

**SOCIAL  
SERVICES  
IN THE  
21ST  
CENTURY**

**THE NCSS VISION**

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**REACHING OUT**  
*Changing Lives*

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## FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure, as President of NCSS, to present to you NCSS' vision of Social Services In The 21st Century. It describes a vision for social services that is guided by anticipated scenarios, trends and current strategic considerations. NCSS will use this vision to plan, develop and reposition social services for the 21st century.

This vision was developed by NCSS volunteers, staff and management. We drew on the NCSS management Five-year Priorities prepared by our CEO and senior management staff and the recommendations presented in the report of the NCSS Task Force on Social Service 2015. The task force, chaired by Dr Phua Kai Hong and comprising Dr Alfred Choi, Dr Ngiam Tee Liang, Dr Kanwaljit Soin and Dr Mary Ann Tsao, was appointed to study and develop recommendations for a social service scenario in the year 2015. NCSS thanks the task force and all agencies and individuals who contributed their ideas and views.

The next steps will be to translate the vision into strategies and plans with further input from government ministries, social service agencies and strategic partners. It is my hope that through the collaborative efforts of all, this vision for social services will become a reality in the 21st century.

**Dr Robert C K Loh**  
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## INTRODUCTION

The current social service system in Singapore is based on a “many helping hands” approach with the government moving away from direct service to a more facilitating and enabling role. Today, help for the disadvantaged and distressed is met by civic-minded individuals and organisations. The range of services today is largely provided by the voluntary sector with greater resource allocation from the government than in the past. The social service sector today reaches not only the vulnerable and needy who continue to remain a priority, but increasingly to those in mainstream society.

Impressive as the range of social services is, an undeniable legacy of the volunteer movement in social services is a compartmentalised service delivery system that lacks integration and co-ordinated service planning across client groups. The sector as a whole has elements of fragmentation and weak systems of referral and case management. Given this and the rapidly changing social service environment, it is necessary to carve a vision for social services that will guide the sector into the next millennium.

## STRATEGIC DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

The strategic drivers for change are as follows:

- a) **Singapore's Development** Singapore is at a stage of economic development where there is a need to involve people more in the care and concern of others. As Singapore builds a more caring and gracious society, there will be more people volunteering their services to care for others and conceivably more people seeking employment in the social service sector. This will affect the systems of managing volunteers, configuring jobs and managing careers in the social service sector.
  
- b) **Maturity of the Social Service System** The social and economic development of Singapore underscores the need for a mature social service system capable of meeting the complex needs of a modern society. In this respect, three points are noted as follows:
  - (1) Social and demographic trends will affect priorities in service development and systems of organising and delivering services. In particular, the rapidly ageing population, and dysfunctional phenomena like juvenile delinquency, family violence, divorce and substance abuse will be of concern.

- (2) The traditional welfare approach of providing hand-outs to the needy is giving way to a philosophy of equipping those in need with the skills to enable them to meet the challenges of life. It is recognised that people in need possess the capacity to help themselves, a capacity that must be tapped, and that the traditional welfare approach has the undesirable effect of promoting dependency resulting in spiralling costs.
- (3) Although the current service system, carved as it is along age-based or condition-based criteria (e.g. elderly persons, visually handicapped persons, etc.) meets social service needs to an extent, it will not effectively serve clients whose needs straddle the classification system. The demand for integrated need-based client-focused services will be fuelled as clients are better informed and have higher expectations of service.

c) **Rising Expectations** That there will be more educated Singaporeans will mean the following implications on social services:

- (1) Service clients will have higher expectations of service in terms of quality, effectiveness, convenience and timeliness. This will mean a need for higher standards of professionalism and greater customer focus in social service agencies.

(2) Increasingly there will be public concern about the use of funds donated to social services. There are already signs of 'donor fatigue' and the current economic downturn will pose a challenge to fund-raising in the coming years. This will mean a need for stronger funder-funded or donor-agency relationships.

- d) **Technology** The rapid advances in technology will continue to have a major impact on information sharing and service delivery in social services. The sector will have to keep pace with the advances in order to fully harness the potential of technology.
- e) **Entry of Other Organisations** The entry of other organisations in the social service sector such as the Community Development Councils will mean a need for defined or re-defined partnerships between NCSS, social service agencies and such organisations. As the Community Development Councils and ethnic self-help groups continue to establish their influence in the communities they are responsible for, they will bring into social service their local knowledge and networks to complement the professional knowledge and skills in social service agencies.

