

**Submission to the Legislative Council Panel on Health Services**

**“Proposed Government Grant and Relaxation of Financial Assessment  
Criteria for Samaritan Fund”**

1. The Consumer Council (“CC”) is pleased to have the opportunity to provide its views on the proposed government grant and relaxation of financial assessment criteria for Samaritan Fund (“SF”) for consideration of the Panel Members.

**Guiding principles**

2. CC is tasked with protection of consumer interests, and believes that in dealing with issues touching on consumer interests, the guiding principles should be:
  - i. easy access and affordability for consumers; and
  - ii. transparency and fair process.

**Proposed grant and relaxation of financial assessment criteria**

3. CC appreciates that there were increases in SF expenditure and applications due to technology advancement and rising medical demand from the aging population and chronic diseases. CC welcomes the Government proposal to provide a \$10 billion grant to SF to maintain the operation of SF and to enable it to meet increased expenditure.
4. CC also welcomes the Hospital Authority’s (“HA”) proposals of relaxing the eligibility criteria of SF to benefit more needy patients, such as:
  - i. Introducing a deductible allowance from patient’s disposable capital; and
  - ii. Simplifying the tiers of patients’ contribution ratio.

**Administration of SF**

5. HA is responsible for determining the drugs to be introduced and categorized as self-financed drugs with safety net, as well as managing

SF. There is concern that SF might be used as a justification by HA for excluding drugs proven to be of significant benefits but extremely expensive to provide in the Drug Formulary (DF).

6. CC pointed out in previous submissions that HA should increase transparency by providing reasons for not including certain new drugs in the DF. CC also suggested that there should be avenues open for suggestions to be made by interested individuals to bring new drugs to the attention of the Drug Utilization Review Committee for consideration.
7. On the issue of safety net and financial assessment criteria, CC is of the view that HA should collect patient opinions with regard to access to drugs and affordability on a continuous and systematic basis. Regular review on criteria for assessing a patient's affordability is suggested.

Consumer Council

16 April 2012