

立法會
Legislative Council

LC Paper No. CB(2)1178/12-13(02)

Ref : CB2/PS/1/12

Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Health Services

Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for
the meeting on 28 May 2013**

Support and allowance for carers

Purpose

This paper gives an account of past discussions at meetings of the Council and relevant committees on the provision of support and allowance for carers of elders and persons with disabilities ("PWDs").

Background

2. According to the Administration, the Government has been attaching great importance to the contributions and needs of family carers. This has been one of the key elements of the strategic development of the overall social welfare policy, including policy on elderly services and rehabilitation services. Specifically, support measures for family carers echo with the underlying principle of the policy on "ageing in the community", which can enhance elders' quality of life and elders with long-term care needs do not necessarily have to be cared for in residential care homes. Likewise, the Administration has enhanced its support for carers of PWDs with a view to facilitating full integration of PWDs into the community.

3. Support offered to carers includes providing them information, training and counselling services, helping them with the formation of mutual-assistance groups, setting up resource corners, and giving demonstration and loan of rehabilitation equipment through the elderly and rehabilitation centres.

Deliberations by Members

District-based trial scheme on carer training

4. Members' discussion on support for carers cover two main areas, namely "training and support" and "subsidies in a form of cash allowance". In receiving a briefing on the welfare initiatives in the Chief Executive's Policy Address 2007-2008 at the meeting of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") on 15 October 2007, members were advised that to equip individuals with basic elderly care skills and develop "elderly sitter" services to provide relief to carers, the Administration would launch a district-based trial scheme providing funding for District Elderly Community Centres to run trial schemes on carer training courses and to recruit those who had completed the courses to serve as "elderly sitters".

5. At the Panel meeting on 9 February 2009, members were briefed on the Administration's plan to extend the District-based Trial Scheme on Carer Training to the whole territory. Members noted that the trial scheme was rolled out in 2007 to encourage synergy among elderly centres and associations in the district with a view to providing an array of support services to carers including counselling, skill training and respite residential and day care services, thereby rendering relief to carers. Whilst supporting the scheme in principle, some members pointed out that carer-helpers were playing an important role in supporting elders to age in the community owing to insufficient residential care places for the elderly. They proposed to provide subsidies to care-helpers for those elders who were on the waiting list for admission to subsidized residential care homes for the elderly. Other members held the view that the provision of training to the carers alone could not solve the problems arising from insufficient subsidized residential care places.

6. The Administration advised that the Elderly Commission ("EC") was studying issues relating to the long-term planning for the provision of residential care services ("RCS") for the elderly. The Administration would work with EC to explore how to promote further the development of quality RCS in meeting the long-term care needs of the elderly. At the Panel meeting on 11 January 2010, EC presented its report on RCS for the elderly which pointed out, among others, that as elders' institutionalization rate (i.e. percentage of elders staying in residential care homes) in Hong Kong was high when compared with that of other countries, there was room for enhancing and promoting the utilization of community care services ("CCS").

It was also pointed out that support services for carers should be strengthened. The Administration would commission EC to undertake another study on the provision of CCS with a view to facilitating elders to age in place.

Provision of carers' allowance

7. In discussing the provision of CCS at meetings of the Panel, members had time and again called on the Administration to enhance its support for carers, most notably through the introduction of an allowance for carers to alleviate their stress and financial burden. Their proposal was put forward on the ground that family carers had devoted their time and efforts to look after family members, and they helped to relieve the pressing demand for the subvented residential care homes and day care centres, thereby helping the Administration to save budget in its provision of elderly care services. As such, the Administration should compensate the financial loss of family members in taking care of elders at home. During the Panel discussion on the Pilot Scheme on CCS Voucher for the Elderly, some members urged the Government to respond to the strong call from the community for the introduction of an allowance for carers.

8. The Administration responded that taking care of family was the responsibility of family members. Professional medical services rendered by care professionals, instead of cash, could better suit the needs of impaired elders who required various kinds of care services. EC also advised that it recognized the pressure of family carers in taking care of elders. While the proposed voucher scheme would not provide payment to family carers, a CCS voucher could help elderly users and family carers to choose CCS that most suited their needs, and thereby relieved the carers' pressure in taking care of elders at home. In addition, from overseas experience, cash allowance to carers would inevitably give rise to the concern about abuse of public money, and therefore prudent consideration would be needed on the various issues pertinent to such a suggestion.

