

立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)1720/17-18(06)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

Panel on Welfare Services

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 9 July 2018**

Support for carers of elderly persons and of persons with disabilities

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 elderly persons and of 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.

4. According to the Administration, the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low Income Families ("the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons") was introduced in June 2014 with funding from the Community Care Fund ("CCF") to provide carers of elderly persons from low-income families with a living allowance to help supplement their living expenses, so that elderly persons in need of long term care services can, with the assistance of their carers, receive proper care and continue to live in a familiar community. Phase II of the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons was rolled out in October 2016 and would be implemented for two years. Besides, the Administration launched in October 2016 a two-year Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities ("the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Persons with Disabilities") through CCF to support needy carers of persons with disabilities from low-income families.

Deliberations by Members

Enhancing support services for carers of elderly persons and of persons with disabilities

5. Some Members considered that the support services provided for carers of elderly persons were inadequate. Taking the view that case managers could continuously coordinate and make referrals on the care services needed by elderly persons and the support needed by their carers, these Members enquired whether the Administration had planned to provide across-the-board care services for the elderly and support for their carers through the case management approach.

6. According to the Administration, it provided a range of centre-based and home-based community care services at community level through 74 day care centres/units for the elderly ("DEs/DCUs"), 34 enhanced home and community care services teams and 60 integrated home care services teams to support elderly persons living in the community and their families. In addition, a total of 210 subvented elderly centres (i.e. district elderly community centres and neighbourhood elderly centres) in 18 districts over the territory provided various support services for elderly persons and carers at district level, such as counselling, referral, assistance in handling long-term care service applications, emotional support, health education, arrangement for social and recreational activities, meal services, carer training, etc. Starting from 2014-2015, the Administration had allocated an additional recurrent funding of about \$160 million annually for the elderly centres to strengthen the community support and service for elderly persons and their carers. In addition, the Administration launched the

District-based Scheme on Carer Training in October 2007 to teach participants basic knowledge of elderly care and the scheme had been regularized since 2014-2015 to further enhance the training for carers.

7. The Administration further advised that under the Second Phase of the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly ("the Pilot Scheme on CCSV") launched in October 2016, in addition to the case management being continuously conducted by recognized service providers, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") had set up a centralized team to serve as the first point of contact for elderly persons interested in using the vouchers and their carers. The centralized team would also provide dedicated support and assistance in collaboration with responsible workers. Besides, the Administration rolled out the Pilot Scheme on Home Care and Support for Elderly Persons with Mild Impairment in December 2017. The pilot scheme incorporated the case management approach and service providers discussed with elderly persons and their carers and formulated individualized care plans for elderly persons.

8. In view of the incidents in which persons with intellectual disabilities were left unattended as a result of sudden deaths of their aged carers at home, some Members called on the Administration to provide comprehensive community support services for such families, which include establishing a case management system and database, as well as arranging for family visits by social workers, household cleaning and meal delivery services, social activities, etc.

9. The Administration advised that SWD had been providing an array of subsidized community care services for persons with disabilities and their carers, with the aim to help persons with disabilities to stay in the community and assist their carers in coping with the difficulties in taking care of them. These services included parents/relatives resource centres, respite service, district support centres for persons with disabilities ("DSCs"), home care service for persons with severe disabilities, integrated support service for persons with severe physical disabilities, day care service for persons with severe disabilities and integrated community centres for mental wellness. These services covered emotional support, personal and nursing care, rehabilitation training, day care, home respite service, escort service, and cash subsidies for renting respiratory support medical equipment and purchasing medical consumables. SWD would conduct timely review of these services so as to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and their carers. Besides, SWD allocated an additional provision of \$6.2 million in 2017-2018 to increase the number of social workers in DSCs for strengthening case management and outreach services. This could effectively identify the needs of persons with disabilities and

provide them with suitable services or referral, so that they and their carers could receive timely and appropriate support.

