

**For discussion  
on 22 January 2013**

## **Legislative Council Subcommittee on Poverty**

### **Elderly in Poverty**

#### **Introduction**

This paper summarises the Administration's existing measures in preventing and tackling the problem of elderly in poverty. Apart from providing financial assistance to the elderly in need, a wide range of services including home care, medical and housing are also available. The Community Care Fund (CCF) has also rolled out a number of programmes for the elderly people.

#### **Financial Assistance for the Elderly**

2. Financial support for elderly persons is mainly provided through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), Old Age Allowance (OAA), Disability Allowance (DA) and Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) to be launched in April 2013. Our social security system is designed to channel welfare resources to those most in need, including the elderly. Nearly 80% of the elderly aged 65 or above are at present receiving assistance or allowance of different types under the social security system. The percentage of elderly people aged 70 or above receiving assistance or allowance reaches 87%.

#### *The CSSA Scheme*

3. The CSSA Scheme helps families in financial hardship meet basic needs, and provide a safety net for the elderly who cannot support themselves financially. Compared with able-bodied adults, elderly people enjoy more relaxed means test requirements, and the value of an owner-occupied residential property is totally disregarded for cases where there is an elderly member. In addition, the CSSA Scheme also takes care

of the special needs of the elderly through the provision of higher standard rates, special grants and supplements. The existing standard rates range from \$2,660 to \$4,810 per month, depending on the health condition of the elderly recipient; and the average monthly CSSA payment for singleton elderly is \$4,701 where special grants and supplements are taken into account.

4. Elderly CSSA recipients are entitled to special grants to meet their special needs, such as that for glasses, dental treatment, removal expenses, burial grants, fares to and from hospital/clinic, costs of medically recommended diets and costs of medical and rehabilitation appliances. Families with elderly recipients are entitled to receive an annual long-term supplement for the replacement of household and durable goods if they have received assistance continuously for 12 months or more. Meanwhile, elderly CSSA recipients in receipt of CSSA for at least one year may, under the Portable CSSA Scheme, continue to receive the monthly standard rates and annual long-term supplement if they choose to retire in Guangdong or Fujian Province.

#### *Social Security Allowance Scheme*

5. Elderly persons with severe disabilities aged 65 or above may apply for DA or OAA under the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme to meet their special needs arising from severe disability or old age respectively; if they are not already covered by CSSA. DA, as well as Higher OAA for elderly persons aged 70 or above, are not subject to means test.

6. Furthermore, the Administration will introduce a new “Guangdong Scheme” under the SSA Scheme to provide OAA for eligible Hong Kong elderly people who choose to reside in Guangdong. They would be able to receive a full-year allowance in Guangdong without coming back to Hong Kong. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) is now taking forward at full steam preparatory work for the “Guangdong Scheme”, and aims to implement the Scheme in the second half of 2013.

### *The Old Age Living Allowance*

7. In addition, the Administration will introduce, in April 2013, the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA), pitched at \$2,200 per month, to supplement the living expenses of the elderly aged 65 or above and in need of financial support. It is estimated that this new allowance will benefit over 400 000 people, and can strengthen the social security system as one of the pillars of the existing retirement protection system to better tailor to our community's changing needs.

### **Care and Support Services for the Elderly**

8. The Administration has also been strengthening our care and support services for the elderly. While some of our initiatives benefit not only those elderly in financial need, through promoting active and healthy ageing we help enhance the quality of life of the elderly and prevent them from falling into poverty. We promote "ageing in place" in elderly services but also strive to increase the supply of subsidised residential care places at the same time. Such subsidised services have helped ease the financial burden of many poor families with elderly people. Efforts have also been made to reach out and identify singleton and "hidden" elderly (who are more prone to poverty) to address their needs.

### *Facilitation for active and healthy ageing in the community*

9. To promote lifelong learning among the elderly, the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and the Elderly Commission (EC) have been jointly implementing the Elder Academy (EA) Scheme since 2007. In the 2012-13 school year, there are altogether 110 EAs set up in primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions throughout the territory. The Administration also set up the Elder Academy Development Foundation in late 2009 to support the sustainable development of the Scheme.

10. Apart from the EA Scheme, LWB has been collaborating with the EC to promote active ageing at the community level. Since its inception in 2008, the Neighbourhood Active Ageing Project (NAAP) has been

encouraging people of different ages to serve as volunteers to care for the elderly. In addition to reaching out to “hidden” elderly and promoting the message of care and love for the elderly, the NAAP provides an opportunity for the elderly to act as volunteers and use their talents to serve the community. A new phase of the NAAP was launched in April 2012, and 69 district projects are being carried out in different parts of the territory. The new phase aims at fostering harmonious family relations and enhancing neighbourhood support networks, which ties in with the "Love And Respect Thy Elders" Campaign of the Family Council.

