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**Panel on Welfare Services**

**Updated background brief prepared by  
the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 8 February 2021**

**Provision of welfare services under  
the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic**

**Purpose**

This paper provides background information on the provision of welfare services under the coronavirus disease 2019 ("COVID-19") epidemic and summarizes the major views and concerns expressed by Members during previous discussions on the subject.

**Background**

2. In view of the local epidemic situation, special work arrangements for government employees have been implemented where necessary since late January 2020 in order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 being spread in the community.<sup>1</sup> In respect of provision of welfare services, the Social Welfare Department ("SWD") will keep in view the epidemic situation and from time to time adjust the scale of operation of subsidized welfare facilities, including long-term care facilities, by reducing the scale of or suspending certain services. To keep members of the public informed of the availability of services at subvented service units, SWD has, since 27 January 2020, announced through press releases the special arrangements of subvented welfare services, including service suspension,

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<sup>1</sup> Under the special work arrangements for government employees, save for those involved in the provision of emergency services and essential public services and in anti-epidemic efforts, all other government employees will be arranged to work from home.

provision of limited services and suspension of groups and programmes, etc., in response to the latest developments of the epidemic.<sup>2</sup>

3. According to the Administration, it has taken various measures to assist welfare service units in strengthening their anti-epidemic measures. Relevant service units under subventions or contracts, as well as all residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") and residential care homes for persons with disabilities ("RCHDs") have been provided with several rounds of special allowance for the procurement of personal protective equipment ("PPE") and sanitizing items. The Administration has also provided millions of face masks for subvented, contract, self-financing and private residential service units (including SWD-licensed RCHEs) for the use of their staff in support of their continued provision of services. In addition, rounds of Anti-virus Coating Spray Subsidy have been launched to support RCHEs, RCHDs and day care units of elderly and rehabilitation services to apply anti-virus coating spray to their premises for strengthening infection control. A Time-limited Programme on Enhancing Infection Control and Ventilation of Residential Care Homes was launched by SWD on 22 December 2020 with a view to minimizing the risks of virus spreading in RCHEs and RCHDs.

### **Deliberations by Members**

4. Issues relating to the provision of welfare services under the epidemic were discussed by the Panel on Welfare Services ("WS Panel") and the Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy under the WS Panel and the Panel on Health Services ("HS Panel") in March and May 2020 respectively. Separately, the HS Panel has discussed with and received updates from the Administration on, among others, the infection prevention and control measures for residential care homes ("RCHs") since the third wave of the epidemic. The deliberations and concerns of Members are summarized in the following paragraphs.

#### Services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities

5. Some Members took the view that essential services such as bathing, home cleaning and meal delivery services for elderly persons and persons

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<sup>2</sup> For details of the special arrangements starting from 2 December 2020, please refer to the press release of the Government at: <https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202011/30/P2020113000751.htm>.

with disabilities should continue during the epidemic. They enquired about the measures adopted by the Administration for ensuring that community care services ("CCS") for the elderly, such as services provided by district elderly community centres ("DECCs"), would not be affected during the epidemic.

6. According to the Administration, essential services including delivery of meals, escort, nursing and administration of medicine had all along been provided for elderly persons and persons with disabilities in need, though service frequency and intensity might have been adjusted having regard to the epidemic situation. Home care services teams and CCS teams had provided personal care service including assistance in personal hygiene and procurement of necessities for needy service users when epidemic situation permitted.

7. The Administration further advised that while centre-based services subsidized by SWD, such as DECCs, neighbourhood elderly centres, social and recreational centres for persons with disabilities, integrated children and youth services centres, children and youth centres and community centres, had not been open to the public in order to reduce the risk of infection arising from the gathering of people, other types of services were provided on a limited scale. Separately, day care centres for the elderly, sheltered workshops, integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres, integrated vocational training centres and day activity centres had remained open depending on the situation to serve those with special needs. Individual service users might, depending on their circumstances or needs, contact the centre or service unit concerned in advance.

#### Training services for children with special needs

8. Some Members reflected some parents' grave concern that with the training service suspended during the epidemic, their children with special needs had regressed in their abilities in the physical, social, cognitive, speech emotional and behavioural aspects and enquired about the assistance provided for these children.

9. According to the Administration, to strike a balance between protection of the health of service providers as well as that of service users and maintenance of training services, SWD had requested service operators to resume training for pre-school children with special needs on a one-on-one basis in a progressive manner subject to parents' consent. Service providers would also provide home-based video training and

e-training for these children and give advice to parents over the phone on how the training for their children could be provided at home.

