

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Healthy Ageing

PURPOSE

This paper briefs members on the work undertaken by the Elderly Commission, and the Administration, on the promotion of Healthy Ageing in Hong Kong.

BACKGROUND

2. In Hong Kong, there was an estimated 759 200 older persons (aged 65 and over) in 2000, accounting for about 11.2% of the total population. By 2029, 19.8% (1 792 000), i.e. one out of five of Hong Kong people, will be aged 65 or over. The proportion of “older olds” (i.e. those aged 75 and over) within the aged population will rise sharply, as the baby boomers turn 75.

3. A recent local survey has shown that 75% of local people aged 65 or over, and 45% of people in the 45 to 64 age groups are suffering from one or more chronic diseases, with diseases like diabetes, heart disease and chronic bronchitis common among the older persons. In terms of the impact of these chronic diseases and conditions on the health system, over 46% of the hospital day-beds are occupied by older persons, while they represent only about 11% of the total population. Moreover, the high prevalence of chronic diseases in the older population would bring personal hardship to the individuals concerned.

4. On the other hand, many chronic diseases are the cumulative effect of individual lifelong lifestyles and environmental influences. With effective health protection and promotion, many of these diseases are preventable, and a significant proportion of disability found in older persons is potentially reversible. The promotion of “Healthy Ageing” in Hong Kong is therefore timely and worthwhile, both from the individual and societal perspectives.

WHAT IS HEALTHY AGEING

5. The concept of Healthy Ageing or Positive Ageing has already been established in many overseas countries including Canada, Australia and some European countries. They all share a common vision that Healthy Ageing is a total life-course approach in attaining optimal physical and psychosocial well-being. It begins with people who are basically healthy, and seeks the development of public policies, community and individual measures which are conducive to the development of Healthy Ageing. Health is considered as not merely the absence of diseases but also the optimization of the individual's functioning including the body and mind. They have all adopted Healthy Ageing as part of their government strategies.

6. Sufficient physical activity, eating well and quitting smoking are important lifestyle factors that contribute to the prevention of many diseases. By adopting a healthy lifestyle, people can expect not only to live longer, but also to enjoy added years as they stay healthier. Moreover, various psychosocial aspects of life, e.g. a person's history, social relations, lifestyle, personality, and mental (including cognitive) processes, have equally significant health implications. In fact, physical and psychosocial factors are often interwoven and collectively have significant impacts on a person's well-being. Pursuit of one's richness and fullness of life in both physical and psychosocial well-being leads to Healthy Ageing.

STRATEGIES FOR HEALTHY AGEING

7. The Elderly Commission (EC) commenced discussions on the promotion of Health Ageing in Hong Kong last year. In April 2001, it compiled a Report on Healthy Ageing which mapped out its views and proposed strategies to promote Healthy Ageing in Hong Kong. A copy of the report, together with the executive summary, is attached at Annex A for members' reference. In the report, the EC has set out its vision on Healthy Ageing which is to create a society with a sustainable supportive environment that enables all persons, including older persons, to have access to information, services and support so that they can make responsible choices regarding their health and well-being, and to live independently as valued members of the community for as long as

possible. It has also set out six sets of values and nine guiding principles which should be adopted in formulating policies and developing programmes that are supportive of Healthy Ageing. Details of the values and guiding principles can be found in Chapter 6 of the report.

8. To realize the proposed vision, values and principles of Healthy Ageing, the EC has proposed to follow four strategic directions in promoting Healthy Ageing and in launching a three-year thematic Healthy Ageing Campaign, starting from May 2001. The four strategic directions are:

- (a) Promote personal responsibility;
- (b) Strengthen community action;
- (c) Create supportive environment; and
- (d) Improve image of ageing.

More details about the strategic directions can be found in Chapters 7 to 10 of the report.

PROMOTION OF HEALTHY AGEING

9. As the concepts of Healthy Ageing are comparatively new to Hong Kong, the Health and Welfare Bureau and the concerned departments will support the EC by taking the lead in explaining the concepts and the strategies to the community and the service providers, and to initiate community wide discussions on Healthy Ageing. In this regard, a Healthy Ageing Convention was organized by the EC on 19 May 2001, during which the Report on Healthy Ageing was formally released. The Convention also served as a platform to announce the commencement of the three-year Healthy Ageing Campaign to the service providers and their frontline staff.

