

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON DRAFT VULNERABLE ADULTS BILL 2016

Q1. What triggered MSF to propose this law? What feedback has MSF received on this issue so far?

Singapore's population is rapidly ageing. By 2030, there will be over 900,000 residents aged 65 and above, a fair number of whom would be single or have no children. Elderly who develop dementia may be unable to care for themselves. This is especially worrying for those who are living alone – this number is projected to increase from 35,000 in 2012 to 83,000 in 2030. Persons with disabilities are also living longer, and more are expected to outlive their parents. Frail elderly and aging persons with disabilities are especially vulnerable to abuse, neglect and self-neglect.

Family is the first line of care and protection for their elderly and disabled members. The community also plays a critical role to support families. The new legislation allows the state to intervene to protect vulnerable adults, where family or community interventions have been exhausted or are not effective. It is a future-ready legislation in light of our rapidly ageing population.

MSF has worked closely with social workers and other social service professionals in scoping this law. They are generally supportive, as the VAA will provide a way forward in managing difficult cases where community social workers are unable to gain access to vulnerable adults despite repeated attempts.

Q2. How prevalent is elder abuse/ abuse of persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Singapore? What factors have led to the emergence of this trend?

The incidence rate of elder abuse/ abuse of PWDs in Singapore has remained fairly constant over the past few years, at under 200 cases per year.

As Singapore's population ages, the number of elderly is expected to increase significantly, with over 900,000 residents aged 65 and above in 2030. Persons with disabilities are also living longer. It is important to ensure that sufficient safeguards are in place to prevent and, if prevention fails, to quickly address instances of abuse. This would help ensure that elder / PWD abuse rates continue to remain low in Singapore.

Q3. What are some examples of mental and physical infirmity, disability or incapacity? Does the disability have to be permanent? Are individuals with mental disorders covered?

Mental and physical infirmity, disability or incapacity may be due to chronic or short-term, acute conditions. It includes (but is not limited to) being bed- or wheelchair-bound and lacking mental capacity. It may be permanent (e.g. intellectual disability from young, congenital physical disability) or temporary (e.g. infirmity due to stroke, with possibility of recovery).

Individuals with mental disorders may come under the purview of the Vulnerable Adults Act if they lack mental capacity and are suffering from or at risk of harm arising from abuse, neglect or self-neglect.

Where it is not immediately clear whether a person who is suffering from harm or at risk of harm is a vulnerable adult (e.g. whether he has mental capacity), assessment may be conducted by a psychiatrist or other certified medical practitioner.

Q4. Will the new law cover hoarding?

The VAA applies only in cases where the hoarding and the overall home environment can harm or has harmed the vulnerable adult. MSF may apply for a court order for the home to be made safe, on behalf of a vulnerable adult without mental capacity or with the consent of a vulnerable adult with mental capacity.

In cases of hoarding which does not involve harm or risk of harm, the HDB, together with community partners and government agencies (e.g. SCDF, NEA, PA, IMH) will engage the individual and work with him/her to clean the home.

Q5. If a vulnerable adult refuses assistance (e.g. out of love for the perpetrator), will MSF respect his/her decision and allow him/her to come to harm? What else can MSF do to assist such persons?

If a vulnerable adult with mental capacity refuses assistance, MSF will respect his/her decision not to be re-housed or to obtain Court orders against the perpetrator. This is in line with the principle of respecting the individual's choice.

However, MSF will work with community agencies to continue to engage the vulnerable adult and his/her family, to persuade them to accept services voluntarily. Such a social work approach will be employed regardless of whether powers under the Act are invoked.

Q6. Besides the VAA, what else is MSF doing to help adults who are suffering from abuse, neglect or self-neglect? How can caregivers, especially those under a lot of stress, be better supported?

MSF works with voluntary welfare organisations (VWOs) to detect cases and provide social work intervention to vulnerable adults suffering from abuse, neglect or self-neglect.

The Government recognises the challenges and stresses faced by caregivers of family members with high care needs. MOH has enhanced support for caregivers to make it easier for them to navigate the care system. Caregivers can approach AIC's AICarelinks (pronounced as I Care Links) at AIC's office and certain hospitals. These

are one-stop points for caregivers to get information and advice on the appropriate services for their loved ones.

They can also contact AIC's Singapore Silver Line for support on all matters relating to mental health and eldercare services. AIC works closely with community touch points to look out for caregivers who may be stressed and render assistance where needed.

Q7. I know of someone who may be a vulnerable adult. Who can I approach for help? Will I be required to testify in Court?

Members of the public may report suspected cases of vulnerable adult abuse or neglect to any of the 3 Family Violence Specialist Centres, or through the ComCare hotline. The contact details are provided below:

PAVE

Address: Blk 211 Ang Mo Kio Ave 3 #01-1446 Singapore 560211
Tel: 6555 0390

TRANS SAFE Centre

Address: Blk 410 Bedok North Ave 2 #01-58 Singapore 460410
Tel: 6449 9088

Care Corner Project StART

Address: Blk 7A Commonwealth Ave #01-672 Singapore 141007
Tel: 6476 1482

ComCare Hotline

Tel: 1800 222 0000

Members of the public may report suspected cases of vulnerable adult self-neglect to any of the Family Service Centres, Senior Activity Centres (Cluster Support) or through the ComCare hotline.

Contact details of the nearest FSC or SAC(CS) can be found at: <http://app.msf.gov.sg/dfcs/familyservice/default.aspx> and <https://www.silverpages.sg> respectively.

Depending on the outcomes of the investigation, e.g. whether a criminal offence has been committed, you may be required to testify in Court. However, whistle-blower protection will be proposed in the new law.