



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

# **MoU signing between HCSA Highpoint Halfway House, Pertapis Halfway House, Selarang Halfway House, Teen Challenge Singapore, and The Helping Hand to strengthen collaboration in the first hepatitis C elimination initiatives for ex-offender groups in Singapore**

**SINGAPORE, 25 July 2023** – As part of phase two of HCSA Highpoint Halfway House's (HCSA Highpoint) Educate, Test, Treat! (ETT) Programme, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed today to formalise the commitment of participating halfway houses to encourage former drug offenders, newly released prisoners, and those in recovery from addiction to take up hepatitis C (HCV) testing and treatment, and work towards eliminating HCV in Singapore by 2030. The exchange of the MoU was witnessed by Assoc Prof Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Minister of State, Ministry of Home Affairs & Ministry of National Development.

Under this MoU, HCSA Highpoint, working together with current and new partners including Pertapis Halfway House, Selarang Halfway House, Teen Challenge Singapore, and The Helping Hand will provide HCV testing, education, and linkage to care service for participants from the various halfway houses. The ETT programme has been supported by biopharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences since its launch a year ago.

In phase one of HCSA Highpoint's ETT Programme, 214 participants from HCSA Highpoint, Selarang Halfway House, Teen Challenge Singapore, and The Helping Hand registered, among whom approximately 37% were tested to have HCV. As of June 2023, 29% of those who tested positive for HCV have been successfully linked to care, starting on a course of oral medication for HCV treatment. This was complemented by HCSA's FriEnd-C Befriender Programme, an integrated support system to guide patients that are HCV positive and ensure that they do not fall out of the programme and complete the treatment journey.

Former drug offenders are deemed as high risk because HCV is transmitted primarily through blood and bodily fluids, which can happen through sharing contaminated needles. HCV infections are typically asymptomatic until decades later when symptoms develop. Left untreated, chronic HCV can cause serious health problems, including liver damage, liver

failure, and liver cancer. With the introduction of direct-acting antivirals (DAAs), HCV is now a curable condition. A 12-weeks course of oral medication can be effective in treating HCV in patients.

“The HCSA Highpoint Hepatitis C – Educate, Test, Treat! (ETT) Programme was the first of its kind in Singapore to focus on high-risk groups to eliminate the transmission of HCV. In phase one, we were heartened to see the high testing acceptance, with a substantial proportion of individuals now engaged with HCV care and treatment,” said Mrs Kim Lang Khalil, Chief Executive Officer, HCSA Community Services. “Broadening the ETT programme to other halfway houses reaffirms our commitment to driving awareness and education on HCV among former drug offenders. The MoU is an important step towards expanding this service to a wider population and benefiting more people in the process.”

Commenting on the MoU, Mr Michael Cheah, Chief Executive Officer, The Helping Hand, said, “We are delighted to sign this MoU with HCSA Community Services and fellow participating halfway houses, and pave the way for eliminating HCV among former drug offenders through accessible and affordable means to be tested and treated.”

Mr Sufian Salim, Head of Home, Pertapis Halfway House, also added, “Through this new partnership, we are now able to tap on HCSA Community Services’ resources and opportunities to screening, diagnosis, and linkage services for former drug offenders who are at high risk for HCV.”

“Coordinated and targeted micro elimination projects like the HCSA Highpoint Hepatitis C – Educate, Test, Treat! (ETT) Programme is critical to achieving the World Health Organization’s global targets to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030,” said Mr Stanley Li, General Manager, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, Gilead Sciences. “Gilead Sciences is pleased to work with HCSA Community Services and our community partners to support high-impact initiatives towards HCV elimination efforts in Singapore.”

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**About HCSA Community Services**

HCSA is a charitable organisation with the Institution of Public Character (IPC) status and a member of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS). The organisation was launched in 1996 as a halfway house for recovering drug addicts and ex-offenders. Today, their work has expanded to include teenage girls who have undergone the complex trauma of abuse and single parents with limited support. HCSA operates with a team of dedicated staff, volunteers, corporate and community partners, as they continue to serve the most vulnerable in society, to give them a future and a hope. HCSA's mission is to empower these vulnerable populations through their signature programmes. Find out more at <https://hcsa.org.sg/>.

**About Pertapis Halfway House**

PERTAPIS was formed in 1969 by a group of young aspiring Muslims who believed in the importance of moral and religious education in order to build a strong resilient self in youth. In the days of kampung living, the community would come together to help ease the burden of families in need. For most, this did not change even after modernisation and families moved into flats. They carried on that kampung spirit by forming 'block committees' and organising activities involving social interaction, community bonding and welfare support. From its humble beginnings, PERTAPIS, as a 'self-help organisation' is today an approved charitable organisation under the Charities Act with Institution of Public Character (IPC) status and has helped more than 3000 families in need. Find out more at [www.pertapis.org.sg](http://www.pertapis.org.sg).

**About Selarang Halfway House**

Selarang Halfway House is a secular residential, step-down facility set up to offer a residential programme as part of the Mandatory Aftercare Scheme (MAS). Selected ex-offenders are emplaced to the Selarang Halfway House to undergo the residential programme, which aims to facilitate their rehabilitation and gradual reintegration into the community upon their release from prison. Selarang Halfway House undertakes to create a safe and supportive environment that supports and guides residents in their desistance from crime and reintegration journey before they progress to the next two phases of the MAS, namely Home Supervision Phase and Community Reintegration Phase. Find out more at [www.yri.com.sg/selarang-halfway-house](http://www.yri.com.sg/selarang-halfway-house).

**About Teen Challenge Singapore**

Teen Challenge Singapore is a Christian Therapeutic Community working with adult males who are primarily drug abusers and ex-offenders. The aim of the program is to help them to achieve complete abstinence and live an emotionally, psychologically, spiritually rich and meaningful life through spiritual growth and skills training. The objective is to help clients be self-empowered through learning new life skills that will facilitate their re-integration back to society and family so as to minimize their chances of relapse to drug abuse and crime. Find out more at [www.teenchallenge.org.sg](http://www.teenchallenge.org.sg).

**About The Helping Hand**

The Vision of The Helping Hand is to transform an ex-offender to live a Christ-Centered Life. The objectives are to promote social concern in the community and to establish halfway house programs based on Christian principles and teachings to help recovering addicts and ex-offenders rehabilitate and re-integrate into society as stable and contributing members. Find out more at <https://thehelpinghand.org.sg>.

**About Gilead Sciences**

Gilead Sciences, Inc. is a biopharmaceutical company that has pursued and achieved breakthroughs in medicine for more than three decades, with the goal of creating a healthier world for all people. The company is committed to advancing innovative medicines to prevent and treat life-threatening diseases, including HIV, viral hepatitis, COVID-19, and cancer. Gilead operates in more than 35 countries worldwide, with headquarters in Foster City, California.