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MEDIA RELEASE

NHG POLYCLINICS EXPANDS DEDICATED PRIMARY CARE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES REQUIRING HIGHER LEVELS OF SUPPORT AND THEIR CAREGIVERS

- Following a successful two-year pilot at NHG Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic, the SPARk Clinic will expand and scale the service to NHG Khatib Polyclinic by end of 2026.
- Provides a team-based, relationship-centred model that delivers personalised, inclusive primary care to persons with disabilities who have higher support needs, and their caregivers.
- Reduced barriers to healthcare help identify health conditions that could otherwise go undiagnosed.

Singapore, 6 August 2026 – NHG Polyclinics, the primary care arm of NHG Health, today announced the expansion of its SPARk *(Supporting PWDs with Accessible Resources and (k)are)* Clinic to NHG Khatib Polyclinic by end-2026. First piloted at NHG Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic in July 2024, SPARk Clinic provides chronic care management for persons with disabilities who have higher support needs aged 18 and above, and their caregivers. Over two years, the pilot's team-based, relationship-centred approach has delivered meaningful outcomes, from preventive health screenings to improved follow-up medical attendance, and stronger caregiver support.

2 "Often, persons with disabilities who have higher support needs only surface in our health system when an emergency brings them to our hospitals. Caring for them proactively in primary care changes that. Chronic conditions are detected earlier, hospitalisations are avoided, and pressure on our specialist and tertiary hospitals is eased. After two years of piloting chronic care management for this group of residents at NHG Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic, we are now ready to scale up care for them and their caregivers. With the expansion, the SPARk Clinics at Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic and Khatib Polyclinic will anchor support for these residents in Central and North Singapore, respectively," said Professor Joe Sim, Group Chief Executive Officer, NHG Health.

Challenges in Accessing Primary Care

3 Persons with disabilities who have higher support needs and their caregivers frequently face challenges that result in missed or defaulted follow-up medical appointments, leaving chronic conditions to progress silently for years.

4 The first challenge is access to care. Some have withdrawn from care because previous experiences were stressful or inaccessible. Differences in communication styles, sensory sensitivities, and unfamiliar healthcare environments can heighten anxiety. Communication difficulties also make it harder for them to understand the importance of regular follow-up, and when they are unable to express their symptoms clearly, the motivation to seek care weakens. One of the most significant challenges for them is undergoing blood tests, which are vital for the early detection of conditions such as dyslipidemia and diabetes, and thyroid disorder which occurs more frequently in people with Down syndrome.

5 The second challenge is caregiver support. Many caregivers are ageing, overburdened, or under-resourced. Competing responsibilities, transportation difficulties, financial concerns, fatigue, and the demands of multiple appointments can be overwhelming — and for some families, simply getting to the clinic is a challenge in itself.

SPARk Clinic: Delivering Inclusive Care Through Relationships

6 "Primary care is where relationships are built and trust is earned over time, and that makes us uniquely placed to serve persons with disabilities who have higher support needs. SPARk Clinic reflects NHG Polyclinics' commitment to inclusive care, encompassing preventive health, chronic care management, caregiver support, care coordination, and access to community resources for these patients," said Associate Professor Karen Ng, Chief Executive Officer, NHG Polyclinics.

7 SPARk Clinic provides care for adults aged 18 and above with higher support needs and who have intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, or other trisomy disorders. Many of these individuals live with complex medical needs including multiple co-existing conditions, as well as support needs that may include limited or non-verbal communication, dependence on caregivers for daily activities, and challenges navigating healthcare settings. Currently, 85 patients are enrolled in the SPARk Clinic. As NHG Polyclinics scales up this service progressively, an estimated 400 persons with disabilities who have higher support needs are expected to benefit from the programme.

8 Recognising that this group experiences significant health inequities – including poorer health outcomes, lower rates of preventive screening, and higher rates of avoidable hospitalisation – SPARk Clinic seeks to understand their challenges, helps them overcome these challenges during their visits, and enables early diagnosis and effective management of chronic conditions. In SPARk Clinic, a team-based model is adopted whereby a dedicated care team comprising Family Physicians, a Care Manager, and a Care Coach provides personalised and comprehensive care to the patients and their caregiver, who are also managing chronic conditions. Through this family empanelment care model, the patients and their caregiver are cared for by the same team, allowing familiarity and trust to be built over time through regular interaction and continuity of care. This is significant given that this group of patients commonly face cognitive, sensory, and communication barriers, which can make establishing rapport especially challenging.