11. On the other hand, SWD has secured \$900 million in 2012-13 from the Lotteries Fund for implementing the Improvement Programme of Elderly Centres. The Programme aims to improve the physical settings and facilities of 237 elderly centres over the territory with a view to encouraging more active participation of the elderly in social activities and volunteer services.

12. In 2010, “eElderly”, an internet portal, was set up specially for the elderly. With an elderly-friendly design, the portal provides one-stop information on elderly services and products, encourages the elderly to keep pace with the times and enriches their social life. Meanwhile, SWD has continued to fund a variety of activities and support carers of the elderly under the Opportunities for the Elderly Project. In 2012-13, 239 programmes were subsidised by government grants amounting to around \$3 million.

#### *Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities*

13. We launched the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities on the MTR and four franchised bus companies in end-June and early-August 2012 respectively. We are targeting to launch the Scheme on New Lantao Bus and ferries around March this year. By enabling elderly people aged 65 or above to travel on these transport modes any time at a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip, the Scheme encourages the elderly to participate more in community activities, and hence helps build a caring and inclusive society.

### *The Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service (CCS) Voucher for the Elderly*

14. “Ageing in place” is the wish of most elderly people. To this end, the Administration will launch a four-year Pilot Scheme on CCS Voucher for the Elderly starting from September 2013. The Pilot Scheme will, through a voucher, provide subsidy directly to eligible elderly for them to choose the community care service they need. The Administration will monitor the implementation of the Pilot Scheme in order to test the new funding mode of “money-follows-the-user” before considering regularising the Scheme or applying the funding model to other types of services.

### *Residential Care Services for the Elderly*

15. While most of the elderly prefer ageing in the community, some frail ones will need institutional care. To this end, SWD has been making strenuous effort to increase the supply of subsidised residential care places. At present, the Administration provides about 26 000 subsidised places in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), serving about 43% of all elderly staying in RCHEs throughout the territory. From now to 2014-15, the SWD will provide over 1 700 new subsidised places. We have also earmarked sites in 11 development projects for constructing new contract RCHEs.

### *Reaching out/identifying singleton and “hidden” elderly*

16. Since 2008, the Administration has been providing additional recurrent resources to all District Elderly Community Centres (DECC) and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres to enhance their outreaching work to address the needs of singleton and “hidden” elders. The Administration has also strengthened the manpower of 41 DECCs to enhance the counselling and referral work, as well as handle the long-term care applications. So far, 18 000 hidden and needy elderly persons have been identified since the service enhancement.

## **Medical Services for the Elderly**

17. As for medical services, a number of financial assistance schemes are available for the elderly people. Comprehensive public healthcare services are also provided for elderly patients.

### *Medical fee waiver mechanism for elderly*

18. It has been our public healthcare policy to provide comprehensive and lifelong holistic health care services to each citizen, and to ensure that no one is prevented, through lack of means, from obtaining adequate medical treatment. At present, CSSA recipients will be exempted from payment of their public health care expenses.

19. Non-CSSA elderly patients who could not afford medical expense at the public sector can apply for a medical fee waiver at the Medical Social Services Units of public hospitals and clinics or the Integrated Family Services Centres & the Family and Child Protective Services Units of SWD. The Medical Social Workers (MSWs) or Social Workers (SWs) would assess each application carefully, with due consideration given to the financial, social and medical condition of the applicants on a household basis to ensure that elderly patients who have genuine financial problems and are frequent users of public medical services could obtain a medical fee waiver if needed.

### *Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme*

20. The Elderly Health Care Voucher Pilot Scheme has been implemented since 1 January 2009 to subsidise eligible elderly aged 70 or above in using primary care services in the private sector, including preventive care services. At present, about 460 000 elderly persons have made use of the vouchers, with a cumulative expenditure exceeding \$327 million. Starting from 1 January 2013, the annual voucher amount for each eligible elderly person has been doubled from \$500 to \$1,000. The Administration will also convert the voucher scheme from a pilot project into a recurrent support programme for the elderly in 2014.