10. Some Members expressed concern about the high cost of services provided by self-financing day care centres and long waiting time for day care services. They urged the Administration to enhance the provision of day care services in order to shorten the waiting time and provide temporary relief for carers. The Administration advised that it had been adopting a multi-pronged approach to increase the provision of day care places for the elderly. SWD had earmarked sites for the construction of new DEs/DCUs and it was estimated that about 880 day care places for the elderly would be progressively provided starting from 2017-2018. Separately, the Administration was also implementing the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses, under which non-governmental organizations were encouraged to optimize the use of their land to provide, through expansion, redevelopment or new development, welfare facilities that were considered by the Administration to be in acute demand. If all the projects under the Special Scheme could be implemented smoothly, it was roughly estimated that there would be an additional provision of about 2 000 day care places for the elderly. The Administration also planned to provide an additional 1 000 CCSVs in 2018-2019, bringing the total to 6 000, to further support ageing in place for elderly persons with moderate or severe impairment. Besides, to meet the demand for day care service arising from the growing number of ageing persons with disabilities, the Administration increased recurrent expenditure by \$12.1 million in 2017-2018 to provide 80 additional day care service places in DSCs and extend the service to persons with intellectual disability assessed as having onset of ageing. The total number of such service places had been increased to over 200.

11. Some Members considered that since information on vacancies of respite places published on the relevant websites was not up-to-date, carers of elderly persons had to ring round and check with DEs/DCUs the availability of respite places. They called on the Administration to make improvements in this regard. Some other Members suggested that the Administration should consider providing respite places in SWD's elderly centres and elderly health centres of the Department of Health.

12. The Administration advised that to facilitate elderly persons and their carers to check the information on respite service, SWD planned to set up a real-time vacancy enquiry system for designated residential respite service. Besides, SWD had been providing additional designated residential respite places in new contract homes when they commenced service and in existing contract homes when their contracts were extended/renewed.

There were currently 164 designated day respite places and SWD would continue to designate additional day respite places in newly established subvented DEs/DCUs.

Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of the Elderly Persons from Low Income Families

13. Members held the view that in determining the eligibility for the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons, the Administration should take into account a carer's capability of taking up the care-giving role rather than his/her income. These Members suggested that given the great demand for carers, the Administration should lower the eligibility threshold, such as relaxing the income limit or removing the income assessment requirement in the long run, and increase the quota of the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons. According to the Administration, as CCF's programmes aimed to provide assistance for the needy who fell outside or were not covered by the safety net under the current social welfare system, carers who applied to join the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons should be subject to income test so as to enable effective use of limited public resources.

14. Some Members noted with concern that recipients of carer allowance could not at the same time receive Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") or Old Age Living Allowance ("OALA"). These Members considered that such restriction was unacceptable and would force carers of elderly persons to give up certain financial assistance. The Administration advised that the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons sought to encourage carers to take care of elderly persons without weakening the sense of family obligation nor diminishing the virtue of filial piety. The living allowance was a form of financial assistance aiming to supplement the living expenses of carers. As carers receiving CSSA or OALA were already receiving financial assistance, carer allowance would not be given to them.

15. Members expressed concern that some eligible carers might not be able to benefit from the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons given its limited quota. They enquired about the number of waitlistees for the Scheme. According to the Administration, the Scheme targeted at elderly persons who were on the Central Waiting List for Subsidised Long Term Care Services. The Administration had invited all eligible elderly persons to apply for the living allowance under the Scheme. The number of applications assessed to be eligible had not exceeded the quota for the Scheme and all eligible applicants had been provided with the living allowance. In the event that eligible applications received had

outnumbered the quota, the Administration would consider increasing the quota, subject to availability of resources.

16. Some Members took the view that to allow more carers to benefit from the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons, the Administration should lower the threshold, increase the level of allowance, streamline the application procedures and regularize the pilot scheme. These Members urged the Administration to review the pilot scheme without further delay to alleviate the financial burden of carers.

17. The Administration advised that SWD had commissioned the Sau Po Centre on Ageing of the University of Hong Kong to conduct an evaluation on Phase II of the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons together with the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Persons with Disabilities, with a view to helping the Administration consider the way forward for both schemes. The related matters, including the eligibility criteria, procedures, the amount of allowance, whether the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons was to be regularized, etc. would then be reviewed in one go. The evaluation study was expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2018.

Relevant papers

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

Appendix

Relevant papers on support for carers of elderly persons and of persons with disabilities

Committee	Date of meeting	Paper
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	28 May 2013 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes
Panel on Welfare Services	10 February 2014 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes LC Paper No. CB(2)1160/13-14(01) (Chinese version only)
	15 February 2016 (Item III)	Agenda Minutes
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	28 March 2017 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes LC Paper No. CB(2)1748/16-17(01)
	21 November 2017 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes LC Paper No. CB(2)972/17-18(01)
Panel on Welfare Services	11 December 2017 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes