



ESSAY

Sport in the City

Living Better Through Sport

In Singapore, sport is more than child's play. To tackle many of the city's health and demographic challenges, promoting sport and physical activity is key. This article explains how providing the necessary sport facilities and empowering the community to exercise helps society to stay in good shape.

Cities today face a variety of challenges, including rising healthcare costs, an ageing population, social tensions and economic uncertainties brought about by geopolitical tensions. Singapore is not immune to these challenges.

Singapore in particular faces the challenge of a rapidly ageing population, where one in four Singaporeans will be aged 65 and above by 2030, double of what it is today. Singapore's annual healthcare expenditure over the next

decade is projected to be approximately 3% of GDP, overtaking spending on education. The country's healthcare costs will also rise at a rate faster than that of its neighbours. On the other hand, while various races and religions coexist in harmony in Singapore, forces that threaten to pull communities apart are still present.

While sport might not be the immediate answer that comes to mind, how can we use it to improve Singaporeans' lives?



Lim Teck Yin is the Chief Executive Officer of Sport Singapore.



With Sport Singapore's Sports Facilities Master Plan, sports and play spaces are just a short walk away from people's homes.

URBAN SOLUTIONS



01

Activating Sport for Health & Well-being

With an ageing population, sport can inspire everyone to stay active and healthy, which can reduce the healthcare burden on the working population. Every 10,000 Singaporeans who stay active can translate to S\$2.3 million in healthcare savings and an increase in the number of healthy years lived, according to Active Citizens Worldwide (ACW). Sport can also encourage seniors to be socially active, reduce their risk of social isolation and help communities build resilience.

Sport Singapore (SportSG) is a local government agency that promotes sport in the country. Its purpose is to transform Singapore through sport. It envisages a Singapore where active living is the norm and citizens are motivated to stay healthy with their family, friends and community, regardless of life stage. This is done using three approaches: organising programmes to promote sport, developing infrastructure and facilities to encourage active lifestyles, and empowering the community.

Promoting Sport through Programmes

ActiveSG is SportSG's national movement that brings people together in sport and physical activity. ActiveSG membership is complimentary and open to all Singaporeans and Permanent Residents. New members receive free credits that can be used to enter swimming pools and gyms, book sport facilities and pay for sport programmes.

ActiveSG members can participate in a range of sporting and lifestyle programmes that cater to all ages and abilities. At ActiveSG swimming pools, morning pool walks help seniors build water confidence before they progress to other activities like aqua-aerobics. Some ActiveSG gyms hold senior-friendly programmes and have been retrofitted with resistance-training equipment that utilise air pressure instead of weights, reducing the risk of injury.

There are also free public programmes. For example, Yishun Swimming Complex holds hydro-health programmes such as



02

ballet-inspired exercises at its pool. Bishan Sport Centre holds circuit training sessions, kickboxing classes, and even yoga under the stars. Other sport centres offer trail walks, energy-bar making classes, night cycling sessions, and even dance parties.

Activating Infrastructure for Sport

SportSG's goal is for the majority of Singaporeans to have access to a sporting facility within a 10-min walk of their homes by 2030. The Sports Facilities Master Plan guides the development of sport spaces at the national, regional, town and neighbourhood levels. Regardless of scale and scope, all facilities allow people to live actively through sport, anytime, anywhere.

At the apex of sport facilities available is the Singapore Sports Hub, a fully integrated sport, entertainment and lifestyle hub. This

SportSG's goal is for the majority of Singaporeans to have access to a sporting facility within a 10-min walk of their homes by 2030.

0.35km² national facility consists of the National Stadium, Singapore Indoor Stadium, OCBC Aquatic Centre and OCBC Arena, Kallang Wave Mall and more. The National Stadium hosts sport events from regional competitions such as the Southeast Asian (SEA) Games in 2015 to community sport programmes for the public to gather and watch, cheer and bond over sport. The 100Plus Promenade running track that encircles the National Stadium is open for public use.

- 01 ActiveSG's programmes have encouraged seniors to get active and try new sports, like flippa ball.
- 02 The Singapore Sports Hub hosts all types of activities, from elite sports to community events.



The Regional Sport Centres (RSCs) are focal points for sport programmes, events and activities for Singapore's five main regions (Central, East, Northeast, North and West). The first RSC, Our Tampines Hub (OTH) in the east, opened in August 2017. It brings together public facilities such as sport facilities, a library, a hawker centre, an arts theatre and dance studios under one roof. OTH exemplifies how co-location of facilities can help achieve broader planning objectives of space optimisation, intensification and integration. Residents visiting OTH can drop off their children for sporting programmes and then run family errands within the vicinity or participate in sport programmes themselves.

In July 2017, SportSG launched Active Health as a national movement for Singaporeans to take ownership of their health and well-being while building social bonds. SportSG also set up Active Health Labs (AHLs), which are immersive and experiential centres founded on exercise science. These complement the work of ActiveSG Sport Centres and integrated hubs to raise awareness of health and well-being using the four pillars of nutrition, physical exercise, sleep, and screen time. There are now eight AHLs located across Singapore. AHL@Admiralty Medical Centre, the first of its kind, is a collaboration with Yishun Health and part of a community medical facility in Kampung Admiralty, Singapore's first self-contained "retirement village".

Apart from establishing AHLs, SportSG has activated spaces for exercise across the island. The Sport-in-Precinct and Dual Use Scheme are key components of the Sports Facilities Master Plan. Under the Sport-in-Precinct scheme, sporting spaces are designed to be accessible and convenient for all. Multipurpose hard courts can be easily reconfigured for team sports like basketball, street soccer, badminton and sepak takraw. The exercise equipment available are also suitable for use by people of different ages

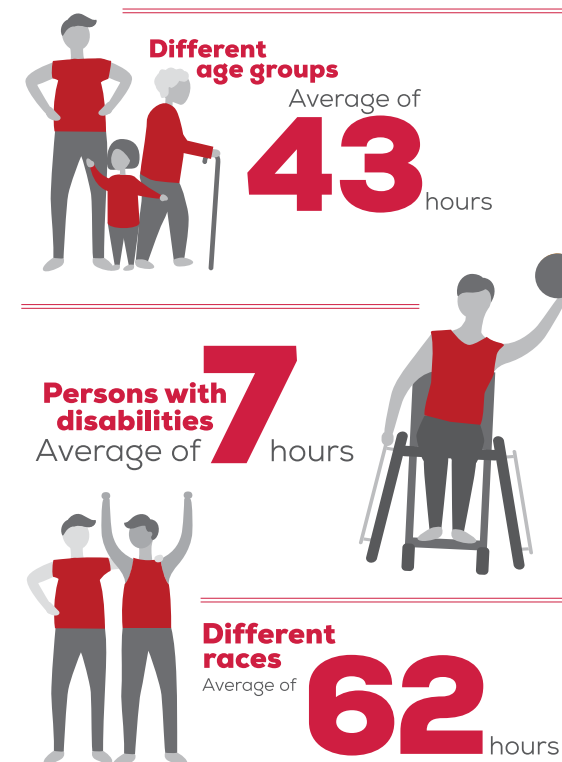
and abilities. Under the Dual Use Scheme, school sports facilities such as football fields and indoor halls are open for public use on weekday evenings and weekends. This has added more than 300 additional sports facilities to the public inventory.

Empowering the Community

In SportSG's engagements with Singaporeans, most expressed hope for a nation that values community bonds and provides equal opportunities for all. The ACW report reaffirms that sport brings people together and fosters social mixing. ActiveSG's Academies & Clubs (A&C) features a mix of traditional, new and lifestyle-oriented sport based on popularity, emerging trends, potential to deepen expertise in the sport, and ability to support lifelong sport participation.

03

Positive Social Contact Generated Through Sport



- 01 Active Health Champions guiding seniors in a workout.
- 02 Residents enjoying the Sport-in-Precinct facilities at Jurong Spring in Singapore.
- 03 Engaging in sport brings about a myriad of positive social outcomes.

“By organising programmes, planning infrastructure and empowering the community, SportSG promotes long-term sporting participation and social engagement.”

Beyond encouraging physical activity and supporting character and leadership development, A&Cs foster social interactions between participants from different ages and backgrounds. SportSG has also established platforms ancillary to A&C programmes for parents who want to support their children in their sporting journey. From football kickabouts and fitness boot camps to photography workshops, families can experience sport and create memories together.

“Members of the community have since joined Team Nila to bond with like-minded peers and give back to the community through sport volunteerism.”

Activating Sport as Strategy

Lord Sebastian Coe—Olympic medallist, former President of the Organising Committee for the Summer Olympic Games and President of the International Association of Athletics Federations—once shared that “sport is a universal language, building more bridges between people than anything else I can think of”.

Sport can be the bridge that connects solutions to address urban issues related to a country’s social and healthcare priorities. By organising programmes, planning infrastructure and empowering the community, SportSG promotes long-term sporting participation and social engagement. This exposes people to new cultures and ideas, allowing them to appreciate each other’s contribution to society and strengthen community bonds. 🍊

Team Nila started out as SportSG volunteers for Singapore’s SEA Games and ASEAN Para Games participants. More members of the community have since joined Team Nila to bond with like-minded peers and give back to the community through sport volunteerism. There are five ways for volunteers to serve and participate.

For example, at the Woodlands Sport Centre, Team Nila regularly engages residents from the neighbourhood to participate in sporting activities. This includes water activities and the Sporting Friday initiative, where activities are organised on Friday evenings by both Team Nila and ActiveSG Sport Centre staff. Volunteers can also join interest groups like sport safety or sport photography to try new activities, hone their passions and bond with like-minded peers.



01 Children enjoying a game of modified water polo with Team Nila volunteers.