Rate of growth in healthcare spending unsustainable: Gan

People must try to stay healthy even as system improves, he says

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Singapore is pumping in more money than ever before into its healthcare system, but it is still struggling to keep up with the increasing rate at which people are living longer, says Health Minister Gan Kim Yong.

The most effective way to keep healthcare affordable will be to stay healthy, he says. “We need to think of healthcare expenditure as a way to buffer the costs of life and aging, rather than a direct personal payment,” he tells THE STRAITS TIMES.

The government is taking a multi-pronged approach to keeping the cost of healthcare contained, he says.

“On the one hand, we are investing heavily into strengthening our public healthcare system so that it can meet the increasing demands of an aging population. On the other hand, we are promoting self-care and personal wellness,” Mr Gan says.

One area where the government is making significant progress is in the area of chronic disease prevention and management.

Mr Gan says that Singapore’s healthcare system has improved the rate of adoption of preventive outcomes for people with diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

He adds: “The government is also observing the impact of new, targeted policies that will work in concert with the existing prevention and management models to help prevent unnecessary hospital admissions and treatment.”

The CHAS system has been revamped to cater more to patients with chronic conditions, he says. “The additions will bring the number of polyclinics in the system to 84. The CHAS system will offer free cervical cancer screening for cancer, and new screening for diabetes and cholesterol to encourage more people to overcome their fear of tests.”

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The addition will bring the number of polyclinics from the current 20 to around 30 by 2030, he says. "We are planning to have 20 polyclinics by 2023. That will give us 30 polyclinics by 2030," he adds.

The new polyclinics will be built in areas with high demand, such as the east, west and north of the island.

The polyclinics will be completed by 2024, he adds. "We are planning to start work on these polyclinics in the next two years," he says.

The Ministry of Health will also continue to review existing polyclinics to meet anticipated demand.

The redevelopment Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic opened last year, while Pasir Ris Polyclinic is set to open in 2024 as part of the Integrated Transport Hub and will be the most family-centred polyclinic in the nation.

Mr Gan says that the government is looking to expand the scope of polyclinic services to include more preventive and chronic care services, such as diabetes and hypertension management.

He adds: "The Ministry of Health will remain committed to this, and we will continue to review existing polyclinics to meet anticipated demand."