

# **Remarks by Health Minister on Senior Citizen's Month 2025**

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**Remarks by Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley**

**Minister for Health And Social Development**

**Senior Citizen's Month 2025**

**May 2025**

A very pleasant and blessed Virgin Islands Good Morning to all of you, and welcome to the beginning of our Senior Citizen's Month of activities for 2025!

I extend a very warm and heartfelt welcome to our golden gems gathered here this morning, who have journeyed from every corner of our beautiful Virgin Islands. I am Honourable Vincent Wheatley, Minister for Health and Social Development.

This event marks the beginning of what I believe is one of the most eagerly anticipated celebrations for our seniors, an entire month dedicated to honouring you. So, for me, this is both a privilege and a pleasure to stand before you today as we officially launch the 36th annual observance of Senior Citizen's Month.

This year's theme, "Flip the Script on Aging", is both timely and powerful as it invites us to rethink the way we view aging. It challenges us to move beyond

outdated stereotypes and to embrace a new narrative: **To flip the script!** It means recognising aging as a beautiful, natural process that brings wisdom, resilience, and a renewed appreciation for life.

When we flip the script, it should remind us that getting older does not mean stepping into the background; rather, it often means stepping into new and vital roles such as mentors, storytellers, and advocates. Personally, I deeply value the time I spend with the seniors of our Territory. One of my favourite pastimes is listening to the stories from yesteryear — stories that hold the history, humour, and heart of these Virgin Islands.

You, our seniors are living examples of resilience! You are the ones who built our institutions, developed our economy, defended our rights, and nurtured the culture and traditions that make us uniquely Virgin Islands strong.

As we celebrate this 36th anniversary, we are reminded that longevity is one of the great achievements of modern society. Thanks to advances in healthcare, education, and overall living standards, more of our citizens are living longer, healthier, and more fulfilling lives.

In fact, as a Territory, we are able to boast that we have eight living centenarians!

**This is a cause for celebration!**

Eight golden gems who have each lived a full century and beyond. I think it is fitting to mention their names, although I'm not sure if any of them are here today; this is an appropriate time to recognise them:

- Mrs. Enelle Smith - 106 years
- Mrs. Emogene Creque - 105 years
- Mrs. Betty Yates - 103 years
- Mrs. Floresa George - 102 years
- Mr. Evelyn Hodge - 101 years
- Mrs. Iris Harrigan - 101 years
- Mrs. Christeen Hodge - 101 years
- And our most recent celebrant, Mrs. Esme Turnbull Stoutt aka "Muddy" - who celebrated on 22nd April.

Their lives are living legacies of perseverance, grace, and unwavering strength.

We honour them, and all our seniors, not just for the years they have accumulated, but for the immeasurable contributions they have made — and continue to make — in our families, our communities, and our Territory.

I must commend the Social Development Department for recognising and celebrating our centenarians in such meaningful ways. As people live longer, it is essential that they also live better — with dignity, a sense of purpose, and the full support of their families and communities.

This is why the Ministry of Health and Social Development, together with our dedicated partners, continue to invest in programmes that empower our golden gems. Whether through improvements in healthcare services, community engagement initiatives, or policies that protect the rights and wellbeing of our seniors — this government remains committed to ensuring that every stage of life is valued and supported — from the cradle to the grave.

As part of this commitment, the Cabinet of The Virgin Islands recently approved an increase in the centenarian grant — doubling it from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Furthermore, through the revision of the Public Assistance Grants under the Public Assistance Programme, monthly grants to our seniors have been raised to \$506.25, offering greater financial support to those who have given so much to our Territory.

Throughout this month, a variety of activities have been organised to celebrate, educate, and advocate for our seniors. From cultural showcases to recreational events — there are opportunities for all of us, of all ages, to connect, to learn from one another, and to express our gratitude to those who paved the way.

Beyond the activities, I encourage each of us to reflect on what it truly means to "***flip the script on aging***." It means embracing the power of intergenerational collaboration. It means recognising older adults as essential contributors to our society — not merely recipients of care. It also means standing firmly against ageism in all its forms, challenging the biases that diminish the value of our seniors.

Let us be a Territory that treasures the experience of age, that listens intently to the voices of our seniors, and that values and empowers our seniors. Let us ensure that no senior feels forgotten, isolated, or unseen.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Social Development Department, our caregivers, community partners, volunteers, and every family member who supports and uplifts our golden gems each and every day. Your dedication is the cornerstone of a society that truly values and honours every generation.

To our seniors: we celebrate you! We thank you! We honour you! You are our foundation, our teachers, and our inspiration. May you continue to thrive and find joy in every new chapter of life.

On behalf of the Government of The Virgin Islands, it gives me great pride to officially declare Senior Citizen's Month 2025 open!

May this month be filled with celebration, connection, reflection, and a renewed commitment to embracing the gift of aging with pride, dignity and positivity.

Thank you, and may God continue to bless each and every one of you — and our beloved Virgin Islands.