

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

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## **Panel on Welfare Services**

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the special meeting on 22 February 2019**

### **Support for carers of elderly persons and of persons with disabilities**

#### **Purpose**

This paper gives an account of past discussions at meetings of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") and relevant subcommittees 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 elderly persons' quality of life, and elderly persons 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. According to the Administration, it has, through the Community Care Fund ("CCF") under the Commission on Poverty ("CoP"), launched the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low Income Families ("the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons") and the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of

Persons with Disabilities ("the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Persons with Disabilities") in June 2014 and October 2016 respectively. These schemes provide carers of elderly persons or persons with disabilities from low-income families with a living allowance to help supplement their living expenses, so that elderly persons or persons with disabilities with long-term care needs may, with their carers' assistance, receive more proper care and continue to live in a familiar community. The two Pilot Schemes were originally scheduled to close in September 2018, but CoP endorsed on 21 June 2018 the implementation of the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons Phase III and the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Persons with Disabilities Phase II for a period of two years from October 2018 to September 2020.

## **Deliberations of the Panel**

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

#### *Support services for carers of elderly persons*

4. In response to members' concern about the adequacy of the support services provided for carers of elderly persons, the Administration advised that it provided a range of centre-based and home-based community care services at community level through 76 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. The Administration would allocate additional resources to all subvented elderly centres and home care services teams throughout the territory in 2018-2019 to enhance outreaching services for supporting needy carers living in the community who were looking after frail elderly persons, including carers with disabilities or aged carers.

5. 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, some 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. The Administration 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.

*Support services for carers of persons with disabilities*

7. 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.

8. 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 ("PRCs"), 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, starting from the 2018-2019 financial year, SWD would progressively increase the number of PRCs from six to 19, and increase the total amount of annual funding for the

Financial Support Scheme for Self-help Organizations for Persons with Disabilities/Chronic Illnesses from about \$15 million to about \$21 million.

*Provision of day care services*

9. 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.

10. 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 vouchers under the Second Phase of the Pilot Scheme on CCSV in 2019-2020, bringing the total to 7 000, 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.

Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of the Elderly Persons from Low Income Families and Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities

*Eligibility criteria of the Pilot Schemes*

11. 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.

12. 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 Schemes should be subject to income test so as to enable effective use of limited public resources. Besides, the income thresholds under the Pilot Schemes, which were set at not more than 75% of the Median Monthly Domestic Household Income ("MMDHI"), were among the lowest of all means-tested assistance schemes. Other social security protection such as Comprehensive Social Security Assistance ("CSSA") was available to individuals who had financial needs. It was not the Government's policy to provide financial assistance for all carers irrespective of their income levels.

13. Some members noted with concern that recipients of carer allowance could not at the same time receive 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 financial assistance was provided for needy individuals under the existing social security system, recipients of CSSA or OALA could not at the same time receive the carer allowance.

#### *Levels of allowances*

14. Some members considered that, compared with Normal OALA and the CSSA standard rate, the amount of allowance for carers of elderly persons was too low. The Administration should increase the amount of allowance to provide carers with better livelihood protection. They also enquired about the basis for determining the levels of allowances.

15. The Administration advised at the Panel meeting of 9 July 2018 that the allowance of \$2,000 per month for carers of elderly persons was set by making reference to the CSSA standard rates for able-bodied single adult. As regards the subsequent Pilot Scheme for Carers of Persons with Disabilities, the amount of allowance was determined with reference to that

of the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons. The allowance would be increased to \$2,400 per month under the new phases of the two Pilot Schemes in accordance with inflation, as reflected by the adjustment of MMDHI published in the Report on General Household Survey in the past four years.

*Participation rate of the Pilot Schemes*

16. At the same Panel meeting, some members noted that as at end-March 2018, the quota for the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Persons with Disabilities was 2 000 but only 1 519 eligible carers had received the allowance. They considered that the low participation rate of this Pilot Scheme was due to insufficient publicity and stringent eligibility criteria of the Scheme. They enquired about the reasons why the quota had not been used up, and the basis for setting the quota for the new phases of the two Pilot Schemes.

17. According to the Administration, the number of recipients of the allowance under the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Persons with Disabilities at the peak was close to 2 000. The quotas for the new phases of the two Pilot Schemes were set having regard to the estimated numbers of eligible carers and participants. The quotas had been increased by 2 000 and 500 in the new phase of the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons and Pilot Scheme for Carers of Persons with Disabilities respectively as a buffer to obviate the need for bidding additional funding in case of an increase in the number of applicants for the two Pilot Schemes.

18. Members suggested that the Administration should write to elderly persons waiting for subsidized residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") and not residing in private RCHEs, with a view to inviting their carers to apply for the carer allowance. In addition, invitation letters should also be sent to carers and publicity of the Pilot Schemes should be strengthened.

19. According to the Administration, the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons was targeted at carers of elderly persons on the Central Waiting List for Subsidised Long-term Care Services ("CWL"). The Administration had sent out around 49 000 invitation letters in Phases I and II of the Pilot Scheme to all eligible elderly persons, with a view to inviting their carers to apply for the 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. Besides, as CWL did not contain carers' contact information and there might be more than one carer for an elderly person, the

Administration was unable to send invitation letters to them. The responsible workers would contact eligible elderly persons to understand whether their carers were interested in applying for the allowance.

*Way forward for the Pilot Schemes*

20. 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.

21. 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. SWD had invited the Sau Po Centre on Ageing to submit the evaluation report on the two Pilot Schemes in the third quarter of 2018. The Administration would conduct a detailed analysis based on the findings of the evaluation to formulate a long-term development plan and direction, including the eligibility criteria, the amount of allowance, and whether the two Pilot Schemes should be regularized, etc. The extension of the two Pilot Schemes for a period of two years would allow the Administration to complete the relevant analysis. The Administration aimed to come up with an overall policy direction for support services for carers of elderly persons and persons with disabilities in 2020.

**Relevant papers**

22. 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)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Panel on Welfare Services	10 February 2014 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> <u>LC Paper No.</u> <u>CB(2)1160/13-14(01)</u> <u>(Chinese version</u> <u>only)</u>
	15 February 2016 (Item III)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	28 March 2017 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> <u>LC Paper No.</u> <u>CB(2)1748/16-17(01)</u>
	21 November 2017 (Item I)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> <u>LC Paper No.</u> <u>CB(2)972/17-18(01)</u>
Panel on Welfare Services	11 December 2017 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u> <u>LC Paper No.</u> <u>CB(2)2050/17-18(01)</u>
	9 July 2018 (Item IV)	<u>Agenda</u> <u>Minutes</u>