

For Information
on 11 October 2021

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

2021 Policy Address Policy Initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau

Introduction

The Chief Executive delivered her 2021 Policy Address on 6 October 2021. This paper sets out the new and on-going welfare initiatives pertaining to the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and Social Welfare Department (SWD) in the 2021 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement.

Summary of New Initiatives

2. The new welfare initiatives in the 2021 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement are summarised as follows :

- Merging the Normal and Higher Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) (see paragraph 3 below);
- Exploring the feasibility of integrating the Pilot Project on Tier 1 Support Services in Kindergartens/Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres (KGs/KG-cum-CCCs) with On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (OPRS) to provide more comprehensive, flexible and on-going support to cater for the training needs of pre-school children with different levels of special needs (see paragraph 4 below);
- Incorporating the planning ratios of long-term residential care, day rehabilitation, pre-school rehabilitation and community support services concerned into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines in 2021-22 (see paragraph 5 below);
- Exploring the extension of the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong (see paragraph 6 below);

- Exploring the relaxation of absence limit under the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme (see paragraph 7 below);
- Introducing an amendment Bill into the Legislative Council to improve the quality of services provided by residential care homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities (see paragraph 8 below);
- Completing the study on support for carers (see paragraph 9 below); and
- Establishing a mandatory reporting mechanism for child abuse cases (see paragraph 10 below).

Details of Policy Priorities/New Initiatives

Poverty Alleviation

3. The Government plans to merge the Normal and Higher OALA in the second half of 2022, so that the more lenient asset limits of the Normal OALA will be adopted across-the-board, and eligible applicants will receive payment at the Higher OALA rate. The initiative will benefit about 50 000 elderly persons who are receiving the Normal OALA. Eligible new applicants will also receive OALA payment at the higher rate.

Supporting Pre-school Children with Special Needs

4. To support pre-school children with special needs, the Government has regularised OPRS from October 2018. The number of service places increased in phases from about 3 000 to over 9 000 in the 2021/22 school year and will further increase to 10 000 in the 2022/23 school year. The Government has also launched the Pilot Project on Tier 1 Support Services in KGs/KG-cum-CCCs in the 2020/21 school year in about 80 KGs/KG-cum-CCCs participating in OPRS to provide early intervention services for children awaiting assessment by Child Assessment Centres (CACs), or assessed by CACs to have borderline developmental problems, etc. The Government will explore the feasibility of integrating this Pilot Project with OPRS to provide more comprehensive, flexible and on-going support to cater for the training needs of pre-school children with different levels of special needs.

Planning Ratios for Rehabilitation Services

5. The Government will incorporate the planning ratios of long-term residential care, day rehabilitation, pre-school rehabilitation and community support services concerned into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines in 2021-22.

Elderly and Rehabilitation Services

Exploring the Extension of the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong

6. The Government will explore extending the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong¹ to cover other residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) in Mainland cities within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), so as to provide more options to the elderly persons who choose to retire in GBA. To facilitate monitoring and ensure quality of services, the RCHEs must be operated by non-governmental or private organisations of Hong Kong with a good track record in the provision of such services.

Exploring the Relaxation of Absence Limit under the SSA Scheme

7. The Government will explore the relaxation of absence limit under the pre-application one-year continuous residence requirement of the SSA Scheme, thereby providing greater flexibility to elderly persons who wish to apply for allowances, including the Old Age Allowance and OALA, and retire on the Mainland.

Improving the Quality of Residential Care Services

8. The Government will introduce an amendment Bill into the Legislative Council in 2022 to improve the quality of services provided by RCHEs and residential care homes for persons with disabilities, through increasing the minimum staffing requirements and minimum area requirement per resident as well as enhancing the accountability of operators.

Completing the Study on Support for Carers

9. The Government will complete the study on support for carers and explore how government resources deployed could be consolidated,

¹ Currently, the Government purchases services from two RCHEs, namely the Hong Kong Jockey Club Shenzhen Society for Rehabilitation Yee Hong Heights and the Hong Kong Jockey Club Helping Hand Zhaoqing Home for the Elderly.

including the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly and other relevant services, with a view to more effectively providing support for the carers of frail elderly persons and persons with disabilities.

Establishing a Mandatory Reporting Mechanism for Child Abuse Cases

10. The cross-bureaux working group comprising LWB, the Education Bureau, the Food and Health Bureau and the Security Bureau has considered overseas experience and consulted stakeholders earlier on. The Government has decided to establish a mandatory reporting mechanism for child abuse cases. We are formulating a legislative proposal with the target of introducing a Bill into the Legislative Council in the first half of 2023. Training for practitioners in the relevant professions to identify child abuse cases will be enhanced at the same time to facilitate the implementation of the mandatory reporting mechanism.

On-going Initiatives

Child Care Services

11. We have successively implemented a number of measures to strengthen child care services, which include the incorporation of the planning ratio for aided child care services into the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, the provision of more child care service places, the enhancement of manning ratio in child care centres, the subsidisation of partial child care centre service fee for parents, the regularisation of “Fee-Waiving Subsidy Scheme” to reduce one third of the service fee for eligible families and the re-engineering of 19 Mutual Help Child Care Centres to provide After School Care Programme for pre-primary children in phases.