*Pilot Project on Outreach Primary Dental Care Services for the Elderly in Residential Care Homes and Day Care Centres*

21. In April 2011, the Administration launched a three-year Pilot Project on Outreach Primary Dental Care Services for the Elderly in RCHEs and Day Care Centres for the Elderly (DEs) (the Pilot Project) in collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide outreach dental care services. It is estimated that the Pilot Project will provide for about 100 000 attendances.

22. Under the Pilot Project, the following primary dental care and oral health care services are provided free to RCHEs and DEs through 13 NGOs totaling 24 outreach dental teams -

- (a) primary dental care services, including dental check-up, scaling and polishing and any other necessary pain relief and emergency dental treatments to the elderly concerned;
- (b) oral care training to caregivers of RCHEs and DEs; and
- (c) oral health education activities to the concerned elderly people, their family members and caregivers in RCHEs and DEs.

As at end-November 2012, the Pilot Project had benefitted over 49 000 attendances.

*Elderly Health Assessment Pilot Programme*

23. The Administration, in collaboration with NGOs, will launch an Elderly Health Assessment Pilot Programme in 2013 to subsidise about 10 000 elderly persons to receive basic health check. The NGOs will provide health counseling and follow-up consultations depending on individual elderly persons' health and risk factors assessment, thereby improving the overall health of the elderly. A sum of \$12 million has been earmarked for the pilot programme. The Administration is discussing with the potential NGOs on programme details and plan to launch the programme in mid-2013.

### *Vaccination Subsidy Scheme*

24. The 2012/13 Vaccination Subsidy Schemes have been launched, to provide \$130 in subsidy for each dose of influenza vaccine to the elderly aged 65 years above, as well as children aged between 6 months and less than 6 years old. In addition, there will be a subsidy of \$190 for eligible elderly people to receive pneumococcal vaccine, if they have not been vaccinated before. More than 1 500 private doctors are participating in the vaccination subsidy schemes this year, covering all 18 districts of Hong Kong and providing ample choice for the public.

25. The Government Vaccination Programme continues in 2012/13. CSSA recipients, individuals with chronic medical problems or residents of residential care homes will continue to be eligible for free vaccination.

### *Hospital Authority's services for the elderly*

26. To meet the challenges of managing the growing demand for elderly healthcare service; ensuring service quality and safety; and maintaining an adequate workforce which is skilled in elderly care, the Hospital Authority (HA) has formulated a Strategic Service Framework for Elderly Patients to guide the development and provision of elderly services in 2012-17.

27. A range of comprehensive public healthcare services has been provided by HA for elderly patients. Apart from hospital-based care, other services provided by HA include consultation and treatment through its specialist out-patient clinics and general out-patient clinics, outreach services for patients in the community, as well as palliative care services to terminally ill patients and their families. In response to the international trend on the importance of the development of ambulatory and community healthcare services, HA has strengthened its community-based outreach services. Through the Community Nursing Services, Community Geriatric Assessment Service, Community Psychiatric and Psycho-geriatric Services and Community Allied Health Services, HA provides support for discharged patients (notably elderly patients) to help them recover in the community. In 2013, HA will enhance the medical services for the elderly, particularly on the treatment of the degenerative diseases.



## **Housing Support for the Elderly**

28. To promote “ageing in place”, various housing-related initiatives have been put in place by the Housing Authority for the elderly living in public rental housing (PRH).

### *Harmonious Families Schemes*

29. The Administration attaches great importance to forging closer and harmonious relationship amongst family members, so as to help establish a family-based support network, which is especially beneficial for the elderly. As such, a range of comprehensive harmonious families schemes are offered by the Housing Authority to encourage the younger generation and their elderly parents to live together for mutual support. These include the Harmonious Families Priority Scheme, the Harmonious Families Addition Scheme, the Harmonious Families Transfer Scheme, as well as the Harmonious Families Amalgamation Scheme. These harmonious families schemes have been well received by the PRH elderly tenants since their implementation. As at November 2012, some 24 330 households have benefited from these schemes.

### *Rent Assistance Scheme for PRH Elderly Families*

30. The Rent Assistance Scheme (RAS) was introduced in 1992 to provide temporary relief in the form of rent reduction for tenants who are facing temporary financial hardship. In response to the needs of tenants under current socio-economic condition, the Housing Authority has, on several occasions, relaxed the eligibility criteria for applying for RAS, such that more families in need, in particular elderly households, can benefit under the RAS. As at end-November 2012, a total of 12 200 PRH households were receiving rent assistance provided by the Housing Authority. Of these, 6 390 (53%) were elderly households, who were granted 50% rent reduction. The Housing Authority will continue to publicise the RAS and will closely monitor the adequacy of the assistance provided to elderly households in PRH.