# VISION FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

These strategic drivers point to the need for a change in and repositioning of the social services in several elements. The vision for social services is discussed in five broad areas, namely, social service areas, volunteerism, funding and accountability, governance and management, and strategic partnerships.

**SOCIAL SERVICE AREAS** The vision for social services under the broad heading of social service areas has the following elements:

a) **Effective Integrated Community-Based Services**

The planning, development and provision of services will be driven by needs (that may cut across client groups) as well as by client groups. Service planning will seek to optimise resources by clustering services into programmes with functions that meet the needs of several client groups. Delivery systems supported by latest technology will move towards integration of services so that greater synergy may be achieved. For instance, case management will be the core programme at family service centres. Community-based services will be fostered with institutionalisation left as a last resort. This will enable clients to maintain dignity and self-respect, and continue to be part of the larger community. Also, comprehensive

needs assessments will be complemented by regular evaluation of services so that services will remain relevant and effective.

*b)* **Accessibility of Services** There will be a range of cost effective quality social services in different modes offering a range of choices to the mainstream service users and special groups. For example, a service user requiring counselling services will be able to choose from among delivery modes ranging from face-to-face to telephone or on-line. User-friendly and technologically-supported services will aim to be available, accessible, acceptable and affordable to all who need them. To increase access, there will be extended hours of service delivery, more services offered in a variety of languages, and more services located according to user convenience. Specialised services may still be needed for certain groups but these should be co-ordinated and integrated with generalised social services as far as possible. In any case, social service agencies will continue to be responsive to the more vulnerable groups of people, particularly the most disadvantaged with the least means.

*c)* **Stronger Outreach** Service planners and providers will place greater emphasis on attracting the most marginalised of groups and individuals and also those in mainstream society who are in need of services. This may

be done by developing culturally-sensitive services based on local needs, through outreach from within by members of the target groups, through working with ethnic self-help groups, clans and religious groups and Community Development Councils in outreach programmes, and through harnessing technology to good effect.

- d) **Professionalisation** Social services will be of high quality and standards with professional staff and technology-driven job designs and organisations. There will be a system to certify agencies of good standard. The community will use the certification to identify exemplary service providers. The process of certification will require agencies to actively focus on improving service planning and development. Renewal of certification will depend on maintaining a consistently high quality of service provision. NCSS will work with professional associations and government ministries to develop the certification system. There will also be proper career development systems for staff in the sector (in the social service professional areas as well as in the management areas). The idea of registration or licensing systems for the professions will be pursued. With greater professionalism, NCSS will enhance its lead role in social service training in Singapore and extend it to the region where feasible.

**VOLUNTEERISM** With volunteerism playing a major part in Singapore society of the 21st century, the vision for social service under the broad heading of volunteerism has the following elements:

- a) **Volunteer Recruitment and Management** Volunteer recruitment will be enhanced through public education. A good match between the expertise and interests of the volunteers and the needs of the agency is also important. The public's misconceptions of volunteering will be changed by highlighting that volunteering benefits both service users and volunteers. Volunteer planning and management will cater for the needs of volunteers in management of agencies, volunteers in their own professional areas and volunteers in direct services. Competent volunteer management will result in optimal developmental experiences for volunteers and enhancement of social service planning and delivery.
- b) **Corporate Volunteerism** Corporate volunteerism will be the norm and a primary focus of NCSS promotion efforts. One strategy will be to develop more programmes and activities that are tied to the mission statements of companies so that they can find justification in embarking on such volunteering activities. The volunteering organisation can also devise innovative, mutually beneficial programmes through which employees will be

actively involved in company-sponsored volunteer programmes in social service agencies.

**FUNDING & ACCOUNTABILITY** The vision for social service under the broad heading of funding and accountability has the following elements:

- a) **Value for Money** There will be full recognition that non-profit social services provide value for money. Potential donors will be educated about the value of donating to non-profit social services. They will also be made aware that the social service sector has yielded dividends to society in the form of social benefits, and is neither a drain on nor always on the receiving end of the economy. Social service agencies will run cost effective programmes, modify them where they are shown to be inefficient, and remove them where they are shown to be ineffective, obsolete or inconsistent with longer term directions. Smaller social service agencies may choose to merge with other agencies to reap synergy, save on overheads and achieve economies of scale.
  