Strengthening Support for Ethnic Minorities (EMs)

12. SWD has commissioned NGOs with employment of EM staff to proactively reach out to EMs and connect those in need, as well as to provide case counselling, groups and activities for EMs. SWD has also continued to implement its Ethnic Minority District Ambassador pilot scheme, which aims to employ more EMs in SWD and NGOs, enhance district services, and co-ordinate and deepen communication and co-operation with relevant stakeholders.

Poverty Alleviation

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme

13. The CSSA Scheme has all along been serving the function of a safety net effectively. It helps those who cannot support themselves financially to meet their basic needs. The Government has fully implemented a series of measures² to improve the CSSA Scheme as announced in the 2019 Policy Address since February 2021. As at end-August 2021, there were about 220 000 CSSA cases, including about 19 200 unemployment cases, recording an increase of over 50% from about 12 600 cases in early 2020. In 2021-22, the estimated recurrent expenditure for the CSSA Scheme is about \$23.6 billion.

The Working Family Allowance (WFA) Scheme

14. The Government introduced the WFA Scheme in April 2018 to implement a host of improvements³ to the then Low-income Working Family Allowance (LIFA) Scheme. Separately, in light of the pandemic, the Government has reduced the WFA working hour requirements for non-single-parent households from the claim months of June 2021 to May 2022, so that more households will be eligible for WFA and some existing beneficiaries may receive higher rate of allowance. As at end-August 2021, there were about 61 900 WFA “active households”⁴ (involving about 210 000 persons), which is more than double the number of the then LIFA Scheme. In 2021-22, the estimated recurrent expenditure for WFA is about \$1.98 billion (excluding the expenditure required for implementing the time-limited reduction of working hour requirements), about three times of that of the then LIFA.

OALA

15. The Government introduced Higher OALA in June 2018. The payment rate is currently at \$3,815 per month. As at end-August 2021, there were about 570 000 elderly persons receiving Higher OALA and about 50 000 receiving Normal OALA (currently at \$2,845 per month). In 2021-22, the estimated recurrent expenditure for OALA is about \$30.8 billion.

² These measures include substantially raising the maximum level of monthly disregarded earnings, extending a range of supplement and special grants to eligible non-elderly able-bodied recipients, and significantly increasing the maximum rent allowance.

³ These measures include relaxing the eligibility criteria, substantially increasing the rates of allowances twice, and allowing household members to aggregate their working hours to apply for WFA.

⁴ Referring to those households which have been approved with WFA and submitted the latest applications in the past six months.

16. The Government introduced OALA under the Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme in January 2020. As at end-August 2021, this “portable” arrangement benefitted over 13 000 Hong Kong elderly persons residing in the two provinces.

Short-term Food Assistance Service (The Service)

17. The Government has regularised the Service in August 2021 to provide low-income persons who have temporary difficulties in meeting their basic food expenditure with short-term and basic food items for generally not more than eight weeks each time. In addition, the Government has relaxed the asset limits of the Service for 12 months starting from June 2021 to support individuals and families temporarily affected by the pandemic.

Care for the Elderly

18. The Government’s objective is to enable our senior citizens to live in dignity and provide suitable support for them to promote their sense of belonging, sense of security and sense of worthiness. The Government will continue to offer hardware and policy support to promote “active ageing” while taking care of the service needs of frail elderly persons. The Government strives to provide appropriate long-term care services for those elderly persons in need under the policy of promoting “ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up”. We will continue to take forward the recommendations set out in the Elderly Services Programme Plan.

Supporting Ageing in Place for the Elderly

19. From July 2017 till now, the number of service places for subsidised home care services has increased from around 8 400 to around 13 400. The number of service vouchers under the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly has increased from 3 000 to 8 000. The average waiting time for subsidised home care services has substantially reduced from 11 months in July 2017 to 5 months in July 2021.

Residential Care Services

20. The Government is currently taking forward 66 development projects, of which 47 include the construction of new RCHEs, providing about 8 800 residential care places for the elderly in the coming few years. The Government has been purchasing an additional 5 000 EA1 places through the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme in five years starting from 2019-20 to increase the supply of subsidised residential care places for the

elderly and enhance the overall service quality of private RCHEs.

Promoting Gerontechnology

21. The Government has allocated \$1 billion to set up the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care in December 2018, with a view to improving the quality of life of service users and reducing the burden and pressure on care staff and carers. Thus far, five tranches of grants totalling over \$380 million have been approved, subsidising about 1 300 eligible elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure or rent over 9 600 technology products.

Navigation Scheme for Young Persons in Care Services (Navigation Scheme)

22. SWD is providing a total of 1 200 training places under the Navigation Scheme within five years starting from 2020-21, encouraging young persons to join the elderly and rehabilitation care services. SWD also aims to attract more young people to join the social welfare care sector by introducing enhancement measures under the Navigation scheme, including expanding the age range of trainees, reducing the number of weekly working hours of trainees and raising their salaries.