### *Assurance of Future Accommodation of the Elderly Tenants*

31. For elderly tenants who need to vacate their PRH flats to move into a RCHE, for hospitalisation for over three months, or joining the Portable CSSA Scheme, a letter of assurance will be issued to guarantee that they may in future return to a PRH flat. For elderly tenants who are living with their family member(s) and are willing to delete their names from tenancies, they will be issued letters of reinstatement to guarantee their future return to a PRH flat if needed.

### *Other Services and Arrangements*

32. To cater for the needs of non-CSSA elderly persons who require an Emergency Alarm System (EAS), an EAS Grant for a one-off installation cost up to a maximum of \$2,500 is offered by the Housing Authority on a reimbursement basis. In addition, elderly households in need may also enjoy free services to replace the conventional pole-socket drying rack with a new one with cord pulleys, as well as to replace an existing bath tub to shower area with grab rail.

33. The Housing Authority encourages the Estate Management Advisory Committees (EMACs) to organise various partnering functions with NGOs for elderly tenants via the EMAC Funds. These functions serve to promote elderly services carried out by the NGOs, or to provide outreach services for the elderly tenants.

34. The range of services available for elderly tenants are intended to provide support to allow them to age in place, encourage families to live together for mutual support and provide a range of adaptations in their flats to facilitate their living situation. The Housing Authority will continue providing support to elderly tenants.

### **Assistance from the CCF**

35. Since its establishment in 2011, the CCF has launched various programmes to provide assistance to needy elders.

*Subsidy for Elders for Household Cleaning and Escorting Services for Medical Consultations*

36. The programme of Subsidy for Elders for Household Cleaning and Escorting Services for Medical Consultations was rolled out in October 2011. It aims at providing subsidies to elderly persons aged 65 or above from low-income families who are living in the community and on the waiting list of Integrated Home Care Services (Ordinary Cases) for receiving household cleaning service and escorting service for medical consultations. Each eligible applicant can receive the services through the subsidies for up to 12 months. As at the end of 2012, 1 075 elderly persons have benefited from the programme with about \$1.8 million subsidy released. The programme has recently been extended to enable eligible elderly people to receive the services up to 31 March 2014 the longest. The budget for the programme is around \$15 million and application will close in end March 2013.

*Subsidy for Elderly Tenants in Private Housing*

37. The programme of Subsidy for Elderly Tenants in Private Housing was rolled out in July 2012. It provides subsidies to low-income elderly tenants in private housing to relieve their pressure in view of the rising inflation and cyclical rental increases. The amount of subsidy is \$4,000 each for one-person elderly household, \$8,000 each for two-person elderly households and a uniform \$12,000 each for three-or-more-person elderly households. The CCF has set aside around \$50 million for the programme, with about \$9.2 million disbursed to around 1 850 households (2 290 elders) as at the end of 2012. Application for the programme will close in end January 2013.

*Elderly Dental Assistance Programme*

38. The Elderly Dental Assistance Programme was rolled out in September 2012 with the assistance of the Hong Kong Dental Association, to subsidise needy elderly persons for dentures and other necessary dental services. The CCF has set aside \$100 million for the programme which is expected to benefit about 10 300 elders. Needy elderly aged 60 or above

who are receiving Integrated Home Care Services or Enhanced Home and Community Care Services as subvented by SWD but are not CSSA recipients are referred to participating dentists / dental clinics for the dental service. As at the end of 2012, 295 dentists / dental clinics have participated in the programme and 275 eligible elderly persons have been referred to receive the service.

## **Others**

39. Since 2006, the Home Affairs Department has been implementing the Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership (ESR) Programme to provide seed grant to eligible non-profit making organisations for setting up social enterprises (SEs). At present, 17 ESR SEs are providing services to the elderly, such as health care services, escort services to clinics, home care services, and the sale of rehabilitation products for the elderly.

40. The Chief Executive (CE) in his Policy Address delivered on 16 January 2013 has reaffirmed his pledge to care for the elderly, through a wide range of new and flexible modes of subvention and service delivery (please refer to paragraphs 103 to 107 of the Policy Address). The elderly are also one of the main target groups of the Commission on Poverty, which was appointed by CE in December 2012.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau**

**Food and Health Bureau**

**Home Affairs Bureau**

**Transport and Housing Bureau**

**Home Affairs Department**

**Social Welfare Department**

**January 2013**