

立法會

Legislative Council

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Panel on Welfare Services

Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

Minutes of the 18th meeting
held on Monday, 2 April 2007, at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building

Members present : Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Chairman)
Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, SBS, JP
Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Members absent : Hon Albert HO Chun-yan
Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP

Member attending : Dr Hon KWOK Ka-ki

Public Officers attending : Mr D C CHEUNG
Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 2

Miss Cherie YEUNG
Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food
(Elderly Services and Social Security) 4

Mr WU Kin-sing
Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 1
Social Welfare Department

Dr HSE Mei-yin, Kitty
Senior Dental Officer (Administration)
Department of Health

**Deputations
by invitation**

: The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong

Mr WONG Kwai-yau
Supervisor

1st Step Association

Miss KWONG Suet-yi

Mr WU Yun-lung

Disable and Carer Concern Group

Ms WONG Yat-ki

Ms LAM Wai-king

Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse
(Kwan Fook)

Ms LIU Ngan-fung
Chairman

Cat

Society for Community Organization

Mr NG Wai-tung
Community Organizer

Mr YAU Kin-man
Community Organizer

Hong Kong Right for Homeless Association

Three representatives for homeless

爭取基層生活保障聯席

Ms Moi YEUNG

Ms LEUNG Mei-yee

Concerning CSSA Review Alliance

Mr AU YEUNG Tat-chor
Community Organizer

Miss SHEK
Member

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Ms Mariana CHAN
Chief Officer

Concerning Group for Women Poverty

Ms LEE Choi-kwan
Member

Ms HO Foei-lin
Member

Clerk in attendance : Miss Betty MA
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4

Staff in attendance : Ms Maisie LAM
Council Secretary (2) 2

Mr Arthur KAN
Legislative Assistant (2) 7

Action

I. Provision of special grant to cover costs of dental treatment under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

[LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1435/06-07(01) to (08), CB(2)1463/06-07(01) to (02) and CB(2)1504/06-07(01)]

The Subcommittee deliberated (Index of proceedings attached at **Annex**).

Views of deputations

2. The Subcommittee received views from 10 deputations on the provision of special grant to cover costs of dental treatment (dental grant) under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme. All deputations demanded the Administration to resume the provision of dental grant, which had ceased since June 1999, to able-bodied CSSA recipients below the age of 60. Other major views of the deputations are summarised as follows –

- (a) the Administration should step up publicity to raise the awareness of eligible CSSA recipients about the dental grant;
- (b) there were no clear guidelines for staff of the Social Security Field Units (SSFUs) to process applications from able-bodied CSSA recipients below the age of 60 for the discretionary payment of the dental grant;
- (c) the public dental services provided by the Department of Health (DH) should be strengthened with a view to increasing the number of General Public Sessions and consultation quota, and providing curative care covering scaling and filling;
- (d) the scope of dental grant should be expanded to cover teeth extraction; and
- (e) the School Dental Care Service should be extended to kindergarten and secondary students.

Discussion with the Administration

3. Members noted that CSSA recipients who were old, disabled or medically certified to be in ill health were given the dental grant to cover the actual expenses or the ceiling amount of the treatment items set by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in consultation with DH. Members also noted that CSSA recipients might seek dental services from over 30 clinics designated by SWD. After approaching the designated clinic for an estimate of cost, the CSSA recipients might apply for dental

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grant from SWD to cover the expenses.

Dental grant under the CSSA Scheme

4. Members strongly called upon the Administration to consider providing dental grant to all able-bodied CSSA recipients aged below 60 and made the following suggestions for the Administration's consideration -

- (a) frontline SSFU staff should be provided with clear guidelines for processing applications for the discretionary payment of the dental grant;
- (b) the Administration should streamline and expedite the processing of applications for dental grant by, say, allowing CSSA recipients to receive immediate treatment at the designated dental clinics without the need to obtain an estimate of cost in the first place;
- (c) instead of requiring the CSSA recipients to submit supporting documents in person in respect of their applications for dental grant, the Administration should arrange for the designated dental clinics to inform SWD direct the estimate of cost for dental treatment, and for SWD to inform the designated dental clinics direct whether the applications were approved; and
- (d) CSSA recipients on dental grant should be able to receive dental treatment and emergency dental services covering pain relief and teeth extraction at the same designated dental clinics.

