

# 立法會 *Legislative Council*

LC Paper No. CB(2)337/20-21(06)

Ref : CB2/PL/WS

## **Panel on Welfare Services**

**Updated background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat  
for the meeting on 23 November 2020**

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

#### **Purpose**

This paper gives an account of the past discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services and relevant subcommittee 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 attaches great importance to the service needs of family carers and has been trying to understand their evolving demands for different types of welfare services through various channels. Support for carers has always been one of the key elements of the strategic development of the overall social welfare policy. Specifically, support measures for family carers encourage active and healthy ageing in the community and assist elderly persons with long-term care needs to achieve a maximum level of functioning in their daily life at home and in the community, thereby improving their quality of life. 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. The Administration has, through the Community Care Fund ("CCF"), 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. The Pilot Schemes, administered by the Social Welfare Department ("SWD"), provide eligible carers with a living allowance to help supplement their living expenses so that elderly persons or persons with disabilities in need of long-term care services may, with their carers' assistance, receive proper care and remain living in the community. CCF announced on 30 September 2020 the launching of new phases of the Pilot Schemes from April 2021 to September 2023.

## **Deliberations of members**

### Support services for carers of elderly persons

4. In response to members' concern about the inadequate support for carers of elderly persons, the Administration advised that it provided a range of centre-based and home-based community care services 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. A total of 210 subvented elderly centres (i.e. district elderly community centres and neighbourhood elderly centres) in 18 districts also provided support services for elderly persons and their carers. The services included counselling, referral, emotional support, health education, assistance in making long-term care service applications, arrangement for social and recreational activities, meal services and carer training. The Administration had allocated additional resources to all subvented elderly centres and home care services teams in the 2018-2019 financial year to enhance outreaching services for needy carers, including carers with disabilities and aged carers, who were looking after frail elderly persons.

5. Holding the view that a case manager could take up a facilitative role to render assistance according to individual needs of elderly persons and their carers in a timely and well co-ordinated manner, some members enquired whether the Administration would adopt a case management approach in elderly care service.

6. The Administration advised that in addition to case management services provided continuously by recognized service providers 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, SWD had set up a centralized team to serve as the first point of contact for elderly persons who were interested in using the vouchers and for their carers. The Pilot Scheme on Home Care and Support for Elderly Persons with Mild Impairment launched in December 2017 had also incorporated

the case management approach. Service providers would discuss with elderly persons and their carers in formulating individualized care plans.

#### 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 persons with disabilities and their carers, which should include establishing a case management system and database, arranging family visits and providing household cleaning and meal delivery services.

8. The Administration advised that SWD had been providing an array of subsidized community care services for persons with disabilities and their carers to help persons with disabilities integrate into the community and strengthen the caring capacities of their carers. The 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 services for persons with severe disabilities and integrated community centres for mental wellness, covering emotional support, personal and nursing care, rehabilitation training, and special subsidies for purchasing medical consumables, etc. SWD would conduct timely review of these services.

9. In the light of a recent family tragedy where a mother was alleged to have strangled her 21-year-old intellectually disabled son to death, some members expressed grave concern about the inadequate support for carers of special school leavers and considered that the Administration should ensure a seamless transition from school-based services to various support services in the community for special school leavers upon their graduation to relieve the caring stress of their carers.

10. According to the Administration, special schools would discuss with the parents of the students approaching senior secondary years the latter's options for post-school services and assist them in applying for appropriate post-school services, such as Shine Skill Centres of Vocational Training Council, sheltered workshops and day activity centres ("DACs"). Students at the age of 15 or above might be referred by their special schools to waitlist for such services. Special schools in general would follow up with school leavers for two years after they had left schools. When necessary, special schools would refer them to DSCs or Integrated Family Service Centres subvented by SWD for assistance.

11. In the 2020-2021 financial year, resources had been reserved for increasing the number of DSCs from 16 to 21 progressively. Home care services for persons with severe disabilities had also been extended to persons with disabilities having moderate nursing care need or moderate functional impairment gradually starting from March 2020. Moreover, a total of 150 service places in three DACs had been reserved for severely mentally handicapped persons who were not admitted to hostels for severely mentally handicapped persons to ease the burden of their carers.

12. Some members urged the Administration to conduct surveys on the demographic structure, care-giving situation and service needs of carers and publish the survey findings on a regular basis so as to provide timely and appropriate support. The Administration advised that it had taken note of the demand of persons with disabilities for various types of services and enhanced the provision of support to their carers to relieve the caring stress. However, it had no plan to conduct any survey on carers at this stage.

