

**Delivered Speech by Mr Edwin Tong SC,
Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, Second
Minister for Law and Deputy Chairman of People's
Association
at the CDC Vouchers Donation Scheme Networking
Luncheon with Charity Organisations
27 November 2023, 11.00am to 1.30pm, at PAHQ Auditorium**

Good morning to my parliamentary colleagues,
Mayors Yen Ling, Alex, Denise, Fahmi, Joan,
and also to Shamsul.

Good morning especially to all of you,

INTRODUCTION

1. We just saw the great work that is being done by the CDCs.
 - a. Whether you reach across the boundaries to help families at risk,
 - b. or you look after the social service needs on the ground,
 - c. you look at how we can be better versions of ourselves.

2. This morning, I wanted to touch on all of the work that you do.

- a. Coming from so many volunteer organisations and charities,
 - b. you serve as our partners in this endeavour, as we continue to try and build a better Singapore for everyone.
3. Over the years, we have had the privilege of working with so many of you from different sectors,
- a. whether it is families, animals, social services, children and families - the range.
 - b. We have benefitted so many Singaporeans.
4. But I would say that beyond just the sectors alone,
- a. and beyond the dollar terms that you can measure in all of these programmes and outreach,
 - b. which is tremendous;
 - c. the one thing it all stands for and how it unifies all of this,
 - d. is how you touch the heart of Singaporeans;
 - e. how you make Singapore a better place,
 - f. and how you create programmes that truly make us more inclusive as a country of fellow Singaporeans
 - g. and also to ensure that when we say we want it to be inclusive and accessible, it's not just something to talk about;

- h. but we roll up our sleeves and literally go to work on the ground.
- 5. I want to thank all of you, to start with, because each of you bring something special to Singapore's landscape.
 - a. Each of you are in charge of programmes that benefit not just a segment of Singaporeans,
 - b. but collectively they go to the heart of Singaporeans and the heart of Singapore.
- 6. Bit by bit, little by little, all of what you do, will make Singapore a much brighter, a much better place for our future generations.
 - a. All of this is, of course, in line with what we want to achieve in Forward Singapore.
- 7. Forward Singapore is, to me, a very important initiative.
 - a. It's really about not just dialogues, and policies and programmes,
 - b. but actually it's about cultivating a state of mind.
- 8. What is it that we want to do with each other as fellow Singaporeans,
 - a. how can we work together with the government,
 - b. how can the government help you and in turn,

- c. how can you help the government and
 - d. how can you help one another to build a brighter ethos and better Singapore?
9. I'll give you one statistic. Post-COVID, there was a survey that was done by Pew Research.
- a. We are one of a few, a vast minority of countries that have emerged stronger after COVID than before.
 - b. It is an amazing statistic for us to be able to achieve this in our small country.
 - c. But I think you all know that we didn't achieve this overnight.
 - d. We achieved this because we built trust;
 - e. we built social capital;
 - f. we had cohesive communities well before COVID.
10. All of this was achieved through the individual grassroots work,
- a. Door to door, day by day, every floor, every flat, every unit and every resident. It all matters.
 - b. Coupled with the work that each of you do as social service agencies, and the various stakeholder groups you look after.
 - c. Collectively, that's made us stronger.

- d. That is why we could emerge from COVID much stronger than before, which is really amazing if you think about it.
11. But now as we emerge from COVID and move forward, we got to think of what is going to be the next bound for us.
- a. How do we strengthen ourselves when everywhere else around the world is divided?
12. You just have to look at the news – bad news every day,
- a. And it's happening in so many places around the world;
 - b. and we in Singapore, we can't assume to be immune to it.
 - c. We have to build our community, strengthen it whenever we can.
 - d. Because we don't know when the next crisis might happen, but we have to be ready.
13. So the CDC Vouchers was conceived of, partly to help fellow Singaporeans,
- a. because we knew that COVID doesn't affect everyone equally.