5. Responding to members' views, the Administration made the following points -

- (a) for able-bodied CSSA recipients aged below 60 who were in genuine financial hardship and unable to afford the dental expenses, District Social Welfare Officers (DSWOs) concerned might consider, on an exceptional basis depending on the merits of individual cases, a discretionary payment of dental grant to cover the expenses. The discretionary power was delegated to DSWOs to ensure that discretion would be exercised fairly, sensibly and consistently;
- (b) the purpose of the dental grant was to cover the costs of treatment items including dentures, crowns, bridges, scaling, fillings and root canal treatment. CSSA recipients were entitled to free emergency dental services covering pain relief and extraction of teeth provided by DH at 11 government dental clinics and seven public hospitals;

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- (c) under the existing arrangement, CSSA recipients who were approved dental grant were free to turn to a registered private dentist for treatment. The amount of dental grant payable would be equal to the cost charged by the designated clinic/non-designated clinic or the ceiling amount set by SWD, whichever was the less; and
- (d) for urgent cases where the CSSA recipient was referred by SSFUs for an estimate of cost could receive immediate treatment at the designated dental clinics on the same day after making appointments.

Admin

- 6. Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services and Social Security) 2 agreed to consider members' suggestions in paragraph 4(c) above.

Public dental care services

7. Members generally expressed concern about the inadequacy of the dental care services provided by DH for the needy, including CSSA recipients.

8. The Administration advised that at present, 11 government dental clinics provided free-of-charge emergency and pain relief services to the public. These dental clinics had yet to reach their full capacity as the average utilisation rate was around 85%. Moreover, specialist and emergency dental services were provided by DH at seven public hospitals to hospital in-patients and referred patients, including patients with special oral healthcare needs. CSSA recipients were entitled to free specialist and emergency dental services at dental clinics of the seven public hospitals.

9. As the concern regarding public dental care services raised by members was beyond the purview of the subcommittee, members agreed that the issue be referred to the Panel on Welfare Services and the Panel on Health Services for follow-up, and that a joint meeting of the two Panels could be held as appropriate.

Admin

10. When concluding the discussion, the Chairman requested the Administration to provide the following information –

- (a) the average utilisation rate of each of the 11 government dental clinics providing emergency dental services to the public in the past three years;
- (b) the average waiting time for "referred patients", mentioned in paragraph 8 above, to receive specialist and emergency dental services;

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- (c) the respective average and the longest time taken for the eligible CSSA recipients to get an estimate of cost and receive dental treatment from the designated dental clinics;
- (d) the processing time taken by SSFU to approve applications for the dental grant; and
- (e) the number of cases where discretionary payment of dental grant was given to able-bodied CSSA recipients aged below 60 in the past five years, and the criteria for granting such exceptional approval by DSWOs.

II. Any other business

Proposed work plan of the Subcommittee

[LC Paper No. CB(2)1435/06-07(09)]

11. Members endorsed the proposed work plan of the Subcommittee and the time frame for completion of work as set out in the paper prepared by the LegCo Secretariat.

12. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 6:25 pm.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
17 May 2007

Annex

**Proceedings of the 18th meeting of the
Subcommittee on Review of the
Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme
on Monday, 2 April 2007, at 4:30 pm
in Conference Room A of the Legislative Council Building**

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
000000 – 000815	Chairman	Opening remarks	
000816 – 001249	The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong	Presentation of views by The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong [LC Paper No. CB(2)1435/06-07(04)]	
001250 – 001653	Hong Kong Association for the Survivors of Women Abuse (Kwan Fook)	Presentation of views by Kwan Fook [LC Paper No. CB(2)1435/06-07(05)]	
001654 – 002229	Hong Kong Right for Homeless Association	Presentation of views by Hong Kong Right for Homeless Association	
002230 – 002704	Society for Community Organization	Presentation of views by Society for Community Organization [LC Paper No. CB(2)1435/06-07(06)]	
002705 - 003050	The Hong Kong Council of Social Service	Presentation of views by The Hong Kong Council of Social Service [LC Paper No. CB(2)1463/06-07(01)]	
003051 – 003332	爭取基層生活保障聯席	Presentation of views by 爭取基層生活保障聯席 [LC Paper No. CB(2)1435/06-07(07)]	
003333 – 003753	Concerning CSSA Review Alliance	Presentation of views by Concerning CSSA Review Alliance [LC Paper No. CB(2)1435/06-07(08)]	
003754 – 004233	1 st Step Association	Presentation of views by 1 st Step Association [LC Paper No. CB(2)1504/06-07(01)]	
004234 – 004659	Disable and Carer Concern Group	Presentation of views by Disable and Carer Concern Group	
004700 - 004855	Concerning Group for Women Poverty	Presentation of views by Concerning Group for Women Poverty [LC Paper No. CB(2)1463/06-07(02)]	
004856 - 005102	Chairman Administration	Administration's response to views of the deputations, highlighting that - (a) the objective of the oral health and dental care policy was to promote oral hygiene and oral health awareness in the community through preventive and promotive oral health services; (b) Department of Health (DH) provided free emergency dental services covering pain relief and extraction of teeth to the public at 11 government dental clinics; (c) specialist and emergency dental services were provided to hospital in-patients and referred	

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
		<p>patients at seven public hospitals;</p> <p>(d) the scope of and application procedures for the special grant for dental treatment (dental grant) was for CSSA recipients who were old, disabled or in ill health; and</p> <p>(e) a discretionary payment of the dental grant might be given to the able-bodied CSSA recipients aged below 60 who were in genuine financial hardship and unable to afford the dental expenses to cover the dental expenses</p>	
005103 - 005426	Chairman Administration	<p>The Chairman's enquiry about the guidelines for granting the discretionary payment of the dental grant</p> <p>The Administration's elaboration on the operation of the discretionary mechanism under which the Director of Social Welfare might consider, on an exceptional basis depending on the merits of individual cases, a discretionary payment of special grant to able-bodied CSSA recipients aged below 60</p>	
005427 - 005756	Chairman Miss CHAN Yuen-han Administration Mr Frederick FUNG	<p>The Chairman's concern about the limited services provided by public dental clinics for the needy including CSSA recipients and the inconvenient arrangement for extracting only one tooth per consultation</p> <p>The Administration's remarks –</p> <p>(a) the average utilisation rate of 11 government dental clinics with public sessions was around 85%. Members of the public might seek emergency dental services from those clinics with a lower utilisation rate; and</p> <p>(b) the arrangement for one tooth extraction per consultation was to facilitate wound healing of the patients, especially the elderly</p> <p>The Chairman's request for the average utilisation rate of each of the 11 government dental clinics providing emergency dental services to the public in the past three years</p> <p>Views of Mr Frederick FUNG that follow-up dental appointments should be arranged for those patients who required extraction of several teeth at one go, instead of asking them to get a consultation quota on each and every occasion</p>	Admin to provide the information (para. 10(a) of the minutes refers)

