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Singapore pledges to support workers' mental health

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National University of Singapore (NUS) Chairman Hsieh Fu Hua is among the 19 CEOs and key leaders from both the private and public sectors who signed a joint pledge on 17 October to prioritise mental wellbeing within their organisations, and the wider Singapore workforce.

The signing took place at the end of the inaugural CEOs + Leaders Breakfast Dialogue held at PwC Singapore. The Dialogue was organised by the WorkWell Leaders Workgroup, a volunteer-run ground-up initiative made up of leaders who champion workplace mental wellbeing as a strategic priority.

The leaders — who included National University Health System (NUHS) CEO Professor John Wong; National Council of Social Services (NCSS) CEO Sim Gim Guan; Deputy Secretary of the Public Service Division Teoh Zsin Woon; WWF Singapore CEO Maureen DeRooji; and Nomura Singapore Limited CEO Toshiya Yoshida — shared strategic and practical insights on employee mental health within their respective organisations.

The 2016 Singapore Mental Health Study conducted by the Institute of Mental Health showed that one in seven adults in Singapore experiences a mental health condition in their lifetime. Four out of five do not seek help for reasons such as stigma, financial concerns and the perception that the problem would go away on its own.

Studies show that investing in workplace mental wellbeing enhances productivity and long-term business sustainability. An NCSS survey of 505 companies in 2017 found that for every $1 invested in workplace adjustments such as flexible work arrangements and job redesigns, an average return of $5.60 is generated through outcomes like reductions in absenteeism and medical claims, and increased productivity.

Measures in place to ensure the mental wellbeing of NUS staff include the Employee Assistance Programme, which offers professional support and consultation, counselling services as well as lunchtime talks on topics ranging from healthy eating to mindfulness.