

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

**PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES
PANEL ON HEALTH SERVICES
JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE ON LONG-TERM CARE POLICY**

**Provision of Financial Assistance
on Medications and Medical / Rehabilitation Appliances
for Persons with Disabilities and Chronic Patients**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the Administration's financial assistance on medications and medical / rehabilitation appliances for persons with disabilities and chronic patients.

Various Types of Financial Assistance

Waiver of Medical Fee

2. It is the Administration's healthcare policy that no one is prevented from obtaining adequate medical treatment through lack of means. Services at public hospitals and clinics are heavily subsidised by the Government, with the subsidy rate as high as 96.8%. Recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) are exempted from payment of public health care expenses. Non-CSSA recipients who cannot afford public sector medical expenses may apply for a medical fee waiver at the Medical Social Services Units of public hospitals and clinics or Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) or Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) of the Social Welfare Department (SWD). Medical social workers or social workers of the IFSCs / FCPSUs of SWD will assess the applications with due consideration given to the applicants' financial, social and medical conditions on a household basis.

Samaritan Fund

3. The Samaritan Fund administered by the Hospital Authority (HA) aims to provide financial assistance for HA patients who meet the specified clinical criteria and passed the means test to meet expenses on self-financed drugs or privately purchased medical items needed in the course of medical treatment but are not covered by the standard fees and charges in public hospitals and clinics. As at April 2013, the Samaritan Fund covers 20 self-financed drugs, involving the specialties of oncology, haematology, gastroenterology, rheumatology, neuroscience, endocrinology, and dermatology, etc.

4. Apart from subsidising the expenses on self-financed drugs, the Samaritan Fund also covers many medical items needed by persons with disabilities and the chronically ill in the course of medical treatment in public hospitals or clinics, including breathing apparatus, sputum suction units, oxygen respirators, electric wheelchairs, shower chairs, myoelectric and custom-made prosthesis, appliances for prosthetic and orthotic services and physiotherapy and occupational therapy services, etc. The Samaritan Fund will provide subsidies to patients with financial difficulties if their need for the medical items is supported by a medical doctor or an allied health professional in accordance with HA's prevailing clinical guidelines.

The CSSA Scheme

5. The CSSA Scheme provides financial assistance for means-tested families in need to meet their basic needs. The Scheme also takes care of the special needs of persons with disabilities and chronic patients through the provision of higher standard rates, special grants and supplements to them. Disabled and chronically ill CSSA recipients are entitled to special grants to cover expenditure on glasses, dental treatment and removal expenses, fares to and from hospitals / clinics, costs of medically recommended diets and costs of rehabilitation and medical appliances (such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, stoma bags, diapers, etc.). Besides, supplements for disabled and chronically ill CSSA recipients may include long-term supplement and community living supplement, etc.

Disability Allowances

6. The Disability Allowance (DA) under the Social Security Allowance Scheme, which is non-means-tested, helps persons with severe disabilities to meet their special needs. Recipients of Normal DA receive a monthly allowance of \$1,510. Persons meeting the eligibility criteria for Normal DA and assessed by doctors to be in need of constant attendance from others in their daily life and not receiving care in government or residential institutions subsidised by the Government (including subsidised places in subvented / contract homes and residential care homes under various bought place schemes), or all public hospitals and institutions under HA, or boarding in special schools under the Education Bureau can receive Higher DA at a rate of \$3,020 a month.

Community Care Fund

7. The Community Care Fund (CCF) Medical Assistance Programmes administered by HA aims to offer assistance to people facing economic difficulties. The First Phase Programme, implemented on 1 August 2011, provides financial assistance to HA patients to purchase specified self-financed (SFI) cancer drugs which have not yet been brought into the Samaritan Fund safety net but have been rapidly accumulating medical scientific evidence and with relatively higher efficacy. At present, nine specified SFI cancer drugs are covered under the Programme. The Second Phase Programme, implemented on 16 January 2012, complements the Samaritan Fund by reducing the maximum patient contribution ratio from 30% to 20% on drug costs of their household annual disposable financial resources, hence providing additional subsidy to patients for purchasing designated SFI drugs. On 1 September 2012, the Government approved the regularisation of the Second Phase Programme under the Samaritan Fund.

8. To enhance the support for persons with disabilities, CCF has also launched a number of assistance programmes, providing eligible persons with severe disabilities with a special care subsidy of a maximum amount of \$2,000 each month. A maximum monthly subsidy of \$2,500 is provided for persons with severe physical disabilities for renting respiratory support medical equipment, and a maximum monthly subsidy of \$2,000 for purchasing related medical consumables.

9. We will allocate an annual recurrent provision of around \$100 million for introducing an integrated support service programme for persons with severe physical disabilities in 2014-15. Under the programme, not only the CCF assistance programmes for persons with severe physical disabilities for the renting of respiratory support medical equipment and purchase of related medical consumables as mentioned in paragraph 8 above will be regularised, a case manager will also be in place to coordinate and provide one-stop integrated support service according to their needs.

Charitable Funds

10. For persons with disabilities and chronic patients with financial difficulties who are non-CSSA recipients, they may apply for immediate and short-term financial assistance from charitable funds to purchase necessary rehabilitative and medical appliances. Examples of such charitable funds are Yan Chai Tetraplegic Fund administered by Yan Chai Hospital Board; and Li Po Chun Charitable Trust Fund, Tang Shiu Kin and Ho Tim Charitable Fund, Brewin Trust Fund and Kwan Fong Trust Fund for the Needy administered by SWD. Non-CSSA persons with disabilities and chronic patients in financial difficulties may approach medical social workers, social workers of the IFSCs or non-governmental organisations to apply for the charitable funds. Social workers will assess the applicants' conditions including their financial resources in accordance with the relevant application criteria and categories of assistance and provide them with the appropriate assistance.

Advice Sought

11. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Food and Health Bureau
Social Welfare Department
Hospital Authority
March 2014