

JOINT NEWS RELEASE

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Many in Asia open to cancer screening, but a gap remains between intention and action, finds a multi-country study by NTU Singapore and NHG

Singapore's first academic-clinical unit for health behavioural insights and interventions sheds light on health behavioural trends in Asia

Driven by positive health outcomes, people may be open to the idea of undergoing cancer screening. However, a gap exists between this intention and their actual behaviour, according to preliminary findings from a 10-country¹ study conducted by **Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore)** and the **National Healthcare Group (NHG)**.

In Singapore, where breast cancer is most common among women, 75 per cent of the female survey participants aged 40 and above said they would likely go for a mammogram if offered. However, 34 per cent actually went for one in the past two years.

Similarly, for colorectal cancer screening, about 70 per cent of the participants aged 50 and above in Singapore expressed intention to go for a stool test, but only 27 per cent took a stool test or underwent a colonoscopy in the past year.

This difference between intention and behaviour was also seen in the other nine countries surveyed in the study which was carried out from December 2024 to March 2025, involving about 10,000 participants.

These preliminary findings are part of a larger study that dives into various health behaviours in Asia (Please refer to the **Annex** for more details of the study). These findings will in turn guide healthcare providers and policy makers in developing and implementing effective nudges and interventions, as well as tailored treatment strategies, in both the patient population and the community.

¹ The 10 countries are: China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The study is conducted by the **Asian Centre for Health Behavioural Insights and Interventions (HABITS)**, a new research centre jointly set up by NTU Singapore and NHG. It is Singapore's first integrated research unit dedicated to health behavioural sciences.

NTU President Professor Ho Teck Hua said: "In order to improve health outcomes, it is essential that we understand human behaviour. Only then can we create nudges to encourage people to develop good habits. HABITS will serve as an interdisciplinary collaborative platform where behavioural scientists work side-by-side with medical doctors to develop effective, evidence-based interventions to improve health."

Professor Joe Sim, Group CEO, NHG, said: "HABITS will be a game changer as we seek to understand and modify healthcare and health seeking behaviours to transform our healthcare system and to add years of healthy life to Singaporeans."

HABITS was officially launched today by **Dr Janil Puthucheary, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Digital Development and Information & Ministry of Health**.

Professor May O. Lwin, Centre Director, HABITS, and Associate Provost (Faculty Affairs) at NTU said: "Our multi-country study suggests that having a certain intention does not always translate into action. This means that it is not enough for doctors to screen, diagnose, prescribe lifestyle behaviours to patients. To develop effective interventions, it is crucial to understand the factors that shape health decisions. Our multi-country study provides valuable insights into health behaviour trends across Asia. By delving deeper into these patterns, we hope to design targeted interventions that improve public health not only in Singapore but across the region."

Professor Chong Phui-Nah, Clinical Director, HABITS, and Senior Advisor and Senior Consultant (Family Medicine), NHG, said: "HABITS is Singapore's first behavioural health research centre that bridges academia and clinical practice. This confers HABITS the unique ability to integrate research across multiple diseases and disciplines and translate research into the clinic and community, ensuring that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Through its clinical arm, HABITS will work closely with the Ministry of Health, Health Promotion Board, and other stakeholders in the ecosystem. This will ensure close alignment with the national health strategy, facilitate implementation and policy changes, and ultimately improve population health."

Advancing population health through behavioural insights

HABITS brings together more than 30 researchers from NTU's Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine and Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, and multidisciplinary clinicians from NHG.

It aims to identify underlying factors exacerbating priority health concerns in Singapore and Asian populations, and to develop knowledge and solutions that will impact public health policy, drive health promotion efforts, and support national strategies such as Healthier SG.

Working with the local healthcare ecosystem, HABITS will:

- Develop, validate, and trial behavioural interventions for target populations;
- Promote screening and preventative health behaviours
- Identify high-risk groups and behavioural phenotypes to drive clinical impact and translation; and
- Strengthen national capabilities by integrating research into health intervention processes.

For a start, HABITS will focus on five key disease areas – infectious disease, ageing and palliative care, mental wellness, cancer, and metabolic syndromes – with plans to expand its scope over time.

More information can be found on westudyhabits.com.

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About Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

A research-intensive public university, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) has 35,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Business, Computing & Data Science, Engineering, Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, Medicine, Science, and Graduate colleges.

NTU is also home to world-renowned autonomous institutes – the National Institute of Education, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering – and various leading research centres such

as the Earth Observatory of Singapore, Nanyang Environment & Water Research Institute and Energy Research Institute @ NTU (ERI@N).

Under the NTU Smart Campus vision, the University harnesses the power of digital technology and tech-enabled solutions to support better learning and living experiences, the discovery of new knowledge, and the sustainability of resources.

Ranked amongst the world's top universities, the University's main campus is also frequently listed among the world's most beautiful. Known for its sustainability, NTU has achieved 100% Green Mark Platinum certification for all its eligible building projects. Apart from its main campus, NTU also has a medical campus in Novena, Singapore's healthcare district.

For more information, visit www.ntu.edu.sg

About the National Healthcare Group

The National Healthcare Group (NHG) is a leader in public healthcare in Singapore recognised for delivering high value patient care. Our clinical services are provided through an integrated system of primary care polyclinics, acute care tertiary hospitals, community hospitals, national specialty centres, and community-based ambulatory care centres. Together, we provide comprehensive, holistic, and innovative healthcare to address the needs of our patients and the population we serve. As a learning organisation, we are establishing ourselves as an academic health system to drive clinical excellence, raise research intensity and grow our academic partnerships to continually improve the way we deliver care to our patients.

As the Regional Health Manager for 1.5 million residents in Central and North Singapore, NHG collaborates with private general practices, public and community health and social care providers to keep residents well and healthy.

With more than 20,000 healthcare professionals in NHG, we are committed towards building healthier and resilient communities, and Adding Years of Healthy Life to the people we serve.

More information is available at www.nhg.com.sg.

ANNEX

Multi-country behavioural health study

The HABITS team conducted an online survey with representative samples from 10 cities across Asia:

- Beijing, China
- Mumbai, India
- Jakarta, Indonesia
- Tokyo, Japan
- Malaysia
- Manila, the Philippines
- Singapore
- Seoul, South Korea
- Bangkok, Thailand
- Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

About 10,000 people, aged 21 years old and above, participated in the study.

Other preliminary findings:

- 1) Two in three people in Singapore are aware of genetic testing. This is the lowest among the 10 countries surveyed.
- 2) In Singapore, healthcare providers remain the main source of health information, followed by friends and family, then traditional medicine practitioners.
- 3) Survey participants are most likely to seek health information from the Internet, followed by social media, then traditional media.
