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MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11 FEBRUARY 2025, 1:30PM

LAUNCH OF TEMASEK FOUNDATION–EQUAL HAYDAYS WITH HORSES PROGRAMME

Pilot is Singapore's first equine-assisted programme designed to improve the well-being of seniors in institutional homes and in the community and promote active ageing.



Singapore, 11 February 2025 - EQUAL in partnership with Temasek Foundation, NTUC Health, NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, and the National Healthcare Group's Institute of Mental Health, today launched Singapore's first equine-assisted programme designed to enhance the well-being of seniors and promote active ageing – the **Temasek Foundation–EQUAL Haydays with Horses Programme**. The event was graced by Speaker of Parliament Mr Seah Kian Peng and Member of Parliament Mr Xie Yao Quan.

This innovative two-year pilot harnesses the therapeutic power of horses to improve physical health, cognitive functioning, psychological well-being, and social connectedness among elderly Singaporeans. Through structured activities like grooming and interacting with horses – including miniature horses brought to the heartlands – the programme will foster physical activity, mental stimulation, and emotional connection amongst seniors, including those who may be socially isolated.

Activities are also facilitated to provide seniors with a fresh and meaningful way to stay active, engaged, and socially connected, as well as boost preventive care to promote healthy ageing.

Mr Seah highlighted the importance of innovative, collaborative, and community-led initiatives in addressing Singapore's ageing population. He remarked, "Singapore's ageing population calls for creative and holistic approaches to eldercare. Initiatives like the Temasek Foundation–EQUAL Haydays with Horses Programme demonstrate the potential of complementary interventions to improve seniors' physical and mental health while fostering a stronger sense of community through meaningful connections with both the horses and their peers. Let's continue to explore novel ideas to ensure our seniors age with dignity and joy."

A First-of-Its-Kind Collaboration

The Temasek Foundation-EQUAL Haydays with Horses Programme will be rolled out for up to 800 seniors in NTUC Health nursing homes and Active Ageing Centres from October 2024 till 2026.



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"As a pioneer in equine-assisted programmes for children and youths in Singapore, our charity has witnessed firsthand the profound impact that interactions with horses can have on socio-emotional development and mental well-being. Building on this success, we are proud to collaborate with leading institutions – Temasek Foundation, NTUC Health, NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health and the Institute of Mental Health – to extend this unique approach to serve seniors, a segment of the population that will benefit greatly from these meaningful connections," said Sandra Leong, Chief Executive Officer of EQUAL.

"The Temasek Foundation–EQUAL *Haydays with Horses* Programme marks a significant step in our journey to provide innovative, evidence-based animal-assisted programmes that address the diverse needs of Singapore's ageing population, reinforcing EQUAL's commitment to creating lasting, positive change for all persons in need."

As Singapore continues its efforts to create a more inclusive society for the elderly, *Haydays with Horses* aligns closely with the national focus on preventive health and holistic eldercare. The programme addresses vital components of active ageing, including physical health, cognitive functioning, psychological well-being, and social connectedness.

Strengthening Singapore's Preventive Care and Active Ageing Initiatives

As Singapore continues its efforts to create a healthier and more resilient society, *Haydays with Horses* aligns closely with the national focus on preventive health and holistic eldercare. The programme addresses vital components of active ageing, including physical health, cognitive functioning, psychological well-being, and social connectedness.

Ms Chan Su Yee, CEO of NTUC Health, said, "Social engagement and a zest for life are key enablers to ageing well. At NTUC Health, we are committed to helping seniors—whether active or more frail—stay engaged, curious, and interested in life and community. Partnerships with organisations like EQUAL allow us to bring innovative programmes that spark new interests, build confidence, and deepen social interactions. Many of our seniors have never had the chance to interact with horses, and this first-time experience was both thrilling and meaningful for them. This pilot programme, which will extend to our nursing home residents, allows more seniors to participate while enriching our understanding of how unique interventions, like equine-assisted activities, can support seniors to age with grace and resilience."

Impact of the Programme

The first run of the *Haydays with Horses* programme, held from October to December 2024 with seniors from NTUC Health Active Ageing Centre (Lengkok Bahru), saw inspiring transformations in participants like Mdm Tan Ah Chiu and Mr Raymond Chong.