10. The Healthy Ageing Campaign will focus in the first year on the promotion of physical well-being, highlighting the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. This will be followed by the promotion of psychosocial well-being in the subsequent two years with continued efforts to promote physical well-being. The Campaign will adopt a two-pronged approach:

- (a) sustained public education and publicity efforts; and
- (b) extensive involvement of the community through the Community Partnership Scheme (CPS).

11. The EC acknowledged and the Administration agreed that the successful promotion of Healthy Ageing in Hong Kong requires the combined efforts of a wide range of sectors in the community, including the non-government organizations (NGOs), welfare and health care professionals, the academia, district bodies, the mass media, and the private sector, etc. To raise the awareness of the community on the concepts of Healthy Ageing, the Administration will support the EC's effort by organizing events and activities which may include training sessions and workshops, exhibitions, production of educational materials, TV/radio programmes, advertisement in mass media or public transport, etc. in the coming months.

CONCERTED WORK ON HEALTHY AGEING

12. Several government departments, the Hospital Authority (HA) and NGOs have already developed programmes and services to coincide with the four strategic directions and the initial focus of the Campaign. For example, the Department of Health (DH) plans to step up its promotional drive on eating well and promoting physical activity by pursuing two initiatives, namely the "Nutrition and Food Hygiene Programme" and "Exercise for Healthy Ageing", to support the first year focus of the Campaign on physical well-being.

13. In response to the recommendation that elders should be empowered with information so that they can make informed decisions about their physical well-being, the HA's Info World service will set up a model "Home" workshop and start running practical skill sessions for elders and their caregivers by the end of this year. Contents of the workshops will cover various aspects of healthy lifestyles, personal care and safety.

14. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has subvented NGOs to operate the "Elderly Volunteers Programme" to encourage elders to make good use of their skills and knowledge to help others in need. Another initiative is the funding of the "Opportunities for the Elderly Project" which aims to provide opportunities for elders and

volunteers of all ages to run innovative activities and programmes for elders with a view to improving the image of ageing as well as promoting care and concerns for elders. On the other hand, the SWD and subvented NGOs are, on a regular basis, offering life-long learning opportunities as part and parcel of their service provision to elders.

15. Other departments such as the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Home Affairs Department, Information Services Department, Radio Television Hong Kong, Education Department and Housing Department will also be involved in the Campaign so as to broaden our reach into the community.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY

16. The EC has obtained a grant of \$21 million from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (HKJCCT) to set up the CPS (see para. 10(b)) for three years to encourage various sectors of the community to organize Healthy Ageing public participation and education programmes which would contribute to the realization of the mission, vision and values of Healthy Ageing, and are relevant to the four strategic directions set out above. The CPS will serve to rally multi-sectoral participation in Healthy Ageing, and also aim to cultivate innovative ideas and inspirational approach in promoting the concepts of Healthy Ageing in the community. Applications for support under the CPS in the first year will be received by 1 July 2001 so that funds can be disbursed in the second half of this year.

HEALTHY AGEING IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY WIDE HEALTH PROMOTION

17. Ageing is a life-long process beginning before birth and continuing throughout life. The DH has been working to improve the health of the population and to prepare them for a healthy old age through providing a range of health promotion and disease prevention programmes for different age groups. We also seek to promote self-responsibility for health as well as create a supportive environment where people find healthy life choices easy to make.

WAY FORWARD

18. To oversee the development of the three-year Healthy Ageing Campaign, a Steering Group on Healthy Ageing has been set up under the EC to monitor overall developments, and to develop further strategies to promote the psychosocial well-being of elders. The Health and Welfare Bureau, together with relevant government departments, will continue to support the EC in its work in this area.

ADVICE SOUGHT

19. Members are invited to comment on the work on the promotion of Healthy Ageing in Hong Kong as set out in this paper.

Health and Welfare Bureau
June 2001

Annex A

Executive Summary

and

Report on Healthy Ageing

by Elderly Commission

April 2001