#### Provision of day care services

13. As regards the problem concerning the high service charges of self-financing day care centres and unduly long waiting time for subsidized day care services, some members urged the Administration to enhance the provision of subsidized day care services to provide temporary relief for carers.

14. The Administration advised that it had been adopting a multi-pronged approach to increase the provision of day care service places for the elderly. SWD had earmarked sites for the construction of new DEs/DCUs and about 880 day care service places for the elderly would be progressively provided starting from the 2017-2018 financial year. Separately, the Administration was 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 welfare facilities in acute demand. It was roughly estimated that there would be an additional provision of about 2 000 day care service places for the elderly. The Administration would also issue an additional 1 000 vouchers under the Pilot Scheme on CCSV in the 2020-2021 financial year, bringing the total to 8 000, to further support ageing in place for elderly persons with moderate or severe impairment. Besides, the Administration had increased the recurrent expenditure by \$12.1 million in the 2017-2018 financial year 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.

#### Provision of emergency and day respite service

15. Noting that some carers were unable to attend to urgent personal matters or take a short break due to a lack of emergency respite service and the high fees charged for day respite service for persons with disabilities, some members urged the Administration to enhance the provision of respite service and reduce the service fees.

16. The Administration advised that SWD would purchase some 40 places from private residential care homes joining the Bought Place Scheme for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities (including those providing high level of care) to serve as designated residential respite places so that carers could be temporarily relieved from their caring responsibilities, thereby reducing their pressure and allowing them to manage their personal commitments. SWD had also launched the Vacancy Enquiry System for Residential Respite Service for Persons with Disabilities, Residential Respite Service for the Elderly and Emergency Placement for the Elderly in December 2019 to facilitate persons with disabilities/elderly persons and their carers to search for information on vacant residential respite places.

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

17. Some members held the view that in determining the eligibility for the two Pilot Schemes, the Administration should take into account a carer's capability of taking up the care-giving role rather than his/her income. They suggested that the Administration should relax the income limit or remove the income assessment requirement in the long run.

18. According to the Administration, as CCF's programmes aimed to provide assistance for the needy falling outside or were not covered by the safety net under the current social welfare system, applicants of the Pilot Schemes should be subject to income test to ensure 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, 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 having financial needs. It was not the Government's policy to provide financial assistance

for all carers irrespective of their income levels.

19. Some members noted that in order to be eligible for the living allowances under the two Pilot Schemes, the elderly persons being taken care of must be on the Central Waiting List for subsidized long-term care services and the persons with disabilities being taken care of must be on the waiting lists for any specified rehabilitation services subsidized by SWD. Given that many elderly persons and persons with disabilities were reluctant to be admitted to residential care homes, such requirements had rendered their carers not eligible to receive the allowance. Some members also noted that the carers receiving allowance under the Pilot Scheme for Carers of Elderly Persons could not at the same time receive CSSA or Old Age Living Allowance ("OALA"). They called on the Administration to remove the restriction.

20. The Administration explained 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 living allowance for carers.

21. Some members took the view that to enable more carers to benefit from the two Pilot Schemes, the Administration should lower the eligibility thresholds, streamline the application procedures and regularize the Pilot Schemes. They urged the Administration to review the Pilot Schemes and increase the amounts of living allowances to alleviate the financial burden of carers.

22. The Administration advised that SWD had commissioned the Sau Po Centre on Ageing of the University of Hong Kong to conduct an evaluation study on the two Pilot Schemes. Based on the findings of the evaluation study, the Administration would formulate a long-term development plan and direction, including the eligibility criteria, the levels of allowances, and whether the two Pilot Schemes should be regularized, etc. The Labour and Welfare Bureau had also commenced a policy study to explore carers' needs in a more comprehensive manner with a view to developing an overall carer policy and strengthening support for carers. The findings and recommendations of the study were expected to be completed in 2021.

**Relevant papers**

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

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
19 November 2020

## 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 March 2017 (Item I)	<a href="#"><u>Agenda</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Minutes</u></a>
	21 November 2017 (Item I)	<a href="#"><u>Agenda</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Minutes</u></a>
Panel on Welfare Services	11 December 2017 (Item IV)	<a href="#"><u>Agenda</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Minutes</u></a>
	9 July 2018 (Item IV)	<a href="#"><u>Agenda</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Minutes</u></a>
	22 February 2019 (Item I)	<a href="#"><u>Agenda</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Minutes</u></a>
	23 September 2020 (Item I)	<a href="#"><u>Agenda</u></a>

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
19 November 2020