- b) **Funder-funded Partnerships** Funders will be encouraged to provide resources that will support the long-term sustainability of non-profit social services. However, policies and conditions of funders will not undermine the integrity and independence of the funded

agencies. There will also be a system of fund development for major corporate donors in terms of matchmaking donors with specific agencies or service sectors so as to allow donors to have a greater sense of purpose from their involvement in the programmes they fund.

- c) **Funding Responsibility** An optimal mix of national-level and neighbourhood-based fund-raising strategies will be employed. NCSS will play an advocacy role by recommending funding responsibility. The relevant ministries and other bodies (e.g. Community Development Councils and ethnic self-help groups) will be approached to co-fund to optimal degrees. NCSS will fund only programmes that are truly social service. In deciding co-funding arrangements, the main consideration will be the funded agency's mission and objectives. As an example, Community Development Councils may be asked to fund basic community programmes of the Singapore of the future that are currently defined as social service programmes, e.g. family development services.
- d) **Programme Accountability** With funding, there will be high expectations of accountability in terms of achieving optimum outcomes. There is a need for the social service sector to achieve cost effectiveness and ultimately to link inputs to outcomes. Together with co-funding government ministries and funded agencies,

NCSS will develop a comprehensive programme review system that supports the budget and fund allocation cycle for funded programmes. The programme review system will use performance indicators, benchmarks, and incentives for good performance. Together with a strong planning capability, it will help NCSS set longer term funding priorities and lead in service development. NCSS will also provide consultancy to funded agencies to help them maintain service standards and maximise the use of resources.

**GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT** The area of governance and management of social service agencies needs to be addressed squarely. It is an area that has somewhat been neglected. The vision for social service under the broad heading of governance and management has the following elements:

- a) **Visionary & Responsible Boards** Board leadership requires above all that the Board provide vision and accept ultimate responsibility for governance over all aspects of the organisation. Boards will be responsible for the following:
- (1) safeguarding the vision, integrity, objectives and policies of the organisation;
  - (2) ensuring high standards of administration, planning, operation, evaluation and reporting;

- (3) ensuring that statutory obligations are met;
- (4) ensuring that adequate resources are available to the organisation for all aspects of its work; and
- (5) ensuring that resources provided to the organisation are used for their intended purposes and are properly accounted for.

b) **Participation** In social service agencies, policy making will involve service users, service providers and management (both staff and volunteers in management). Boards will be careful not to let interest groups skew the deliberation and formulation of policy.

c) **Governance Structures** Governance structures within each agency will enable the agency to maximise the expertise, wisdom and interests of volunteers in management and of staff. NCSS will facilitate the periodic review of management structures by agencies.

**STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS** The vision for social service under the broad heading of strategic partnerships has the following elements:

a) **Cross-sector Partnerships** The social service sector will work in partnership with the public sector, the private sector and the community. The four will be seen as equal partners, each having different but essential roles in the

community. The responsibilities between NCSS and government ministries will be streamlined, and re-defined if necessary, to achieve greater synergy in social service development. The strategic partnership between NCSS and the community organisations such as the ethnic self-help groups and Community Development Councils will be strengthened. Social service agencies will establish and maintain links with commercial businesses and educational organisations for partnerships in training, research, corporate donations and volunteerism.

b) **NCSS-Agency Partnerships** To facilitate the work of the social service sector, NCSS will provide consultancy services to the social service agencies in various fields as follows:

- (1) service & programme planning, development and evaluation;
- (2) human resource planning, management and development;
- (3) volunteer development and management;
- (4) information technology application and training;
- (5) financial management and auditing;
- (6) image development and public relations.

NCSS will also systematically advocate to policy makers and society on behalf of agencies or advise agencies on the appropriate modes of advocacy for maximum effect. Agencies on their part will continue to provide feedback and ideas from the front-line staff and clients, experiment with and initiate new programmes and work with NCSS to enhance service standards and quality. In the long run, the sector as a whole will gain in effectiveness, credibility and stature.

## I N C O N C L U S I O N

In conclusion, the vision for social services in the 21st century encompasses effective integrated community-based services, increased accessibility of services, stronger outreach and professionalisation. Volunteerism will play a major part in Singapore society with enhanced volunteer recruitment and management and a focus on corporate volunteerism. Funding responsibilities and greater programme accountability will be developed. Governance and management of social service organisations as well as strategic partnerships with other sectors will be strengthened. With all these systems in place, the social service sector of the 21st century will assume a significant position in Singapore society.



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