

More gyms for the elderly, disabled in mature estates: PM

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More gyms catering to the elderly and disabled will be built in mature Housing Board estates, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced last Saturday.

The first such gym is expected to open in Ang Mo Kio Community Centre next year, said Mr Lee at the centre's community dinner for active seniors.

Sport Singapore said it expects the number of community centres with senior-friendly gyms to increase to five by the end of next year.

The gyms will be open to all and charge an entry fee of \$2.50. Those above 55 will need to pay only \$1.50. They will get free entry on Wednesdays.

Speaking at the dinner, Mr Lee – who helms Ang Mo Kio GRC – said the estate has more senior citizens than most other towns in Singapore.

The community centre promotes active ageing by encouraging senior citizens to take part in activities such as aerobics, taiji and dance so as to maintain their physical and mental health after retiring.

The Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) will also study the data collected from these gyms to better understand the needs of the elderly. The study will also look into inter-generational bonding in the gyms, which will have a mix of modern equipment and specialised equipment for the elderly and disabled.

Professor Kalyani Mehta, head of SUSS' gerontology programme, said senior citizens will receive membership cards that they will scan on the exercise equipment before using it. This lets the machines capture the users' exercise data, which will be used for long-term tracking of the gyms' impact on users.

Prof Mehta said that while the entire study will take around three to five years to complete, preliminary results should be obtained after a year. Gerontology students in SUSS will also be involved in the study.

Ang Mo Kio resident Alicia Tan, 44, said she will encourage her mother-in-law, 70, to visit the new senior-friendly gym when it opens next year. "It will be good for her health. But whether she wants to, I'm not too sure. Hopefully, there will be fitness instructors to get the elderly folk started on the exercises," said the accounts assistant.

More organisations are offering elder-friendly exercise programmes. The Lien Foundation's Gym Tonic, for example, is a strength-training programme that uses pneumatic machines for core strengthening and taps software to track users' progress. It is available to the public at locations such as the Active SG Gym @ Our Tampines Hub and the Methodist Welfare Services Senior Activity Centre in Fernvale.