10. As the suspension of services had affected adversely the rehabilitation progress of pre-school children with special needs, some Members enquired whether the Administration would accede to some parents' request and arrange for their pre-school children with special needs to receive training programmes at special child care centres ("SCCC") for another year. The Administration advised that the proposed arrangement would affect the waiting time of the some 1 300 waitlistees for SCCC places. It had discussed with service providers about arranging make-up classes for pre-school children with special needs and some service providers had responded positively.

#### Infection prevention and control measures for social welfare service units

11. Referring to the emergence of confirmed cases in RCHEs for the first time in early July 2020, Members were concerned about the efforts made by the Administration to ensure that appropriate infection control measures had been put in place by RCHs during the epidemic. Some Members called on the Administration to address the not uncommon problem of residential care units to deploy their staff to work in more than one institution which increased the risk of cross-infection, and the poor and crowded living environment of hostels for imported care workers of RCHs under the Supplementary Labour Scheme.

12. The Administration advised that as of early July 2020, SWD had provided all RCHEs and RCHDs with four rounds of special allowance (at a rate of \$5,000 or \$3,000 per round for the first two rounds and \$10,000 or \$6,000 for the third and fourth round) for the procurement of PPE and sanitizing items since January 2020; distributed a total of 10 million face masks for the staff of all subsidised, contract, self-financing and private residential service units (including all RCHEs and RCHDs) since February 2020; and launched an Anti-virus Coating Spray Subsidy under the Anti-epidemic Fund in May 2020 to support all RCHEs and RCHDs to apply an anti-virus coating spray to their premises on or before 31 August 2020. SWD had provided over four million face masks to all RCHEs and RCHDs in mid-July 2020 for use by their residents in need.

13. The Administration further advised that it had set up temporary quarantine facilities specifically for residents of RCHEs or RCHDs who were close contacts with nursing needs and, hence, were not suitable to be quarantined in regular quarantine centres. Separately, in accordance with

the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J), the Secretary for Food and Health had issued compulsory testing notices on 30 November 2020, 11 December 2020, 23 December 2020 and 5 January 2021 respectively to require staff members working in RCHEs, RCHDs, nursing homes, day service units attached to the premises of RCHs to undergo compulsory COVID-19 testing.

14. Some Members considered that the Administration should issue guidelines on the use of PPE by frontline staff of service units for various types of services. According to the Administration, in addition to the Guidelines for Residential Care Homes for the Elderly or Persons with Disabilities for the Prevention of COVID-19 which set out the precautionary measures for RCHs which should be taken to minimize the risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19, the Centre for Health Protection had issued Guidelines for Home-based Services for the Prevention of COVID-19 and Guidelines for Centre-based Services for the Prevention of COVID-19 which covered, among others, recommendations on the types of PPE to be used for the provision of various types of home-based and centre-based services. Relevant service teams were reminded by SWD to refer to the Guidelines to take appropriate measures in the provision of services.

#### Enhancing communication between service units and service users

15. Given that the provision of many welfare services had been suspended during the epidemic, there was a suggestion that the Administration should provide resources for service units to set up video communication system to facilitate them to maintain certain services. The Administration advised that during the epidemic, service units had maintained contact with and provided appropriate support to service users and their families/carers by phone. It would consider the suggestion on enhancing communication between service units and service users having regard to the service provision during the epidemic.

16. Since no visiting in RCHs was allowed during the epidemic unless on compassionate grounds or for official visits, some Members were concerned about the mental health needs of RCH residents. They urged the Administration to keep family members of RCH residents abreast of the residents' conditions. The Administration advised that some RCH operators had made use of telephone and video communication equipment to facilitate residents and their family members to maintain contact. SWD

would remind RCH operators to enhance their communications with family members of residents.

### **Recent development**

17. A written question concerning coping with the epidemic by RCHs was raised at the Council meeting of 28 October 2020. The question and the Administration's reply are in **Appendix I**.