At 89, Mdm Tan Ah Chiu, showed incredible resilience throughout the *Haydays with Horses* sessions, despite her mobility challenges. She embraced every opportunity to engage with the horses, even choosing to walk alongside them rather than stay in her wheelchair. Reflecting on her experience, she shared, "Meeting the horses for the first time made me feel so happy and calm. Holding their reins, walking with them, and making new friends brought me joy and fulfilment. I gave them Chinese names, like calling Galaxy '给乐喜 (gei le xi),' which means 'to give joy.' Joining this programme gave me special memories and new friends."



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Mr Raymond Chong, or Uncle Raymond, as he is affectionately know, is a 77-year-old who is passionate about art-making. Initially hesitant around large animals, he gradually found joy and confidence through his interactions with EQUAL's therapy horses, particularly Chevela, a retired polo horse and the oldest of the EQUAL herd. "Interacting with the horses made me feel excited! I enjoyed grooming them, preparing their meals, and even painting with a horseshoe I was given. The programme brought me joy, new friendships, and unique experiences I'll always cherish," he shared. By the end of the programme, he created a series of artworks inspired by his time with the horses. His journey is a testament to the therapeutic power of *Haydays with Horses* in fostering connection, creativity, and personal growth among seniors.

More of such stories—of healing, encouragement and connection—are expected throughout the pilot run of *Haydays with Horses*. The group-level impact of the programme will be evaluated by a team of dedicated researchers co-led by Dr Luo Nan, Associate Professor in NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, and Associate Professor Mythily Subramaniam, Assistant Chairman, Medical Board (Research) at the Institute of Mental Health. Their findings will provide valuable insights into the programme's impact on the well-being of our seniors, and serve to guide its further development and potential integration into eldercare systems.

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Download images of the Temasek-Foundation *Haydays with Horses* Programme at <https://bit.ly/equal-haydays>

Interview opportunities are available with the following individuals (email preferred):

- **EQUAL** | Ann Hui Peng, Head of Programmes and Services, EQUAL
- **NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health** | Dr Luo Nan, Associate Professor in NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health
- **Institute of Mental Health** | Prof Mythily Subramaniam, Assistant Chairman, Medical Board (Research) at National Healthcare Group's Institute of Mental Health, and Associate Professor in the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health
- **Seniors from NTUC Health's Active Ageing Centre who participated in the first run of Haydays with Horses**

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For more information, please contact:

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ANNEX

1. Overview of the Temasek Foundation–EQUAL Haydays with Horses Programme



<p>Programme objectives</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pilot equine-assisted learning as a complementary therapy to improve the well-being of seniors in institutions and in the community. 2. Evaluate the impact of equine-assisted learning in improving the quality of life of seniors.
<p>Duration</p>	<p>This two-year pilot programme will run from October 2024 to September 2026.</p>
<p>Clients</p>	<p>Seniors in NTUC Health nursing homes and Active Ageing Centres across Singapore, with a focus on cognitively intact seniors, including those at risk of being socially isolated.</p>
<p>Key programme components</p>	<p>Seniors will participate in 4- to 8-session programme runs. Sessions will take place at EQUAL or at nursing homes/ Active Ageing Centres, and will feature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities with horses; • Music and movement; • Aerobics with horses; • Equine art & craft; and • Post-programme connections.
<p>Key programme focus</p>	<p><i>Haydays with Horses</i> will address the following key quality of life domains for seniors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical capacity & cognitive functioning; • Psychological well-being; and • Social connectedness & well-being.



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2. Research and Evaluation

- **Research Focus** | The quantitative and qualitative research will assess the impact of equine-assisted programmes on the physical, cognitive, and psychological health of seniors, and the duration of such impact.
- **Expected Outcomes** | The findings will offer insights into how much animal-assisted interventions can contribute to healthier ageing, how they work, and its potential integration into eldercare systems.
- **Lead Researchers:**
 - o Dr Luo Nan, Associate Professor in NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health
Dr Luo's main research interest and expertise is measurement of self-reported health status and well-being including patient-reported outcomes, health-related quality of life, health preferences, and psychological well-being.
 - o Dr Mythily Subramaniam, Assistant Chairman, Medical Board (Research) at the Institute of Mental Health, and Associate Professor in the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health
Dr Mythily's main research interest and expertise is in mental health and well-being. She has conducted several nationwide epidemiological surveys on the prevalence of mental disorders in Singapore and has expertise in both qualitative and implementation research as well.

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