

**For information**

**Legislative Council Panel on Health Services**

**Implementation of the  
Online Checking of the Eligibility of Non-permanent Hong Kong  
Identity Card Holders for Subsidised Public Healthcare Services and  
Related Refinement of the Definition of Eligible Persons**

**Purpose**

This paper updates Members on the implementation of “Online Checking of the Eligibility of Non-permanent Hong Kong Identity Card Holders for Subsidised Public Healthcare Services” and the related refinement of the definition of eligible persons (EP) for public healthcare services.

**Background**

2. It has been the Government’s policy to provide public healthcare services to local residents at highly subsidized rates. As Hong Kong residents are qualified to obtain Hong Kong Identity Card (HKIC), the Government (through the Hospital Authority (HA) and Department of Health (DH)) has been accepting all holders of HKIC as EP<sup>1</sup> for subsidized public healthcare services.

3. There was no problem with accepting all HKIC holders as EP before 1987. By way of background, HKIC is an identity document rather than a travel document showing the immigration status of the holder. Prior to July 1987, persons who left Hong Kong for good had to notify the registration officer before their departure and to surrender their identity cards, if so required under the then regulation 17 of the Registration of Persons Regulations. With the introduction of the Hong Kong permanent resident status through the Immigration (Amendment) Ordinance in 1987,

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<sup>1</sup> At present, local residents, or EP in this context, is defined as patients falling into the following categories:

- (a) a holder of Hong Kong Identity Card issued under the Registration of Persons Ordinance (Cap 177);
- (b) children who are Hong Kong resident and under 11 years of age; or
- (c) other persons approved by the Chief Executive of HA (or by the Director of Health in the case of DH).

the above regulation and thus the notification requirement was repealed. Consequently, there are overstayers and former non-permanent Hong Kong residents (e.g. those who previously worked or studied in Hong Kong) who return to Hong Kong as visitors and use their “un-returned” non-permanent HKIC to access our healthcare services at subsidized rates as EP when they are actually non-eligible persons (NEP). This has resulted in revenue loss to the Government and need to be rectified.

### **Implementation of the Online Checking of the Eligibility of Non-permanent Hong Kong Identity Card Holders for Subsidised Public Healthcare Services**

4. We reported this issue to the Panel in January 2011. With the Panel’s support, we obtained funding from the Finance Committee on 28 January 2011 to implement the project of “Online Checking of the Eligibility of Non-permanent Hong Kong Identity Card Holders for Subsidised Public Healthcare Services” to plug the loophole and avoid possible revenue loss to the Government.

5. The online checking system is now being developed and is expected to be ready for launching in late 2013. Upon its launch, the frontline staff of HA and DH will first check the card face information of a patient’s HKIC during patient registration. For holders of non-permanent HKIC with specified codes<sup>2</sup>, staff would input the HKIC numbers into the computer system at public hospitals/clinics and the information will be transferred to ImmD electronically for checking. Upon receipt of each request for checking from a hospital/clinic, ImmD’s dedicated system would reply within a few seconds to confirm whether the non-permanent HKIC holder has a valid resident status on the day. Staff of HA and DH will then charge the patient at EP or NEP rate as appropriate depending on the checking result.

6. The dedicated electronic checking system in public hospitals/clinics will be used exclusively by authorised staff of HA and DH for the sole purpose of verifying whether the limit of stay of a holder of non-permanent HKIC is valid when using public healthcare services.

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<sup>2</sup> A non-permanent HKIC card has one of the following codes on the card face –

- (a) Code “C”: for those whose stay in Hong Kong is limited by the Director of Immigration at the time of their registration (e.g. those coming to work or study in Hong Kong);
- (b) Code “U”: for those whose stay in Hong Kong is not limited at the time of registration but whose validity of stay will expire upon their departure from Hong Kong for more than 12 months; and
- (c) Code “R”: for those who have the right to land in Hong Kong at the time of registration.

The proposed checking arrangement will apply to “C” code and “U” code holders only as the resident status of “R” code holders will not be changed.

Measures will be put in place to safeguard data security of the system.

### **Refinement of the Definition of EP**

7. Upon the launch of the online checking system, the current formulation of the definition of EP, which still makes reference to holder of HKIC (please see footnote 1), will need to be revised. Dovetailing the launching of the online checking system, we need to refine the formulation of the definition of EP to align with the existing policy intention of providing subsidized public healthcare services to Hong Kong residents. Having consulted relevant departments, we will refine the definition of EP as follows –

Patients falling into the following categories are eligible for the rates of charges applicable to EP –

- (a) ~~a~~holders of Hong Kong Identity Card issued under the Registration of Persons Ordinance (Chapter 177), *except those who obtained their Hong Kong Identity Card by virtue of a previous permission to land or remain in Hong Kong granted to them and such permission has expired or ceased to be valid;*
- (b) children who are Hong Kong resident and under 11 years of age; or
- (c) other persons approved by the Chief Executive of HA (or by the Director of Health in the case of DH).

*[refinement marked in italic]*

8. We will publish the refined formulation in the Gazette so that it will come into effect upon the launching of the online checking system.

9. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.