

For discussion on
12 March 2001

LegCo Panel on Welfare Services
Review of Family Welfare Services

PURPOSE

On 12 June 2000, Members discussed a Paper on Review of Family Welfare Services to be carried out by the Administration. This paper updates Members on the progress of work of the review on family welfare services.

BACKGROUND

Objectives and Scope of the Review

2. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has commissioned the University of Hong Kong to conduct an 8-month study on the review of family welfare services. The review has started in August 2000 with the following objectives:

- a) to develop a long-term strategy and map out future directions;
- b) to identify and prioritize needs of families;
- c) to review the roles, functions, modes of service delivery and effectiveness of services in meeting changing needs of the community;
- d) to develop a practical and cost-effective service delivery model;
- e) to review future planning of services in meeting changing social

needs;

- f) to examine the need for need assessment tools for setting appropriate levels of intervention corresponding to family needs;
- g) to develop outcome measures; and
- h) to draw up implementation plans.

3. The review covers major family services, viz, family services centre, senior social work practitioner, family life education service, family aide service, Family Activity and Resource Centre, Family Care Demonstration and Resource Centre cum Carers' Support Centre, family education and support services for single parent families and new arrivals under the Promoting Self-reliance Strategy package.

4. Members in the last Panel meeting supported the need for a review. They advised that the Administration should take a macro view to develop a policy to support families and which should be taken into account by other policy bureaux. The Administration agreed that findings of the present review would provide useful references for future macro policy reviews in meeting changing needs of the Hong Kong families. The Administration also agreed that the present review should obtain views from various stakeholders to help formulating future service direction.

PROGRESS OF WORK

The Steering Committee and Working Group

5. In order to ensure that views from a wide spectrum of stakeholders are represented, a Steering Committee, comprising representatives from the Health and Welfare Bureau, SWD, Education Department, Social Welfare Advisory Committee, Hong Kong Council of Social Service, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), service users and independent members of the community has been formed to steer

and monitor the review. A Working Group, with representatives from SWD and NGOs, has been set up to facilitate the work of the consultancy team at operational level.

Methodology of the Review

6. The review has employed an evidence-based, improvement-oriented and user-focused approach so that intensive interaction with stakeholders and information from multiple sources are ensured to make the process open, transparent and participatory while views gathered are balanced and objective. With this aim in mind, the process of fact-finding and observation by the consultants involves the following parts:

- a) documentary review of local and overseas policy and research information on family issues and family service programmes;
- b) analysis of service statistics;
- c) consultation and exchange of views with policy makers, service providers and practitioners through sharing sessions, submissions received and a designated homepage;
- d) focus groups with stakeholders on their views and expectations; and
- e) intensive case studies on service units in operation.

Consultation with Stakeholders

7. To provide a forum for receiving suggestions and exchanging views, an interactive website was set up by the consultants to enhance communication and capture views on family services. Besides, three briefings have been conducted by the consultants and SWD to keep stakeholders informed of the progress of work at

different stages, clarify their concerns and invite suggestions. The review is thus a highly transparent and participatory process.

8. Besides intensive case studies on service units covered by the review, the consultants had conducted a total of 33 focus groups with various stakeholders, including policy makers, service users, service providers, front-line staff and NGO management. Through these focus groups, views from other social workers delivering youth, elderly, child care, rehabilitation, social security, medical social work services in serving families were also gathered. Professionals from non-welfare sector such as school principals, teachers, student guidance officers/teachers, educational psychologists and representatives from Parent-Teacher Associations as well as other professionals including medical administrators, medical professionals, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, nurses, lawyers, police, magistrate, housing managers and the corporate sector were also involved in order to find out how they view the existing services, solicit suggestions for service improvement and interfacing in order to generate synergy to serve families. Valuable information on current service delivery system and practices was obtained through the involvement of a wide spectrum of stakeholders.

Preliminary Findings

9. Preliminary findings show that traditional Chinese family values and structures have been undergoing rapid, profound and unprecedented changes. Immigration, population mobility, aging society and economic recession have all aggravated family problems in Hong Kong. Though nuclear family still predominates, other types of families such as single-parent family, split family (including cross-boundary family), step-family and family with newly arrived children and spouse are on the increase. Family problems are becoming complicated. Symptoms of family malfunctioning and breakdown include extra-marital affairs, domestic violence, rising divorce rate, lack of proper parental supervision and guidance, behavioural problems of children, juvenile delinquency as

well as mental health problems. Good practices, innovative projects and new approaches have been identified during the course of review. They are in many ways meeting the needs of the community. Attempts to strengthen partnership and access to the hard-to-reach families are emerging. However, services on the whole are fragmented. There are indications that some programmes are overloaded, while others are under-utilized. Taken together, there is much room for improvement by restructuring service delivery so that changing family needs can be addressed in a more holistic and integrated manner. Moreover, the consultants find that there is a lack of a systematic, comprehensive and reliable data base on current client profile and professional input which is essential for service monitoring and planning and highlighted the need for setting up a client information system to facilitate future development.

