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**Panel on Welfare Services**

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council  
Secretariat for the meeting on 10 February 2014**

**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.

**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 persons with disabilities with a view to facilitating full integration of persons with disabilities 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.

### Provision of carer 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 persons with disabilities" 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 persons with disabilities and elderly recipients together with a range of supplements and special grants. Persons with disabilities 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.

#### Pilot Scheme of Carer Allowance for the Elderly

11. 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. At its meeting on 28 May 2013, the Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy was briefed on the Administration's initial thinking on introducing the pilot scheme which was aimed at helping families in need to assist their elderly members to age at home. Members and deputations expressed the views that the carer allowance should be a long-term welfare measure instead of a time-limited assistance programme of CCF. The granting of carer allowance should be non-means-tested and should not preempt the continuous provision of subsidized CCS and RCS for the elderly. In addition to carers of elderly persons, the scope of carer allowance should be broadened to cover full-time carers of persons with disabilities, the chronically ill and children.

12. The Administration responded that it was open to ideas and views on the scale and arrangement of the scheme, with a view to developing a practicable pilot scheme. It would consider extending the scope of the scheme having regard to the experience of the pilot scheme on elderly care allowance.

### **Latest development**

13. The Administration will consult the Panel at its meeting on 10 February 2014 regarding the proposed arrangements for a pilot scheme on the provision of living allowance to carers of the elderly from low income families under CCF.

### **Relevant papers**

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

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
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## Relevant papers on support and allowance for carers

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	15 October 2007 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	23 October 2008 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	9 February 2009 (Item V)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Legislative Council	18 November 2009	<a href="#">Official Record of Proceedings</a> <a href="#">Pages 168 – 239</a>  <a href="#">Progress Report</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	11 January 2010 (Item IV)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	11 July 2011 (Item III)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	21 October 2011 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	13 February 2012 (Item V)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Welfare Services	27 April 2012 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
House Committee	22 March 2013 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Verbatim record of the proceedings</a>
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	28 May 2013 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>