



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **MORE THAN 10,000 RESPONSES GATHERED IN PRE-BUDGET 2020 FEEDBACK EXERCISE**

#### ***Support for families, seniors and workers are top concerns for Singaporeans***

1. REACH and the People's Association gathered more than 10,000 responses from the public in the annual feedback exercise ahead of Budget 2020. Social measures to better support our families, seniors and workers emerged as the top most-discussed issues, as many feedback and suggestions were in areas such as raising young families, retirement adequacy, and skills training.
2. Jointly organised by REACH, People's Association (PA) and the Ministry of Finance (MOF), the feedback exercise was held over six weeks from 2 December 2019 to 10 January 2020. Citizens were invited to contribute their views and suggestions on several Budget themes through a mix of online and face-to-face engagement platforms<sup>1</sup>. The list of feedback topics can be found in the Annex.

#### *Support for families*

3. Noting the challenges faced by young families, many respondents called for greater support from the Government for families to raise children over their schooling years, help out with their daily expenses, and care for ageing parents. For example, there were calls to provide stronger support for preschool, and to help parents who have retired. To encourage young couples to start a family, many also called for housing to be made more accessible via more grants or shorter waiting times for BTO (Build-To-Order) flats. Young adults also expressed their hope to see greater work-life balance and family-friendly policies such as extended childcare leave to enable them to spend time with family.

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<sup>1</sup> REACH engagement platforms include three Listening Points organised island-wide, ten small group discussions (as part of the Pre-Budget 2020 dialogue), five WhatsApp group discussions, REACH website and Budget microsite ([www.reach.gov.sg/budget2020](http://www.reach.gov.sg/budget2020)). PA's engagement platforms include grassroots events, Ask Kopi Kakis' kiosks at 25 locations island-wide and selected CCs' Facebook pages.

4. Eight in 10 Singaporeans polled at REACH's Listening Points felt that beyond government support, there are avenues for families to provide mutual care and support for one another within the community. They wanted to see more activities organised by e.g. grassroots that encourage family bonding and interactions with neighbours in their own neighbourhoods. Several also suggested setting up platforms especially for young families to network and find support within their communities.

#### *Support for seniors*

5. With an ageing population and workforce, most Singaporeans agreed with the need to support mature workers who choose to continue working. While there were suggestions for government to roll out measures such as incentives and quotas, respondents also acknowledged that employers have to change their mindset to value and accommodate older workers. When polled at REACH's Listening Points, many respondents aged 60 and above called for support groups that can help them stay positive and motivated over and above efforts aimed at creating awareness and acceptance of senior workers.

6. For the elderly who may no longer be able to work, many acknowledged the various assistance schemes available. However, respondents wanted to see greater financial support for those who face difficulties coping with their cost-of-living. In particular, some proposed enhancements to the CPF and Medisave schemes to help seniors better save up for their retirement, and manage their costs-of-living, especially healthcare expenses. Many also highlighted the need to establish strong community support for seniors to age confidently in place. Others suggested community-based initiatives to engage seniors, and mobilising volunteers to provide emotional support.

#### *Support for workers*

7. Respondents across different occupations and age groups often cited time and financial constraints as factors that prevented them from taking up training. Many elderly respondents also worried that they would have difficulty following the courses, or were not sure that these would increase their employability. Some recognised the value of training and commended the SkillsFuture Credit Scheme, but called for additional or regular top-ups to promote a more sustained effort at upskilling.

8. Some respondents perceived a lack of support from employers as the latter may not sponsor or offer time-off for staff to attend courses. To encourage employers to support the upskilling of workers, they proposed providing government subsidies to offset training costs, or implementing mandatory training leave. To address uncertainty about the benefits and outcomes of training among employers and employees alike, respondents highlighted the need for clearer training frameworks, and to see upskilling as a long-term investment.

*Additional feedback raised*

9. Beyond the key Budget themes, the topic of GST and sustainability also garnered traction. Many registered concern over the imminent GST increase, and called on the Government to explore other ways to raise revenue. Respondents noted that middle- and lower-income families would be particularly affected, and hoped that a comprehensive GST support package could be provided.

10. On sustainability, respondents noted the wide berth for businesses to partner the Government and communities in tackling climate change concerns. Reduction of single-use plastics was also widely discussed, with many lauding recent initiatives but also calling for much more to be done in this arena.

