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**Speech by Mrs Lim Hwee Hua, Minister in Prime Minister's Office,
Second Minister for Finance and Transport at the Launch of Project
"Celebrate Wellness", 10 October 2009**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am delighted to be here this afternoon to champion this worthy cause. Good health is one of the most important things in life – but we often take it for granted and only realize its true value after we lose it. Therefore, I would like to give thanks to our community partners for your enthusiasm in coming forward to jointly promote and celebrate wellness among our women in Singapore.

2. For those of you who may not be familiar with Project WINGS, WINGS, the acronym for Women Inspiring, Nurturing and Grooming Singaporeans, is a community initiative launched in 2004 by the PAP women Members of Parliament (MPs) to help give a leg up to the less-advantaged women and children among us. Over the years, WINGS has launched a whole range of projects with various community partners to support the economic and educational advancement of our women and children.

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3. Project “Celebrate Wellness” is one of the most special initiatives among the many programmes launched by Project WINGS. Project “Celebrate Wellness” aims to rally all women belonging to different age groups, ethnic groups and backgrounds to make well-being the top priority in their lives. Often women unwittingly neglect their own health due to competing demands from work and family. Without good health, we women will find it hard to work or to care for our families. The vision of a Singapore where women thrive in good health was what led to the birth of Project “Celebrate Wellness”. We begin today with a commitment to fight breast cancer, the most common cancer that afflicts women in Singapore. The incidence of breast cancer is about twice that of the next most common cancer in women, colorectal cancer.

4. I must commend Singapore Cancer Society, Breast Cancer Foundation, Health Promotion Board and their partners for having done an excellent job in raising breast cancer awareness among Singaporean women. This year marks the 12th year of the National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and I am delighted to learn that there are lots of fun activities going on to mark this special month. Just a week ago, I was at the Reebok Pink Ribbon Walk and was extremely heartened to find the event so well attended.

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5. According to statistics, the incidence rate of breast cancer increases significantly in women over 50. Early detection of breast cancer through regular screening mammograms can help save lives. For the period of 2003-2006, the percentage of those aged 50-69 who survived 3 years after diagnosis was as high as 84% for stage 3 breast cancer, and close to 100% for those in earlier stages. Even when diagnosed at stage 4, the survival rate was over half, at 52.5%*. However, according to the National Health Surveillance Survey conducted in 2007, only 41% of women aged 50-69 had gone for screening mammogram in the previous two years. It is therefore timely to begin our journey towards battling breast cancer, by helping women aged 50 – 69 years make a start on regular mammogram screening – to help them get into the habit of going for a mammogram once every 2 years.

6. We have made good progress in promoting awareness. More than 80% of women in the target group know about mammograms – a far higher proportion compared to those who actually have been for a screening mammogram in the last 2 years – 41%. With the launch of the national screening programme, BreastScreen Singapore, in 2002, the issue of accessibility was addressed with screening made available at 16 polyclinics as well as via a mobile screening bus, which brings breast cancer screening to the door step of homes and workplaces. Screening via BreastScreen Singapore is heavily subsidized by the government to address the issue of affordability.

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7. The women MPs reaffirm our support in the fight against breast cancer by launching Project “Celebrate Wellness” in the month of October – Breast Cancer Awareness Month. I am happy to announce that, thanks to further generous funding from our partner Tote Board, we can now offer a one-time substantially subsidised mammogram screening for women who are 50 years and older and who have not been for screening before. Mammograms are already heavily subsidised by the government - women who attend breast cancer screening at the polyclinics currently only pay half of the full price of a mammogram (\$50 instead of \$107). Project “Celebrate Wellness” will offer a further subsidy such that eligible women need only pay \$25 for a mammogram at the polyclinics. This heavily subsidised screening is our gift to our women 50 and older to celebrate Singapore’s 50th year of self-government and our progress as a nation.

8. Eligible women will be able to sign up for these discounted mammograms at “Celebrate Wellness” roadshows, which will be organised at community venues by WINGS, the Women’s Executive Committees from People’s Association, the Health Promotion Board and other community partners. These roadshows will feature a slew of health and wellness-related activities such as mass workouts, programmes on mental well-being, culinary workshops and many other exciting activities. What’s more, women can also register for other fun and informative health courses which will be conducted after the roadshows. Women who are eligible for the further subsidy will be receiving an invitation letter with more details. So,

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please look out for the letter, which will be sent to eligible women over a 2-year period from January 2010 – I urge you to take advantage of this once-off project – and go for your mammogram. And don't stop with just this one mammogram – do go for your next mammogram after 2 years, and every 2 years after that. Regular screening mammograms are key to detecting breast cancers early; early cancers which are treated optimally increase your chances of survival. If your screening results letter advises you to go for further tests, please go for your appointment promptly.

9. Last but certainly not least, the community plays a key role in reaching out to both residents and women. Our women MPs, community leaders, activists and volunteers will lead the "fight" against breast cancer and step up efforts so that eventually as few women as possible need to die from breast cancer.

10. On this note, I want to reiterate how encouraged I am to see such passionate commitment from all our partners, who have readily stepped forward for this cause. It is my sincere hope that this will be a longterm partnership that we can build upon in subsequent years, as we address women's health – and Celebrate Wellness.

11. Thank you.

* Data from: <http://www.singaporecancersociety.org.sg/nr/PR-200810-BCAM-MediaConference-Oct4.pdf>