Highlights

- The Government launched the Elderly Health Care Voucher ("EHV") Pilot Scheme in 2009 to subsidize eligible elders to use private primary care services in the community that best suit their needs. The scheme was converted into a recurrent programme in 2014. Since the implementation of the EHV Scheme, the Government has increased the voucher amount thrice to the current HK$2,000, while unspent voucher can be accumulated up to HK$4,000 for later use. Moreover, the eligibility age for the EHV Scheme has been lowered from 70 to 65 since 1 July 2017 (Figure 1).

- The number of eligible elders and utilization of EHV have increased visibly consequential to the enhancement measures introduced in recent years (Figure 2). The proportion of eligible elders who had made use of EHV also tripled from 28% in 2009 to 84% in 2016. The figure dropped slightly to 78% in 2017, probably due to introduction of a lowered eligibility age in July 2017, causing a large increase in EHV-eligible population.

- In 2016, a total of 2.81 million EHV claim transactions were made. Despite the majority of 58% of EHV claims were made for the management of acute episodic condition in 2016, the proportion was slowly decreasing from the level of 69% in 2009. On the contrary, an increasing number of elderly were giving higher priority to preventive care when coming to healthcare spending decision, as respective proportion of EHV claim transactions increased from 7% in 2009 to 11% in 2016 (Figure 3).
Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (cont'd)

Figure 4 – Statistics of the EHV Scheme, 2009-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of healthcare professionals enrolled to the EHV Scheme</td>
<td>2 540</td>
<td>3 976</td>
<td>6 144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of places of practice accepting EHV</td>
<td>3 202</td>
<td>5 543</td>
<td>11 851</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5 – Number and growth rate of enrolled private healthcare providers by healthcare profession, 2013-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical Practitioners</td>
<td>1 645</td>
<td>2 387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Medicine Practitioners</td>
<td>1 282</td>
<td>2 424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optometrists</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiotherapists</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiropractors</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Therapists</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Lab Technologists</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiographers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3 976</td>
<td>7 153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6 – Proportion of practising private healthcare professionals participating in the EHV Scheme, 2016

- **Optometrists**: 67%
- **Dentists**: 44%
- **Medical Practitioners**: 42%
- **Chiropractors**: 36%
- **Chinese Medicine Practitioners**: 32%
- **Physiotherapists**: 22%
- **Occupational Therapists**: 6%
- **Medical Laboratory Technologists**: 3%
- **Radiographers**: 1%

Figure 7 – Average cost per EHV claim transaction by healthcare profession in 2016

- **Chinese Medicine Practitioners**: 16%
- **Optometrists**: 12%
- **Dentists**: 10%
- **Medical Practitioners**: 60%
- **Nurses**: 1%
- **Others**: 2%

Data sources: Census and Statistics Department, Department of Health, and Food and Health Bureau.

Highlights

- There was also a marked increase in the participation of healthcare professionals and the places of practice accepting EHV. In 2017, a total of 7 153 healthcare professionals enrolled in the scheme, involving 15 577 places of practices (Figure 4).

- At present, 10 categories of healthcare professionals practising in Hong Kong are eligible to participate in the scheme. The number of participating healthcare professionals has been on the increase since the commencement of the scheme. During 2013-2017, optometrists registered the most rapid growth (+284%), followed by nurses (130%), dentists (119%), and radiographers (111%) (Figure 5).

- Nevertheless, the proportion of practising private healthcare professionals participating in the EHV scheme varied between these professions. As shown in Figure 6, the participation rate of optometrists was the highest at 67% in 2016, followed by dentists (44%), medical practitioners (42%), chiropractors (36%) and Chinese medicine practitioners (32%). Participation rates of other private health professionals were relatively low, ranging from 1% for nurses to 22% for physiotherapists in 2016.

- An added concern is that the amount of subsidy received by the elderly under the EHV scheme might not be enough to cover the high private healthcare costs. As shown in Figure 7, a single visit to the dentist (HK$884) or optometrist (HK$1,769) may exhaust a significant portion of the annual voucher amount. The Department of Health is currently conducting a comprehensive review of the EHV scheme. According to the Government, it might further enhance the scheme taking into account the review findings and the Government's fiscal conditions.