### **Relevant papers**

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

Council Business Division 2  
Legislative Council Secretariat  
4 February 2021

## Press Releases

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LCQ11: Coping with the epidemic by residential care homes

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Following is a question by the Dr Hon Fernando Cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-  
kwong, in the Legislative Council today (October 28):

Question:

There are comments that the Government's refusal to completely close all boundary control points ended up at least 290 000 persons entering the territory with exemption from the quarantine requirement between February and July this year. This resulted in the outbreak of the third wave of the epidemic, with residential care homes (RCHs) for persons with disabilities and RCHs for the elderly bearing the severe brunt of the epidemic. Quite a number of such RCH residents were confirmed to be infected and died, while other residents living in the same RCHs were sent to quarantine facilities for quarantine. On coping with the epidemic by these two types of RCHs, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) Of the respective to-date numbers of (i) confirmed cases among the residents, (ii) deaths among the residents and (iii) confirmed cases among the staff, in respect of the two types of RCHs; the respective numbers and name lists of the two types of RCHs in which there have been confirmed cases among their residents or staff;

(2) Of the respective to-date numbers of (i) residents and (ii) staff members in respect of the two types of RCHs placed under quarantine, together with a breakdown by the quarantine facility concerned; whether guidelines on the relevant quarantine arrangements have been drawn up;

(3) Of the respective numbers of workers currently employed by the two types of RCHs who were imported under the Supplementary Labour Scheme; the respective numbers of imported workers working in those RCHs of the two types in which there have been confirmed cases among their residents or staff; whether there are requirements (i) for such imported workers to be subject to compulsory quarantine for 14 days upon arrival in Hong Kong and to pass the virus test, and (ii) for employers to take appropriate anti-epidemic measures at the accommodations provided for such imported workers;

(4) As it has been reported that the Social Welfare Department (SWD) collaborates with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department to deploy staff to inspect the ventilation systems of private RCHs with relatively poorer environment and to assist such RCHs in carrying out improvement works (e.g. retrofitting of exhaust fans) in order to reduce the risk of an outbreak of the epidemic in such RCHs, of (i) the number and the name list of such RCHs with relatively poorer environment, and (ii) the number and the name list of those RCHs which need such improvement works, the items to be improved, the public expenditure involved and the progress of the works;

(5) Whether guidelines have been issued to RCHs on the arrangements for relatives and friends to visit the residents during the epidemic, in order to promote healthy communication among RCHs' staff, residents and their families;

(6) Whether guidelines have been issued to RCHs on the rehabilitation and living skills trainings that should be provided for the residents during the epidemic;

(7) Of the number of applications, received by the Government from

RCHs for subsidies under the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care, for procuring telephones and video telephony equipment to facilitate the residents' communication with their relatives and friends during the epidemic; the progress for the vetting and approval of such applications, and the numbers of approved applications and the RCHs involved; and

(8) Given that the Chief Executive indicated earlier on that quite a number of RCHs for the elderly in Hong Kong had difficulties in controlling infection due to their limited space, and that the Labour and Welfare Bureau received, as early as in May 2019, the report of the Working Group on the Review of Ordinances and Codes of Practice for Residential Care Homes set up by SWD, as well as planned to amend the Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Ordinance (Cap 613) and the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance (Cap 459) and the related regulations, in order to adjust upward the statutory minimum floor space per resident of the two types of RCHs from the existing 6.5 square metres to between 8 and 9.5 square metres, of the progress of the legislative amendment exercise and when the public and this Council will be consulted on the amendment bills?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Food and Health Bureau, my reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) As at October 19, 2020, out of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) confirmed cases, there were 135 confirmed cases of residents from residential care homes (RCHs) (102 cases from residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and 33 cases from residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs)), 29 of them passed away. The number of confirmed cases involving RCH staff was 40 (24 cases from RCHEs and 16 cases from RCHDs). A total of 29 RCHs had confirmed cases, including 19 RCHEs and 10 RCHDs. The report of the "Latest situation of cases of COVID-19", which is updated daily by the Government, lists out clusters with 10 or more cases in RCHs. The website is [www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/local\\_situation\\_covid19\\_en.pdf](http://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/local_situation_covid19_en.pdf).

(2) The Department of Health (DH), the Hospital Authority and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) have jointly formulated guidelines on the quarantine arrangements regarding cases of infectious disease at RCHEs and RCHDs. As at October 19, 2020, the cumulative number of RCH residents subjected to quarantine was 487 (409 persons from RCHEs and 78 persons from RCHDs). The cumulative number of RCH staff subjected to quarantine was 241 (171 persons from RCHEs and 70 persons from RCHDs). Among the RCH residents subjected to quarantine, 464 residents were quarantined at Jockey Club PHAB Camp (97 persons), Cheung Muk Tau Holiday Centre for the Elderly (107 persons) and AsiaWorld-Expo (260 persons) respectively. The remaining 23 residents were quarantined on-site or in other facilities. As for RCH staff, they were arranged to be quarantined at general quarantine centres.