- b. Some people might have enjoyed circuit breaker – didn't have to go to work, roads were free, no traffic jams, every meeting can be joined via Zoom;
 - c. in many ways that was a privilege.
 - d. But there were many people who were not able to function so well.
 - e. And many of the homes, especially rental homes, they are not designed for everyone to be at home all the time.
 - f. So, this caused tension.
14. Just as COVID affected everyone unequally in Singapore,
- a. Cost of living also will affect people unequally.
 - b. Some will be better off.
 - c. Some will find it very hard to make ends meet.
 - d. Some breadwinners will find tensions and pressures in their jobs,
 - e. and they will have families to feed and children to take care of.
15. And so, the CDC Vouchers was conceived of, in that context, to help everyone.
- a. This, amongst the several other programmes that the government has done, and which we will continue to do.

16. The CDC Vouchers was unique in one way - it is universal.
 - a. Whether you're a family that lives in a private estate, well-to-do, good income, double income family,
 - b. or you're a family that lives in a rental flat.
 - c. You get the same amount.
 - d. It's one of those universal programmes -- good in some ways, but also perhaps unequal in other ways.

17. So when we had the first tranche of CDC Vouchers,
 - a. many people stepped forward and said, actually we don't need it, can we find a way to donate it?
 - b. I think that was a tremendously generous spirit.
 - c. This is part of the spirit that made us come through COVID, much stronger, much more united.

18. These are little acts but they go a long way.
 - a. If you live in a country, in a home, where people think of others in the same way, don't you feel more at home?
 - b. Don't you feel closer, more united, part of our community, and proud to be fellow Singaporeans?

19. We were very proud to see that many people came forward approached CDC and PA about what to do with their vouchers.
 - a. We decided that PA and CDC will organise it and come up with a scheme – the CDC Vouchers Donation Scheme.

20. I want to share that in the first year alone,
 - a. without much publicity, and a lot of it was ground up,
 - b. we had almost 10,000 households donate close to 1.2 million dollars of the CDC vouchers.
 - c. That was a tremendous number when you think about how it was completely ground up, not organised.

21. It's a great programme.
 - a. We worked with 270 charities and then in turn, the work that you do that benefits people in the way that I mentioned earlier.
 - b. So, it's a tremendously positive reinforcing cycle.

22. This year, we want to do the same thing.
 - a. This time around, we will take some time to organise ourselves a bit better, start a bit earlier.
 - b. We are going to start from 1 December. We are going to let the scheme run until 31 January 2024.

23. Some might say, but the Vouchers expire on 31 December.
 - a. There will be some families who forget to use the vouchers right?
 - b. It is still open for them to donate it to the scheme even after it expires.

24. We want to use this opportunity to explain why we are doing this, working with you.
 - a. But most importantly, to thank you for the partnership you have given to us.

25. CDCs or PA alone with its very strong network, would not be enough today.
 - a. We need to reach out to the different people in the community, and you are all experts in your own group of stakeholders.
 - b. So, we need to partner with you and push the donations to you, push the volunteerism spirit to you, so that you can do your work best.
 - c. This afternoon, we will have a small lunch to really thank you for this, to show our appreciation and to really encourage you to carry on with the good work.

26. My last message is to encourage many more Singaporeans out there, who if you decide that you don't need the vouchers,
 - a. please have a care and think about the many people who will get to benefit through the many charities.
 - b. The people you touch, the hearts you touch, the people you assist along the way.
 - c. But most importantly, it builds the heart of Singapore that we want to see for our future generation.

27. I end with a quote from Mother Theresa and she says,
 - a. Charity is not just about making a donation.
 - b. And I think she means it because it's the easy part.
 - c. But rather, charity is about making a difference.
 - d. And I think that's what all of you do.

28. I want to thank all of you again later on. On behalf of all the Mayors, my colleagues at PA,
 - a. thank you all for being part of our programmes,
 - b. for being so active and so generous in contributing your own time, talents and treasure.

29. Thank you very much.