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Title : Subsidised medical transport on MediWheels for needy

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SINGAPORE: It'll be easier and cheaper for the frail elderly and disabled to move around the neighbourhood, with a new programme called MediWheels.

The initiative is being tried out for six months in Ang Mo Kio-Hougang division.

It'll be rolled out to Ang Mo Kio Group Representation Constituency and Sengkang West Single Member Constituency if it is well-received.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong launched the programme on Sunday.

Wheelchair-bound or bed-bound residents can use the private medical transport service when they go for medical appointments.

Ang Mo Kio grassroots organisations, which will manage the programme, are working with private medical transport service providers Green Crescent Ambulance and Caring Fleet to provide the services.

A two-way trip will cost S\$5 to S\$30, much cheaper than the normal rates of S\$50 to S\$180.

Those who need someone to accompany them can use its medical concierge service.

Needy residents who have difficulty moving around can rent a scooter for just S\$10 a month to go out of their house and move around in the neighbourhood.

About 20 scooters are available. Each costs between S\$1,500 to S\$3,000.

The programme is funded by Central Singapore Community Development Council and sponsors.

Central Singapore CDC is providing about S\$120,000 to fund the programme.

Mayor of Central Singapore CDC Sam Tan said: "We thought this is (a) very, very important initiative, because in our society there are those who face mobility challenges and this is the time for us to give them more focus, more assistance.

"So I thought this is one very concrete project to show that the community cares, the people care. When the Ang Mo Kio- Hougang division proposed this project, we thought this is one very early pilot project we can work with them.

"We will not rule out in supporting other constituencies to serve the needs of their residents."

Residents will be means-tested and the qualifying criteria will be similar to those applying for Community Care Endowment Fund Schemes.

MP for Ang Mo Kio GRC, Yeo Guat Kwang, who first proposed the programme said: "The criteria will be more flexible. I think we would have to draw a line at the moment to say it is S\$2,000 and below (household income) but for anyone whose income is more than S\$2,000, we are willing to look at case by case basis."

So far, about 15 beneficiaries have signed up.

Fifty-six-year-old Yasin Mohd Ali, who goes for dialysis three times a week and has trouble walking, is renting a mobility scooter.

He said: "My block is at 924 (and) my dialysis centre is Block 628. It is about six bus stops away. So when I take a cab, it will cost me to and fro about S\$13. So monthly, maybe it is more than S\$100.

"So with this mobility scooter, I just rent about S\$10 for one month, so it saves me a lot. Not only can I go for dialysis, I can go to the coffee shop or go for marketing whatsoever, so it helps me a lot.

- CNA/ck

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