(3) Pursuant to the Compulsory Quarantine of Certain Persons Arriving at Hong Kong Regulation (Cap 599C) and the Compulsory Quarantine of Persons Arriving at Hong Kong from Foreign Places Regulation (Cap 599E), all persons, including imported workers, having stayed in areas outside Hong Kong for any period during the 14 days preceding arrival in Hong Kong, regardless of nationality and travel documents used, will be subject to compulsory quarantine for 14 days. Breaching a quarantine order is a criminal offence and offenders are subject to a maximum fine of \$25,000 and imprisonment for six months. Besides, those arriving Hong Kong via the Hong Kong International Airport (the Airport) who are asymptomatic are

required to proceed immediately upon arrival to the Temporary Specimen Collection Centre set up by DH in the Airport for collecting their deep throat saliva samples for COVID-19 testing.

Based on information from the Immigration Department, as at end-August 2020, RCHEs and RCHDs employed 2 672 and 135 imported care workers under the Supplementary Labour Scheme respectively. Among them, 44 and two respectively were working in RCHs with confirmed cases of COVID-19 among residents or staff.

(4) Improving indoor ventilation of RCHs can help reduce spread of virus. In this regard, the SWD has arranged for staff of the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department to visit eight RCHEs and RCHDs to inspect and advise on their ventilation conditions. The SWD together with the relevant departments are exploring practicable options for improving indoor ventilation of RCHs.

(5) During the epidemic, the SWD has reminded RCHs from time to time to observe the "Guidelines for Residential Care Homes for the Elderly or Persons with Disabilities for the Prevention of COVID-19" (the Guidelines) issued by the Centre for Health Protection of the DH and step up various infection control and personal and environmental hygiene measures, including making suitable arrangements for visits. The SWD issued a letter on July 8 this year to remind all RCHEs and RCHDs to refer to the Guidelines that visiting is not allowed unless on compassionate grounds or for official visits. When arranging visits for individual residents under special circumstances on compassionate grounds, RCHs must step up and take prudent and effective measures (including checking body temperature of the incoming visitors, requiring them to perform hand hygiene and wear surgical mask, recording the date of visit and other relevant information, arranging visits at a designated place with proper segregation and frequent sanitisation, maintaining a proper social distance, etc). Moreover, only one visitor is allowed for each resident at a time to minimise the risk of infection. The SWD has also advised RCHs to give every possible assistance to family members/relatives of their residents so that they can maintain contact with the residents through other means (such as telephone and video communication), or send videos of everyday life to the residents.

(6) All RCHEs and RCHDs have continued to provide residential care services during the COVID-19 epidemic, and receive services from the Visiting Medical Practitioner Service. The SWD has reminded RCHs from time to time to refer to the Guidelines and maintain social distance during the provision of daily care and training for their residents. Besides, the SWD has urged service operators to utilise practicable means such as telephone and video communication equipment, etc, to maintain contact with and provide support to service users and their family members/carers.

(7) Since its launch in December 2018, the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care has received applications in three tranches. In the last tranche of applications which closed on April 27, 2020, the Secretariat to the Fund received a total of around 70 applications for technology products related to telephone and video communication equipment. As at end-August 2020, the Secretariat to the Fund has vetted and approved over 60 applications.

(8) The Working Group on the Review of Ordinances and Codes of Practice for Residential Care Homes (Working Group) set up by the SWD completed the review in May 2019. Following a comprehensive and in-depth study as well as extensive deliberations, the Working Group has put forward 19 recommendations on various aspects of monitoring of RCHEs and RCHDs. Some of the recommendations have to be implemented by way of legislative amendments. The Government consulted the Legislative Council (LegCo) Panel on Welfare Services; and the Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy under

the LegCo Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Health Services in April 2019 and June 2020 respectively, and the Elderly Commission, the Social Welfare Advisory Committee and the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee in the second half of 2019. Four district stakeholder engagement sessions were also organised in the first half of 2020. The Government is conducting preparatory work for the legislative amendments.

Ends/Wednesday, October 28, 2020  
Issued at HKT 12:18

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**Relevant papers on provision of welfare services  
under the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>Paper</b>
Panel on Welfare Services	9 March 2020 (Item III)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	19 May 2020 (Item I)	<a href="#">Agenda</a> <a href="#">Minutes</a>
Panel on Health Services	10 July 2020 (Item II)	<a href="#">Agenda</a>
	13 November 2020 (Item VI)	<a href="#">Agenda</a>
	7 January 2021 <sup>*</sup>	<a href="#">CB(2)616/20-21(01)</a>

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