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Singapore's Temasek raises awarenes on 'First 1,000 Days of Maternal and Child Wellness'

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The third Temasek Shophouse Conversation raised awareness on the importance of care from pregnancy through the first two years of life



The first 1,000 days of life is a critical window that holds opportunities for strong foundations to be established towards optimizing an individual's health, well-being, learning, and development throughout his or her life course. Discussions among international and local experts on the latest advances impacting our understanding, everyday practice, and policymaking in this topic took center stage today at the third Temasek Shophouse Conversations

(TSC), organised by Temasek Foundation, in partnership with KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH). With close to 700 registered participants, the virtual event brought leaders from the public, private, and community sectors together to discuss multi-sector collaboration and propel actions to address societal challenges to achieve common good, in the region and globally.

This edition of TSC is titled 'First 1,000 Days – Maternal and Child Wellness', and featured a keynote speech by Singapore's Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health, Mr Masagos Zulkifli.

The event also included two-panel discussions, helmed by local and international speakers in health and related fields, such as from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Australia's Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and the US Nurse-Family Partnership and Child First, as well as from the Singapore Ministry of Social and Family Development, and KKH.

Mr Ng Boon Heong, Chief Executive Officer of Temasek Foundation said: “We believe that a strong and healthy family plays an important role in contributing to community and social resilience. Through the conversations today, we hope to raise awareness on the criticality of the first one thousand days of a child’s life. The key distinction of every Temasek Shophouse Conversation is to convert concepts into opportunities, and to translate these discussions into meaningful actions".

Key findings from local studies and programmes, such as the Growing Up in Singapore Towards healthy Outcomes (GUSTO), of which KKH is a part of, include:

- Antenatal depression and anxiety in mothers impact foetal neurodevelopment, with changes in microstructure, functional connectivity, epigenetic expression that influence infant temperament and behaviour.
- Parenting stress in mothers impacts on the development of internalising problems in children.
- In the longer term, school readiness of the child is also impacted, particularly for low-income families.
- Early detection and intervention is effective in treating perinatal depression.
- Enhancing maternal foetal attachment can buffer impact of toxic stress, and help to nurture mother-child bonding for downstream optimal developmental outcomes.
- Holistic and integrated support for the mother and family – including public education, screening for antenatal depression and early intervention – with a whole of society approach, such as bettering workplace support, is key to addressing and better supporting maternal and child health needs.

Calling for society to act:

The event concluded with the launch of three calls to improve maternal and child wellness and support parenting in the first thousand days and beyond, through baby’s nutrition and evidence-based learning.

The first call was for the public to pledge to support mothers to breastfeed for the first six months and share an educational resource with a new mother to support her in breastfeeding. Mothers are also invited to register to get more information on how they can be a recipient of pasteurized donor human milk or donate their excess breastmilk to the Temasek Foundation Community Milk Bank Programme.

The second is an invitation to parents and caregivers to be a part of the Temasek Foundation ParentWise Programme. Created by Temasek Foundation in partnership with the Seed Institute, the programme seeks to provide parents and caregivers with the tools, strategies and support they need to help their children reach full potential. They can register to join ParentWise learning groups to learn from other supportive parents, or contribute stories and tips on ParentWise.sg about parenting triumphs and challenges.

The third was an invitation to youths under the age of 40 from Singapore and the region to be advocates and changemakers to improve maternal and child wellness in their societies. Supported by Heartware Network, the Youth Action for Maternal and Child Wellness initiative called for youths to contribute ideas or propose projects that can ultimately build social resilience and foster healthier outcomes. Businesses and organisations were also encouraged to step forward to mentor youths, and to help shape and support these projects.