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
005757 - 011347	<p>Mr LEE Cheuk-yan Administration Chairman Society for Community Organization Mr Frederick FUNG Concerning CSSA Review Alliance</p>	<p>Views of Mr LEE Cheuk-yan that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) in the case of applying a discretionary payment of the dental grant, it was unreasonable to require the means-tested CSSA recipients to undergo financial assessment again in determining whether they were in genuine financial hardship and unable to afford the dental expenses; (b) dental grant should be provided to all CSSA recipients; and (c) the Panel on Health Services (HS Panel) should be requested to follow up the public dental care services <p>The Administration's response –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) CSSA recipients might seek dental services from over 30 dental clinics designated by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). After obtaining an estimate of cost from the designated clinic, the CSSA recipient might apply for the dental grant from SWD to cover the expenses; (b) the public, including CSSA recipients, could make use of the free emergency dental services provided by DH; and (c) the power to make discretionary payments for dental grant was delegated to District Social Welfare Officers. Each case would be considered on its own merits to ascertain that discretion would be exercised fairly, sensibly and consistently <p>The Chairman's request for written responses on –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) average waiting time for receiving dental services at the dental unit of the seven public hospitals for referred patients; and (b) the criteria for approving applications for discretionary payment of dental grant 	Admin to provide the information (paras. 10(b) and (e) of the minutes refers)

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
011348 - 012022	Mr Frederick FUNG Administration Chairman	Mr Frederick FUNG's request for the following information - (a) the average and the longest time taken for the eligible CSSA recipients to get an estimate of cost and receive dental treatment from the designated dental clinics; and (b) the processing time taken by SSFU to approve applications for the dental grant The Administration's advice that it would normally take seven days to vet the application and disburse the dental grant if the applicant concerned had provided all the requisite information	Admin to provide the information (paras. 10(c) and (d) of the minutes refers)
012023 - 012749	Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung Administration Chairman	Views of Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung that – (a) additional resources should be allocated to strengthen the dental care services for all CSSA recipients; and (b) extension of the School Dental Care Service to all full-time students The Administration's elaboration of the School Dental Care Service which included an annual dental check-up, oral hygiene education, preventive therapy, fillings, prophylaxis and extractions, if necessary	
012750 - 012922	The Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong	Operation of the discretionary mechanism for approving dental grant and the effectiveness of the School Dental Care Service	
012923 - 013254	Society for Community Organization Chairman Administration Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung	Follow-up discussion on the utilisation rates of the 11 government dental clinics providing free-of-charge emergency dental services for the public and the guidelines for SSFU staff to process applications for discretionary payment of the dental grant Number of approved cases for discretionary payment of the dental grant to able-bodied CSSA recipients who aged below 60 in the past five years	Admin to provide information (para 10(e) of the minutes refers)
013255 - 013757	Miss CHAN Yuen-han Chairman	Views of Miss CHAN Yuen-han that the Administration should restore the pre-1999 arrangement of providing dental grant to able-bodied CSSA recipients Views of Miss CHAN Yuen-han and the Chairman that a joint meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services and HS Panel could be held to discuss the public dental care services for the needy including CSSA recipients	

Time marker	Speaker(s)	Subject(s)	Action required
013758 - 014824	Chairman Administration Miss CHAN Yuen-han Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung	<p>The Chairman and Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung's suggestion to streamline and expedite the application procedures for dental grant, e.g. the applicants could receive immediate treatment at the designated dental clinics upon the production of referrals from SSFU, without the need to obtain an estimate of cost in the first place, the designated dental clinics should provide SWD with the estimate of cost for settlement of payment directly</p> <p>The Administration's explanation that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the CSSA recipients who were approved dental grant were free to turn to a registered dentist of a non-designated clinic for the treatment; and (b) arrangement had already been made for SWD to settle the expenses for dental treatment directly with the designated dental clinics <p>The Chairman's suggestion that administrative arrangement should be made to facilitate CSSA recipients on dental grant to receive dental treatment and emergency dental services covering pain relief and teeth extraction at the same dental clinic</p>	
014825 - 015055	Chairman	The Chairman suggested and members agreed that the HS Panel and WS Panel be requested to hold a joint meeting to follow up the discussion on the public dental care services to the needy	

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17 May 2007