9 It is through this relationship-based approach to care that 80 SPARk patients have returned for regular follow-ups, remained compliant with their medications, and/or successfully completed preventive health screenings – outcomes that are particularly meaningful for this vulnerable group.

SPARk Clinic: Shaping a More Inclusive Primary Care System

10 Understanding that anxiety may arise from unfamiliarity with the clinic environment and care team and undermine the effectiveness of consultations, disability-informed adjustments are made to accommodate individual differences. SPARk patients are seen in the

same consultation room, situated in a quieter corner of the polyclinic. Visual support, communication aids and sensory kits are available throughout the consultation space, and a dedicated room is kept available should a patient need to decompress for procedures. Caregivers are also given additional support. Before every visit, caregivers are coached on practical skills through videos and easy-read guides together with the patient, so the clinic environment and procedures such as blood test and diabetic foot screening become more familiar with each visit. There is also a pre-consultation call with the caregiver before every visit to understand how the patient has been doing and this enables the clinical team to anticipate the patient's needs when they arrive at the clinic.

11 The wellbeing of caregivers is equally central to SPARk Clinic. A caregiver who is burnt out, physically unwell, or overwhelmed cannot provide quality care, and this directly affects the health outcomes of the person they care for. The Care Manager builds rapport with caregivers, understands and addresses their concerns and identifies signs of burnout that might otherwise go unaddressed. The Care Manager also provides education on chronic disease management and diet counselling, follows up on their own health conditions, and links them with community partners for further support. To reduce logistics burden on the caregiver, caregiver and patient medical appointments are also paired to avoid multiple visits, and longer consultation slots are allocated to accommodate communication needs.

12 As caregivers age and experience declining health or pass away, families or the dependent may face sudden crises without proactive future care planning. Such circumstances can have significant implications for the physical and mental well-being of persons with disabilities who have higher support needs. To mitigate this risk, the care team initiates future care planning conversations when the need arises, and Medical Social Workers link them to community resources, empowering both SPARk patients and their caregivers to plan early and confidently for their long-term care. This will help them transition successfully into the broader care network, thus progressively building their independence and resilience.

13 "As persons with disabilities who require higher support needs face limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviours, there is no one size fits all care plan when it comes to healthcare. Managing them well requires time, coordination, and a care team that understands both the medical picture and the individual's communication and behavioural needs. We have come together as a team, envisioning what seemed impossible: a future where every person with disabilities who have higher support needs can access care with dignity and confidence and their caregiver is supported. We are just getting started, and I cannot wait to see how far this programme can go," added Dr Dominique Phang, Family Physician, Principal Staff, NHG Ang Mo Kio Polyclinic, and Lead for the SPARk Clinic.

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About NHG Polyclinics

NHG Polyclinics is the primary healthcare arm of NHG Health, the regional health manager for the 1.5 million residents of Central and North Singapore.

NHG Polyclinics provides a comprehensive range of health services for the family, functioning as a one-stop health centre providing treatment for acute medical conditions, management of chronic diseases, women and children health services and dental care. The focus of NHG Polyclinics' care is on health promotion and disease prevention, early and accurate diagnosis, disease management through physician led team-based care as well as enhancing the capability of Family Medicine through research and teaching.

Through the Family Medicine Academy and the NHG Family Medicine Residency Programme, NHG Polyclinics plays an integral role in the delivery of primary care training at medical undergraduate and post-graduate levels. The Primary Care Academy provides a one-stop primary care training centre for primary healthcare professionals and the community.

More information is available at www.nhghealth.com.sg/nhg-polyclinics

Name Glossary

Professor Joe Sim Group Chief Executive Officer NHG Health	沈恒毅教授 集团首席执行总裁 国立健保集团
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NHG Polyclinics	国立健保集团综合诊疗所 Poliklinik Kumpulan Jagaan Kesihatan Nasional தேசிய சுகாதார பராமரிப்புக் குழும பலதுறை மருந்தகங்கள்