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ROVING OPTICAL SHOP WITHIN SCHOOL GROUNDS AS PART OF ENHANCED ASSISTANCE SCHEME FOR NEEDY STUDENTS WITH MYOPIA

To ensure every child receives proper vision care, the Health Promotion Board has fine-tuned its Spectacles Voucher Fund to provide even better logistical and financial assistance.

Singapore, 17 July 2012: Whether it is a legit reason (“I can’t afford spectacles”) or simply a lame excuse (“I don’t look cool”), the Health Promotion Board (HPB) wants nothing to stand in the way of children from needy families receiving proper vision care.

2. Under the existing Spectacles Voucher Fund scheme, needy students who require a new pair of spectacles are given a voucher which can be redeemed at participating optical shops near their homes for fully-subsidised lenses of the right prescription, along with \$30 to go towards paying for the spectacles frame.

3. With the enhanced Spectacles Voucher Fund, roving optical shops will also be set up within selected pilot schools soon to meet the needs of students within the various school clusters, making the redemption of vouchers even more convenient. In addition, to meet changing costs, the amount given to pay for the spectacles frame will increase from \$30 to \$50.

4. Since the Spectacles Voucher Fund was established in 2006, HPB has helped nearly 15,000 needy children see better. However, about half of the vouchers also go unredeemed every year, which may mean that not every child who needs a pair of glasses is wearing one.

5. This is partly due to 'myopia myths' some parents have. During a recent HPB survey, more than 50 per cent of parents interviewed believed that wearing spectacles will aggravate the problem and deepen their child's myopia.
6. Other misinformation includes the notion that perfect vision or the correct prescription is unnecessary; hence, children can go without, keep the pair from last year or even wear hand-me-down glasses.
7. Research, however, shows that uncorrected or improperly corrected refractive error worsens myopia, which means going without glasses when your child needs a pair or wearing one with the wrong prescription can cause his or her vision to deteriorate.
8. The prevalence of myopia in Singapore is one of the highest in the world. About 26 per cent of seven-year-olds are myopic. This percentage leaps to 70 per cent for 16-year-olds.
9. A public health concern, high degree myopia is associated with potentially blinding complications such as thinning of the retina with the risk of a hole, tear or detachment; macular degeneration; cataract and glaucoma.
10. With the help of intensive nation-wide efforts to manage the myopia problem that started with the introduction of the HPB-driven National Myopia Prevention Programme (NMPP) in 2001, the myopia rate in Singapore has tapered – the latest HPB study indicated about a 5 per cent reduction in myopia prevalence among primary school children.
11. The NMPP comprises annual vision screening for school children (from pre-schoolers to teenagers), promotion of outdoor activities as well as guidelines on classroom curricula and illumination.
12. School children, parents and teachers are also educated on myopia, general eye care and good reading habits. And, of course, there is the Spectacles Voucher Fund, in partnership with participating optical shops as well as lens manufacturers such as Essilor Singapore.
13. Said Mr Ang Hak Seng, Chief Executive Officer, HPB: "About 6,000 needy school children are diagnosed as myopic by nurses from HPB's School Health Service during vision screening every year. The aim of the Spectacles Voucher Fund is to ensure that no needy

pupil is deprived of proper vision care in the form of well-fitting spectacles of the right prescription. However, a proportion of vouchers are still unredeemed every year. This is because some parents still believe that wearing spectacles will further the progression of myopia, or it is not necessary to wear spectacles with exactly the right prescription. Parents should do their part to learn more about myopia, and HPB will help where we can to educate them and make it more convenient to redeem the spectacles vouchers by working with partners to bring a roving optical shop to selected pilot schools and increasing the spectacles frame subsidy from \$30 to \$50.”

14. With a vision of helping needy children see the world better through meaningful collaborations with the private sector, HPB is signing a Memorandum of Understanding today with Essilor Singapore, who is expanding its sponsorship commitment to \$2.43 million.

15. Said Mr Peter Tan, General Manager, Essilor Singapore: “It is our firm belief that everyone deserves crystal-clear vision, no matter what their background and financial ability. This is why we’ve made only the very best of our lenses available to the needy students. These lenses are apt for school-going youths, who are active and energetic physically, and especially suitable and safe for those who engage in sporting activities in or outside school. We are committed to our belief and are thrilled to continue our long-term support for the Spectacles Voucher Fund in realising a better vision for the future generation.”

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