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GL4102 – Taskforce Report

Sexually Transmitted Infections among Youths in Singapore

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the issue of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Singapore and seeks to understand why people continue to be susceptible to acquiring STIs despite the existing treatments and preventive measures available. Specifically, this report focuses on young adults and adolescents aged 10-29, an age group which has witnessed a rise in STI incidences in recent years. The goal of this report is twofold. First, it aims to delve into a better understanding of prevailing policies in Singapore and identify the policy gaps that has resulted in a failure to mitigate the causes of increased STI incidences. Second, it aims to provide policy recommendations that will help to alleviate the challenges that STIs presents to Singapore. In doing so, the report analyses the role of various actors and stakeholders at the local, regional and global levels and how they might contribute to resolving the problem of STIs within the local context.

Four main causes of rising STI incidences were uncovered in this report through a variety of primary and secondary sources, which included interviews conducted with different actors, a focus group discussion, analysis of existing databases and a literature review. First, there is a general lack of awareness about how one can contract and prevent STIs; a result of an abstinence-based sexuality education system. Second, there is an increase in instances of young people having casual, unprotected sex, which has been popularized due to sex tourism, exposure to media influences and emerging technology such as the dating app that facilitates meet-ups for casual sexual encounters. Third, accessibility to contraceptives is hindered by a combination of social and financial costs, one of which is the prevalence of social stigma against matters pertaining to casual, premarital sex. Fourth, there is a disproportionate focus on AIDS in the discourse surrounding

sexual health that results in a general lack of urgency to address the problems that are presented by other STIs; a deficiency that similarly exists on the global stage.

Based on the problems identified, the report highlights several areas whereby additional preventive and remedial interventions are required. At the same time, a study was also conducted on various countries with exceptional sexual health outcomes in order to determine the best practices to be taken into consideration when devising policy. Based on these findings, the report proposes a three-stage linear policy approach comprising of phases one, two and three. Phase one is set to occur in the immediate present due to its relatively low social and financial cost and its ability to target the primary causes of STIs. It encompasses solutions that can be implemented quickly and effectively, such as the expansion of sexuality education through social media engagement and the establishment of condom vending machines. Phase two involves the introduction of measures which aim to address the underlying or secondary causes of STIs, such as social stigma. Similarly, it is set to take place in the short term, albeit at a slower pace than those in phase one as it requires funding and time to implement. The policy recommendations under phase two include edutainment initiatives, the creation of online sex education platforms and the establishment of certified counselling groups. Finally, phase three involves changes to the sexuality education syllabus that delineate a complete shift from an abstinence-focused system to one that fully embraces the progressive comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) curriculum. However, the implementation of phase three would depend largely on the success of phase two in changing mindsets and creating a culture of tolerance and inclusion. The report acknowledges that social change of this level would likely take a long time to happen, given the

conservative nature of Singaporean society. As such, the policies of phase three are targeted for the long run as a goal that policymakers should continuously strive to achieve