

# THE SINGAPORE SOCIAL HEALTH PROJECT 2013

## Overview

The Singapore Social Health Project (SSHP) is an attempt by NVPC to provide a more rounded view of the social progress in Singapore by looking at how Singapore has fared in the nine social dimensions selected for this report. The domains are: culture and values, civil and political participation, income security, healthcare, education, housing and transport, social connectedness and community cohesion and family.

The field of social health measurement is a highly complex and evolving discipline. The views on this subject are differing and sometimes conflicting. As far as possible, we have endeavoured to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the information but NVPC is not able to warrant its completeness.

Each domain is given a rating to reflect whether it is doing better (positive), worse (negative) or if the outcome is not conclusive (neutral).

This series of reports form the first edition. We want to hear thoughts on our reports and assessment from the public. NVPC sees the SSHP as a civic community project for the wider Singapore community. We hope to inspire more conversations about what social progress means to Singaporeans and what action is necessary to help us make that progress.

We welcome feedback and suggestions about to the reports. Comments can be made to:

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# **SINGAPORE SOCIAL HEALTH PROJECT 2013**

## **FAQs**

### **1) What is the Singapore Social Health Project?**

This project is an attempt to track a basket of different social indicators to measure the social well-being and health of Singapore. This would be the social sector's equivalent of the GDP indicator of the economy.

### **2) What is the aim of this project?**

This project aims to develop a social index for Singapore which can help us measure what is most critical to us as a society. We also want this project to reflect social reality and inspire more collective action by government and civil society to address complex social challenges in Singapore.

### **3) What is a Social Health Index?**

A social index is a composite of social indicators that assess the state of well-being and development of a society.

### **4) Why do we need to measure our social health?**

Measuring social health helps us to know how we are doing and how far we are from where we want to be as a society. We believe that there is a fundamental need to develop a multi-dimensional measure of our society that goes beyond the traditional economic metrics. This will enable us to have a more rounded view of progress and well-being in Singapore. What gets measured gets attention. The United States, the United Kingdom, Scandinavian countries, Hong Kong and Japan have used social indices to develop shared civic goals, inform public discourse and report on social change.

### **5) Why did NVPC embark on this project?**

The Singapore Social Health Project aims to provide a social perspective to Singapore's progress, stir public conversations and inspire community action that can lead to an improvement in our nation's social health. This is in line with NVPC's mission of leading and catalysing transformative initiatives to build compassionate and engaged communities.

### **6) What are the findings?**

Singapore was rated negative on 5 dimensions: individual well-being, family, income security, healthcare, and housing and transport. We are neutral on culture and values, education, social connectedness and community cohesion, and positive on civil and political participation.

Overall, the data pointed to stagnating wages and higher cost of living leading to anxieties about the future and posing risks to well-being; a need for a faster progression in creative aspects of culture and education; and rising activity in the civil and political sphere. There is suggestion that the economy growth trajectory has been accompanied by stresses in the social environment and Singaporeans are finding ways to cope.

## 7) What do the ratings for each domain mean?

Trend ratings have been used to convey how Singapore has fared in a particular domain compared to the past. We generally did not look at data earlier than year 2000. To establish a negative, positive or neutral trend, we examined several key indicators under each domain. Based on the trends for these indicators, each domain was then defined as positive, negative or neutral. A trend shows the direction of change in recent times, and not the level of achievement for that specific domain.

- Positive rating was assigned for domains where most headline indicators showed an improvement
- Negative rating was assigned to domains where most or at least some critical indicators showed a decline
- Neutral rating was assigned where there was no clear observable trend or where there was insufficient data to conclusively assess the trend.

We have found that Singapore has made progress on a lot of the social indicators over time, but there are several significant ones which appeared to have worsened in recent times. These issues have been highlighted in the report. Since social indicators are complex expressions of inter-connected issues, we wish to emphasise **that the report is not an evaluation of the government's performance in social areas**. Instead, it is meant to get the public and community discussing these critical topics and taking collective ownership of social issues.

## 8) What does NVPC want to achieve through these reports?

Through these reports, we hope to:

- Stir public discussion on Singapore's social health and inspire greater civic and philanthropy community action
- Influence policy discourse and discussion;
- Compel action to plug data gaps so that a more comprehensive understanding of Singapore's social state can emerge
- Develop a robust and inclusive index to track the progress of social development in Singapore.

## 9) What methodology was used?

The methodology used was meta-analysis. This method is focused on looking at information from various data sources, and comparing results to identify patterns and trends. Sources we examined include: government sources, newspaper reports, international research reports and social networking websites and blogs. Data collected was both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

We see the Singapore Social Health Project as an attempt to harness and make sense of public data; in order to reflect the social landscape in a meaningful way.

## 10) What are the limitations of this study?

The study used is based on open source data which is highly limited in Singapore's context. During the course of our research, we observed several missing data items that could have lent more rigour to our work. This has limited NVPC's ability to provide a more comprehensive picture of the social progress made in the various domains. We urge the government and other research institutes to consider addressing these gaps by working together with us.