Motion on "Providing support for family carers"

9. At its meeting on 18 November 2009, the Council passed a motion on "Providing support for family carers" urging the Administration to, among others, set up a "subsidy system for carers of PWDs" such as providing additional tax allowances, to alleviate their financial burden. The Administration advised that for family carers with financial difficulties, they and their families could meet their basic needs with the financial assistance under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") Scheme.

At present, the CSSA Scheme provided higher standard rates for PWDs and elderly recipients together with a range of supplements and special grants. PWDs who were medically certified to be in need of constant attendance might receive a Care and Attention Allowance to cover the costs of care and attention services at home (including the cost of hiring a carer) on social workers' recommendation. The Administration reiterated that the various types of support services for family carers aimed at helping them discharge their family responsibilities and alleviating their stress, rather than substituting family functions; and that the existing support services could better address the needs of carers, when compared to the provision of subsidies.

10. Under the carried motion, the Administration was urged to enhance relief support services for carers such as increasing the provision of day care bed service, respite care bed service, strengthening support to self-help organizations, training to carers, and enhance the selection mechanism of the Drug Formulary. The Administration advised that it would continue to review from policy and service perspectives the effectiveness and development direction of various welfare services in respect of providing support for service users and their carers, and would continue to identify suitable sites for the construction of new subsidized residential care homes throughout the territory. As regards the categories of drugs in the Drug Formulary, the Administration advised that as at October 2009, a total of 40 new drugs had been introduced into the general drug and special drug categories of the Formulary since its implementation in July 2005. To further enhance its partnership with patient groups, the Hospital Authority established a formal consultation mechanism with patient groups on the Formulary in 2009.

11. In discussing the provision of CCS to elders and PWDs at meetings of the Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy in March and April 2013, the Administration advised that support for elders and PWDs had been strengthened. For example, under the District-based Scheme on Carer Training, each of the 119 participating elderly centres was provided with a one-off seed money of \$50,000 to partner with community organizations in their districts for organizing carer training programmes. Respite services had been strengthened and the Administration would continue to build more residential care homes to provide RCS to elders and PWDs in need. Sixteen District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities had been set up to provide one-stop service for strengthening the support for PWDs residing in the community and their family members. In addition, a three-year pilot scheme had been implemented since March 2011 to provide home-based care services for around 540 persons with severe disabilities

living in Kwun Tung and Tuen Mun and on the waiting lists for subvented residential care services. The pilot scheme would be run on a regular basis from March 2014 whereby the services would be extended to persons with severe disabilities in all the districts, irrespective of whether they were on the waiting list for residential care services or not.

Latest development

12. Notwithstanding the various initiatives and measures taken by the Government, Members have maintained that the Administration should introduce an allowance for carers to alleviate carers' stress and financial burden. In reporting the work of the Commission on Poverty ("CoP") to the House Committee at its special meeting on 22 March 2013, the Chief Secretary for Administration advised that the Community Care Fund ("CCF") Task Force under CoP might consider exploring to launch a pilot scheme of providing an allowance, with funding from CCF, for carers of the elderly. The pilot scheme would tie in with the launch of the CCS Voucher Scheme to facilitate elders to age in the community.

Relevant papers

13. A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in the **Appendix**.

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
24 May 2013

Appendix

Relevant papers on support and allowance for carers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	15 October 2007 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	23 October 2008 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	9 February 2009 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Legislative Council	18 November 2009	Official Record of Proceedings Pages 168 – 239 Progress Report
Panel on Welfare Services	11 January 2010 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	11 July 2011 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	21 October 2011 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	13 February 2012 (Item V)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	27 April 2012 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
House Committee	22 March 2013 (Item I)	Agenda Verbatim record of the proceedings
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	26 March 2013 (Item I)	Agenda

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	23 April 2013 (Item I)	Agenda

Council Business Division 2
Legislative Council Secretariat
24 May 2013