

More seniors tapped helplines last year over issues like pandemic fatigue, uncertainty



Silver Ribbon saw a jump of 10 per cent in calls by seniors, while Touch Community Services received 9 per cent more calls. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

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SINGAPORE - More seniors sought assistance through helplines operated by social service agencies in the second year of the pandemic compared with the first.

The agencies told The Straits Times that these seniors were largely concerned about the evolving Covid-19 curbs, worried over how long the situation would last and feeling fatigued in coping with the outbreak.

Sage Counselling Centre, which provides counselling services to the elderly and has been operating a helpline for them since 2005, noticed a spike of 15 per cent in call volume between April 2021 and March 2022, with 11,912 calls compared with 10,365 in the same period a year earlier.

Silver Ribbon saw a jump of at least 10 per cent in calls by seniors, while Touch Community Services received 12 per cent more calls, from a monthly average of 147 in 2020 to 164 in 2021.

Touch Community Services serves seniors and other groups, while Silver Ribbon provides free counselling for those struggling with mental health woes.

In 2020, [Singapore imposed a circuit breaker from April 7 to June 1](#) to curb the spread of Covid-19.

Ms Grace Lee, executive director of Sage Counselling Centre, said while the virus hit Singapore shores in 2020, most seniors continued to stay home in 2021 - as advised by their families - for fear of getting sick and worrying their children.

"There were many lonely seniors living alone and fatigue had set in; they felt more anxious, fearful and uncertain how long the pandemic would last," she added.

"We observed that some called us more frequently than before, expressing boredom and not knowing how to spend their time as they were more homebound."

Many of these seniors are not tech-savvy and have trouble with apps such as TraceTogether, much less finding entertainment through digital means, Ms Lee added.

"With the increase in digitalisation of services from banks to tele-consultation, many of the elderly are still unable to cross the digital divide in Singapore."

But the agencies are cautiously hopeful that the seniors' woes would ease, along with the volume of calls, with the country's gradual reopening.

From April 26, [Singaporeans could gather in groups with no size restrictions](#) and mask wearing became optional when outdoors.

Silver Ribbon founder and executive director Porsche Poh said: "Many seniors shared that they are pleased the Government has eased the restrictions, and they have resumed meeting their friends and attending activities hosted by religious groups and other agencies."

Sage's Ms Lee added: "This is a happy situation as it means the restoration of routines and social activities for seniors. They have been cooped up for too long; they need to connect with friends and engage in activities."

However, Ms Jacinda Soh, head of Touch Caregivers Support at Touch Community Services, said going forward, there may be seniors who need help with their declining health due to long periods of isolation and inactivity, new hybrid platforms that they are still not used to, higher cost of living and changes in job roles.

"Hence, seniors will have to pace themselves even as we step up engagements with volunteers and community partners," she added.