Support for the Disadvantaged

Persons with Disabilities and Rehabilitation Programme Plan (RPP)

23. In July 2020, the Government accepted the RPP formulated by the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee. The RPP strategic recommendations cover the service needs of persons with disabilities at different stages of their lives. The Government will continue to adopt the approach of “implementation as and when ready” in implementing the recommendations.

Enhancing Community Support Services

24. The Government is committed to increasing the provision of rehabilitation services. In 2016-17 to 2020-21, the number of places of day, residential rehabilitation, respite services and those provided under the Bought Place Scheme for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities (Bought Place Scheme) increased from around 31 300 to 37 600, representing a 20% growth. The Government also sustains the enhancement of community support for persons with disabilities and their carers, including gradually increasing the number of District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities from the present 16 to 21 from 2021-22; increasing the number of Parents/Relatives Resource Centres from six to the

present 19 and that of Support Centres for Persons with Autism from three to five from 2019-20; providing home care services for an additional 1 800 persons with disabilities living in the community from 2019-20; and providing an additional 45 designated residential respite places through the Bought Place Scheme in 2021. In addition, the Government is making preparation for launching a pilot scheme to arrange for residents of Hostels for Severely Mentally Handicapped Persons who are in need of pairing Day Activity Centre services to receive the services at their hostels.

Enhancing Employment Support for Persons with Disabilities

25. In 2018 and 2020 respectively, the Government has increased the on-the-job training allowance payable to the employers hiring persons with disabilities under the Labour Department (LD)'s Work Orientation and Placement Scheme (WOPS) to encourage them to employ job seekers with disabilities. From September 2020, the maximum allowance payable to an employer for hiring each person with disabilities has increased by \$9,000 to \$60,000. LD has also launched a pilot scheme in September 2020, which provides retention allowance to encourage persons with disabilities employed through WOPS or referral of Selective Placement Division to stay in their jobs. Under the scheme, persons with disabilities will be offered a retention allowance of \$3,000 if they stay in the job for three months, and will thereafter receive an additional allowance of \$1,000 for each ensuing month of staying in the job. The maximum payment period is nine months with the amount of retention allowance up to \$9,000.

Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF)

26. CIIF has been providing funding support for social capital development projects since its establishment in 2002. As at September 2021, CIIF has provided/committed funding of about \$860 million to 466 projects launched by 318 agencies/service units. Besides, we have regularised the community support programme for new public rental housing estates through CIIF with effect from April 2019 to help new residents and families integrate into the community as soon as possible.

Child Development Fund (CDF)

27. Since its establishment in 2008, a total of \$900 million has been injected into CDF. Up till now, CDF has utilised about \$583 million to roll out eight batches of NGO-run projects and seven batches of school-based projects, benefitting more than 21 000 grassroots children. The eighth batch of school-based projects will be rolled out in November 2021, which is expected to benefit more than 1 100 new participants.

Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged (PFD)

28. PFD has been promoting tripartite partnership among the welfare sector, the business community and the Government, and providing matching grants to establish partnership and jointly help the disadvantaged. PFD has approved matching grants of about \$520 million to implement 1 070 welfare projects, benefitting more than one million disadvantaged persons. PFD has also approved matching grants of about \$272 million under the dedicated portion to implement 412 after-school learning and support programmes, benefitting about 130 000 primary and secondary school students mainly from grassroots families. A new round of application will be launched by the end of 2021.

Welfare Premises Planning

29. The Government has all along been adopting a multi-pronged approach to identifying suitable sites or premises for the provision of more welfare services which are in acute demand. Among others, the Hong Kong Housing Authority and the Hong Kong Housing Society will consider reserving premises equivalent to about 5% of the total domestic gross floor area for welfare purposes in suitable public housing projects in the future. We have completed a broad-brush review, confirming that for the majority of the public housing projects to be completed from 2026-27 onwards, this initiative would not substantially affect the completion dates of the public housing. The relevant bureaux and departments will take forward the initiative, with a view to providing more welfare premises to meet the medium to long-term needs of the community.

Enhancing the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities (the \$2 Scheme)

30. The Government has announced that the enhancement and anti-abuse measures of the \$2 Scheme will be implemented from 27 February 2022, including lowering the eligible age from 65 to 60 while new beneficiaries aged 60 to 64 must apply and use a Personalised Octopus Card tailor-made for the \$2 Scheme (i.e. the JoyYou Card) and extending the \$2 Scheme to red mini buses, kaitos and the tramways on the condition of their strict compliance with the Transport Department's monitoring conditions prior to their admission to the \$2 Scheme. The Government has started to accept applications for JoyYou Cards in phases from 2 August 2021 for persons aged 60 to 64.

Conclusion

31. The recurrent expenditure on social welfare in the financial year 2021-22 is estimated to be \$105.7 billion, accounting for around 20% of the recurrent expenditure of the Government. The Government will continue to strengthen collaboration with different sectors of the community, plan for and deliver suitable social welfare services.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
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