10. As the focus of work in family services centres is mainly remedial in nature, there is a possibility for these centres to become more community-based and be integrated with different services in order to enhance accessibility to families, including at-risk families, and to provide appropriate support so that problems would not further deteriorate. The senior social work practitioners are valuable resources in handling difficult and complex cases and giving consultation to colleagues, and the family aide service can be further utilized to fill a service gap in training disadvantaged family members in home management and child care. Family Activity and Resource Centres can be further linked with other service programmes to maximize their strategic point of service entry to identify families in need.

11. With the increasing involvement of the health and education sectors in preventive work in the form of parent education, the role of family life education in primary prevention and adoption of an educational approach has to be further examined. There is a growing aspiration for family life education to be refocused to help vulnerable and at-risk families, rather than motivated families, in its preventive work with the adoption of more diversified approaches.

12. With a variety of community-based programmes available, such as those organized by community centres, group work units and youth services which are preventive and developmental in nature and having diversified entry points to contact hard-to-reach families, the consultants will examine how to integrate effectively the work of family services centres and the preventive work of the community-based programmes. In order to ensure that early identification and prompt intervention can be enlisted to support and empower families to face changing needs, there is a growing need to strengthen partnership among government, NGOs, other organizations and professionals in a multi-level but co-ordinated approach.

13. The consultants, basing on the findings and observations gathered so far, will formulate service delivery models that could address family needs in a more holistic and coordinated manner. They have highlighted the basic philosophy to be adopted in the development and provision of services for families, including :-

- a) child-centred, family-focused, community-based;
- b) user-oriented and easily accessible;
- c) recognition of families as a resource and thus service plans should be built on strengthening family capability and competency;
- d) early identification and intervention to prevent the need for crisis intervention;
- e) barrier-free integrated services;
- f) cost-effective intervention which is outcome-driven; and
- g) effective coordination and integration with other relevant services and professionals.

In formulating a revised service delivery model, the consultants will further deliberate on a number of inter-related principles and directions as discussed below.

Early Identification

14. Family problems in Hong Kong are becoming complicated, though not as critical as those in other developed countries. In anticipation of the complex problems and stresses faced by individuals and families arising from changing social, demographic and economic situations and with an aim to prevent further deterioration of these problems, early identification of needs with proactive targeting on individuals and families is required. The consultants will be looking at how services for the families can be effectively integrated with the preventive work of community-based programmes, and re-positioned in relation to the current focus of work being provided by other sectors including health and education services, where there are wide entry points to parents and children in delivering preventive work.

Integration

15. Over the years, substantial resources allocated in strengthening existing services and developing new ones may have led to fragmentation and overlapping of services. It has come to a point of time that an integrated approach in co-ordinating these services and interfacing their functions should be adopted to make these services more accessible and cost-effective in meeting needs of the families. While there are different models of integration, the consultants fully understand the need to address the issues of integration not just within the family service programme or at the district levels alone, but also in a wider perspective of integration with other related services and those inside and outside the social welfare sector.

Partnership

16. As family issues are becoming more complicated and interwoven with other social problems, joint action and partnership cutting across government

departments (such as social welfare, health, education, housing, police), family services programmes, other family-oriented programmes (such as those provided in clinics, schools, youth services, elderly services, rehabilitation services, nurseries, kindergartens), and community organizations (such as District Councils, Parent-Teacher Associations, volunteer groups, business corporations, religious bodies, residents' organizations) have to be interfaced and strengthened. Through this partnership, synergy can be produced while access to families, particularly hard-to-reach ones, can be further enhanced.

WAY FORWARD

17. Making reference to the above findings, the consultants will make recommendations on the future direction and priority of family services, options for service re-engineering, service delivery models, need to develop assessment tools and developing outcome measures on service effectiveness. In the couple of months to come, the consultants will continue to widely consult stakeholders in drawing up their recommendations and implementation plans. The Administration will critically examine the recommendations to be put forward by the consultants with a view to better support families in meeting changing needs.

*Social Welfare Department
March 2001*