Yong Limin, a physiotherapist: “Due to Covid-19, it has become increasingly difficult to facilitate activities that promote physical and mental health due to various restrictions. The pilot aims to improve chronic disease management for seniors through inclusive community engagement amidst the new norm.”

Block vs Block Bingo will be piloted in Jurong, with the support of Jurong Central Zone A Resident Committee (RC).

As part of the pilot, 220 copies of hardcopy bingo tiles cards will be distributed to the two selected HDB blocks. Each bingo tiles card has 9 tiles. On each tile is a listed activity that promotes healthy behaviour. Each unit will aim to complete one line of tiles to win prizes. To earn a stamp on each tile, residents need to show evidence that they have completed an eligible activity under the activity categories stated on the tile. Once one line of tiles has been completed, residents can submit the bingo tiles card in exchange for individual, group and even block prizes.

Said Ms Lim Jie Ying, project manager of Block Vs Block Bingo: “By leveraging on support from the RC, we hope to increase residents’ awareness and participation in programmes and facilities. The project also aims to heighten community bonds and interactions within the precinct through increased interactions when residents take part in the social and physical activities.”

The team will canvass residents for feedback on their learnings and experience, including what their favourite challenges are, and compile a list of good ideas to be piloted at different blocks in the future.