

For information on  
12 March 2007

## **Legislative Council Panel on Health Services**

### **Prevention and Control of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)**

#### **PURPOSE**

This paper briefs Members on the latest situation of HIV/AIDS in Hong Kong and the Government's work in preventing and controlling HIV/AIDS.

#### **BACKGROUND**

##### **Organizational Framework of the Government's HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Work**

2. The Government adopts a multi-pronged approach in the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, including surveillance and monitoring, education and publicity, as well as treatment and care of AIDS patients and people who are HIV positive. The Department of Health (DH) is the lead Government agency for implementing such measures. It also provides secretariat support to the two main AIDS related advisory bodies, namely the Advisory Council on AIDS (ACA), which was established in 1990 to advise the Government on policy relating to the prevention, care and control of HIV infection and AIDS in Hong Kong; and the Council for the AIDS Trust Fund (ATF), which was established in 1993 to determine matters relating to the administration of the ATF and considering applications for grants for programmes and projects on HIV/AIDS publicity and public education.

3. The Special Preventive Programme (SPP) set up under DH's Centre for Health Protection is responsible for supporting the development of evidence-based AIDS strategies, and cultivating expertise

in clinical medicine and public health policy relating to HIV/AIDS. Apart from providing secretariat support to ACA, SPP's main areas of work include -

- (a) **HIV/AIDS Surveillance:** SPP monitors the local HIV/AIDS situation through a voluntary reporting system, seroprevalence studies among high-risk groups and behavioural data collected through DH's service outlets such as AIDS Counselling Service;
- (b) **Prevention and Health Promotion:** SPP conducts HIV prevention and health promotion programmes through its Red Ribbon Centre which encourages community participation in AIDS education and prevention, develops AIDS education programmes and facilitates local and international collaboration in the fight against HIV/AIDS; and
- (c) **Diagnosis, Clinical Treatment and Care:** SPP provides clinical services for AIDS patients and people who are HIV positive to facilitate early diagnosis, disease treatment and control, reducing the risk of transmission by taking intervention measures, counselling for sexual partners of HIV positive people and referring them for testing.

The work of SPP is supported by other parties, including other functional units of DH, Hospital Authority, Information Services Department and Social Welfare Department.

### **HIV/AIDS Epidemiological Trends and Projection**

4. In Hong Kong, the first case of HIV infection was diagnosed in 1984. At the end of December 2006, the accumulated total of reported HIV and AIDS cases were 3 198 and 855 respectively. Around 70% of the infected persons were Chinese and 80% of the infected persons were men. The number of new reported HIV cases in 2006 was 373, representing a 19% increase as compared with that in 2005. Sexual

transmission remains the most common mode of transmission, accounting for 75% of all infections (16% with undetermined route). HIV infection amongst injecting drug users remains relatively low.

5. The overall HIV prevalence in Hong Kong remains at below 0.1% as at end 2006. Despite this low level of prevalence, there are signs that HIV infections in Hong Kong have increased in the last two to three years. There has been a resurgence of infections among men who have sex with men (MSM). In the course of SPP's outreach voluntary counselling and testing work, it was found that HIV prevalence among MSM has grown rapidly from less than 1% in 2002 to 2.5% in 2005. Besides, in 2006, two large separate clusters of HIV-1 subtype B infections were identified. The two clusters involved at least 34 men and 12 men respectively. The clusters suggest the presence of a rapid and local HIV transmission in Hong Kong.

6. In 2006, DH commissioned a study on the local HIV/AIDS situation and the epidemiological trends. The study was conducted by Dr Tim Brown, a renowned AIDS expert and Senior Fellow of the East-West Center in Hawaii, the United States of America. The study estimated that only 60% of MSM used condoms consistently, as compared with the estimated 80% among heterosexual people. Dr Brown considered that the relatively low condom usage among MSM might be one of the main reasons for the increase in HIV infections among them. He projected that if there were less than 80% condom use among MSM, over 30% of MSM in Hong Kong might become HIV positive by 2020.

## **ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT**

7. The Government will continue with its work in combating HIV/AIDS by enhanced surveillance, health promotion and prevention, and provision of the necessary clinical treatment and follow up. Having regard to the increased prevalence of HIV among MSM in Hong Kong, special emphasis will be attached to the prevention and control work specifically catered for MSM. In this connection, DH launched a major publicity and education campaign among the MSM community in mid-2006 to raise their awareness of the importance of safe sex and to

promote the use of condoms. The Red Ribbon Centre has also stepped up its efforts to encourage greater involvement of the MSM community in HIV prevention work. It is working closely with the MSM community in promoting the importance of HIV prevention. For example, it holds monthly meetings with representatives from the MSM community with a view to obtaining their inputs and comments on preventive and health promotion activities.

8. Apart from the above Government-led activities, the Council for AIDS Trust Fund launched a Special Project Fund of \$9 million in December 2006 to provide financial support for community-based HIV prevention programmes specifically for MSM. Projects funded by the Special Project Fund are expected to start in the second quarter of 2007.

## **STRATEGIES FOR THE FIVE YEARS AHEAD**

9. As mentioned above, the Advisory Council on AIDS (ACA) advises the Government on policy matters relating to AIDS. One of its key tasks is to recommend HIV/AIDS Strategies for Hong Kong for the five years from 2007 to 2011. ACA has actively collected views from the community, especially the non-government organizations which are involved in HIV/AIDS work, and conducted surveys on stakeholders' comments on the Strategy Document for 2002 to 2006 and expectations for the new one. After rounds of discussions and deliberations with the stakeholders<sup>(Note)</sup>, the ACA formulated the final draft version of its new strategy document - "Recommended HIV/AIDS Strategy for Hong Kong 2007-2011". In the draft document, ACA has identified five priority areas for action in response to the changed HIV situation in Hong Kong -

- (a) scaling up HIV prevention work in high-risk populations, with MSM being given the highest priority;

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<sup>(Note)</sup>: The stakeholders include non-government organizations which are involved in the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, e.g. the Hong Kong Coalition of AIDS Service Organizations; the Council of AIDS Trust Fund; medical organizations, e.g. the Medical Council of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong Medical Association, the Dental Council of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Dental Association; Equal Opportunities Commission; Hospital Authority; relevant Government bureaux and departments; etc.

- (b) mobilising an effective community-based response with resources allocated to priority areas and the provision of adequate technical support;
- (c) enhancing HIV surveillance and testing;
- (d) sustaining access to quality treatment and care for HIV positive people and those who have AIDS; and
- (e) interfacing with the Mainland China and nearby regions for an effective and collaborated response.

10. The ACA is of the view that HIV prevention efforts for MSM must be enhanced. Increasing condom use is considered the single most effective preventive measure. ACA will continue to work closely with the Council for ATF to ensure that Government efforts and community programmes would complement each other.

## **WAY FORWARD**

11. The Government is committed to strengthening the HIV prevention and control efforts in Hong Kong with the main aims of -

- (a) maintaining the low HIV prevalence in Hong Kong;
- (b) reducing the spread of HIV;
- (c) achieving early diagnosis of new infection cases and providing timely treatment and care; and
- (d) optimizing the health of HIV/AIDS patients.

Nevertheless, the success of any HIV/AIDS prevention programme hinges not only on the work of the Administration. Collaborative efforts of non-government organizations concerned and the community's general awareness of the importance of safe sex are also of importance. DH will continue to work with stakeholders to achieve the best results.

## **ADVICE SOUGHT**

12. Members are invited to note the Government's actions to combat HIV/AIDS in Hong Kong.

Department of Health  
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