11. REACH Chairman Mr Sam Tan, who is also Minister of State for Foreign Affairs & Social and Family Development, said, “Through this year’s pre-Budget engagement, we are heartened to see Singaporeans contributing ideas not just for personal needs but also in consideration of others in the community, including those who may be more vulnerable. Many suggestions also go beyond asking for government support by calling on families, neighbours, and communities to do their part. The Government will consider the feedback raised and, in the spirit of Singapore Together, continue to partner citizens in building better lives for all.”

12. The public will be invited to submit their views on the Budget following the delivery of the FY2020 Budget Statement on Tuesday, 18 February 2020. More details on the various feedback channels will be released in due course.

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## Annex: Budget 2020 Feedback Themes & Questions

1	<p><u>Security and External Relations</u></p> <p>With ongoing threats of terrorism and cyber warfare, it is important for Singaporeans to play an active role in contributing to national efforts to strengthen domestic security and cybersecurity, and to build community resilience.</p> <p>a) Besides existing efforts, such as the SAF Volunteer Corps, the SGSecure movement, SCDF's Community First Responders, and the Government Bug Bounty programme, how can Singaporeans play a further part in enhancing this country's security?</p>
2	<p><u>Business Growth / Innovation / Costs</u></p> <p>There remains very good business potential in Singapore and the region, even in today's uncertain environment (Consider, for instance, the ongoing US-China trade tensions). We need to press on actively with transformation, and place ourselves in a strong position as a Global-Asia Node of Innovation, Technology and Enterprise to thrive in the longer run.</p> <p>There are many government schemes to deepen enterprise capabilities and enhance our competitive position. They include the Enterprise Development Grant (EDG), the Market Readiness Assistance grant (MRA), the Productivity Solutions Grant (PSG), SMEs Go Digital, Start Digital, and various Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).</p> <p>a) Amidst the current uncertainties, which areas of enterprise capabilities do businesses need in order to compete better?</p> <p>b) How are the internationalisation efforts in your industry progressing? What are some challenges and opportunities in internationalisation for your industry or company arising from ongoing US-China trade tensions?</p>
3	<p><u>Training / Employment</u></p> <p>We wish to encourage Singapore workers to continually adapt and acquire new skills throughout their careers. Meanwhile, employers will need to invest in their workers to have sufficient talent to grow their firms.</p>

	<p>There are available training and employment schemes to support firms and workers, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt and Grow (A&amp;G) programmes, which help workers adapt to changing job demands, re-skill for new careers, and stay agile for new opportunities.</li> <li>• SkillsFuture, which supports lifelong learning. Firms that send workers for skills training also receive support, such as course fee subsidies.</li> </ul> <p>a) What are some barriers to workers taking up more individual-based training, and employers sending their workers for training? b) What are some ways to address these barriers?</p>
4	<p><u>Support for Families</u></p> <p>With rising singlehood and smaller family sizes, the level of financial and non-financial support from family members may decline.</p> <p>There are schemes to encourage families to offer mutual care and support, such as housing schemes like the Proximity Housing Grant (PHG) and the Married Child Priority Scheme (MCPS), plus tax reliefs for topping up the CPF accounts of family members.</p> <p>a) How can we review and improve our schemes to further support the community and families in caring for one another?</p>
5	<p><u>Support for Seniors</u></p> <p>Singapore's population is ageing rapidly, and people are living longer. Many older workers wish to stay active and continue working. However, there remain some barriers to older worker employment.</p> <p>There are plans to support seniors who wish to continue working. Steps taken include the raising of the retirement age and re-employment age to 65 and 70 respectively by 2030, alongside increases in the CPF contribution rates for older workers.</p> <p>a) How can we further encourage and support older workers in continuing employment? b) For seniors who are unable to work longer due to health or personal reasons, what are some ways in which their family, relatives or community groups could partner the Government to support their needs?</p>

In the spirit of SG Together, we would also like to seek Singaporeans' views on longer-term issues through the following question:

1	How can we form stronger partnerships to address future opportunities and challenges facing Singapore?
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## **About REACH**

REACH is the national feedback and engagement unit under the Ministry of Communications and Information. Our mission is to connect Singaporeans to the Government through feedback and engagement on national issues. For more information, please visit [www.reach.gov.sg](http://www.reach.gov.sg).

## **About People's Association**

The People's Association (PA) is a statutory board established on 1 July 1960 to promote racial harmony and social cohesion, and to act as a bridge between the Government and the people. We offer a wide range of community programmes and volunteering opportunities for Singaporeans from all walks of life. Our network includes more than 1,800 grassroots organisations (GROs), over 100 Community Clubs, five Community Development Councils, National Community Leadership Institute and PAssion WaVe. More information at [www.pa.gov.sg](http://www.pa.gov.sg).