

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

**PANEL ON WELFARE SERVICES
PANEL ON HEALTH SERVICES
JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE ON LONG-TERM CARE POLICY**

Support Services for Carers of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the various support services rendered by the Administration to carers of the elderly and persons with disabilities, as well as the initial thinking on introducing a carer allowance for the elderly.

Policy Objectives

(1) Services for the Elderly

2. “Ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up” is the underlying principle of the Administration’s elderly care policy. This is also the wish of most elderly persons. Carers play a vital role in taking care of elderly persons who age at home. The Administration has been providing carers with information, resources, training and a wide range of elderly community care services, with a view to enhancing their capability of taking care of their elderly members, relieving their stress, and supporting our elderly citizens to age in the community.

(2) Services for Persons with Disabilities

3. One of the strategic development directions set out in the Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan is to empower persons with disabilities and their carers to become valuable social capital. Towards this direction, we provide a series of training and support for carers of persons with disabilities with a view to enhancing their ability and relieving their stress in taking care of their family members with disabilities.

Support Services for Carers

(I) Carers of the Elderly

Carer Training

4. District Elderly Community Centres and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres, home care service teams and day care centres/units for the elderly (DEs/DCUs) throughout the territory are providing support services to carers of elderly persons. Such services include the provision of information, training and counseling, assistance in forming carers' mutual-assistance groups, establishment of resource centres, demonstration and loan of rehabilitation equipment, etc.

5. The District-based Scheme on Carer Training was launched in 2007. Each of the 119 participating elderly centres was provided with a one-off seed money of \$50,000 to partner with community organisations in their districts for organising carer training programmes. The programmes include understanding elderly persons and the communication skills required, daily personal care for the elderly and information on common illness, as well as the knowledge and skills required for looking after elderly persons with special needs, for example, demented elderly persons, frail elderly persons or depressed elderly persons. These training programmes not only help strengthen carers' ability to take care of the elderly persons but also help relieve their stress. As at 31 March 2013, over 10 000 carers were trained.

6. Through the various kinds of support services, carers can obtain more information and skills, thereby enhancing their ability to take care of the elderly persons. Carers can also build up social and support networks among themselves to exchange views and experiences. This can help further relieve their pressure of being a carer.

Subsidised Community Care Services

7. Social Welfare Department (SWD) provides various kinds of subsidised community care services to support frail elderly persons to age in the community. These services include home-based care services and centre-based day care services. A series of long-term care services for frail elderly persons are provided through 24 Enhanced Home and Community Care Services (EHCCS) Teams, 60 Integrated Home Care Services (IHCS) Teams and 65

DE/DCUs throughout the territory. These services include care planning, basic and special nursing care, personal care, rehabilitation exercises, home-making and meal services, escort services, support and training for the carers, etc. These community care services not only provide appropriate support to frail elderly persons and facilitate them to continue to age in the community, but also provide their carers the opportunity to take breaks and alleviate stress.

Integrated Discharge Support Programme for Elderly Patients (IDSP)

8. As elderly persons continue to age, it is natural that the chances of their hospitalisation due to illness or accident will also increase. While the elderly patients themselves would suffer from their illness, their carers would get stressful as well. We believe that we could help reduce elderly patients' chances of re-admission to the hospital through enhancing elderly patients' and their carers' knowledge of the illness, building up their awareness of crises and enhancing their ability to handle accidents. Hence, we launched IDSP in 2012 in collaboration with the Hospital Authority (HA) to provide "one-stop" services for elderly patients discharged from hospitals in the territory. The elderly patients are not required to go through Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services for joining the programme. Pre-discharge planning, post-discharge rehabilitation and home support services are rendered to the eligible elderly patients and their carers. The home support services include nursing care, personal care, elderly sitting service, home modifications, home-making services, meal delivery services, transportation and escort services, training for carers, etc. It is expected that around 33 000 elderly patients will benefit from IDSP each year.

Respite Service for Elders

9. There are two kinds of Respite Service for Elders, namely temporary day care service and short-term residential service for the elderly. The service aims at providing support to carers, relieving their stress and allowing them to take a short break when need be, thereby encouraging and assisting elderly people to age in the community for as long as possible.

10. Day Respite Service for Elders is being provided by 65 subvented DEs/DCUs across the territory. As of 31 March 2013, SWD designated 118 day respite places at these DEs/DCUs. Individual DEs/DCUs can also make use of any casual vacancy to provide respite service. SWD will continue to designate day respite places in the newly established subvented DEs/DCUs.

11. Regarding Residential Respite Service, in addition to the 11 designated residential respite places provided by subvented residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), SWD also utilises the casual vacancies of the subsidised places in all subvented nursing homes and care-and-attention homes, as well as contract homes to provide Residential Respite Service. Since March 2012, all private RCHEs participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme have joined force in offering Residential Respite Service as well.

Financial Assistance

12. Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) takes special care of elderly applicants/recipients aged 60 or above through the setting of a higher asset limit, and the offer of higher standard rates, special grants and supplements. Depending on the health and family conditions, each elderly recipient who is not living alone will be granted a standard rate ranging from \$2,765 to \$4,585 per month. The rate is higher than that for able-bodied adults and has taken into account the psychological and social needs of elderly recipients, such as dining out, Chinese medicine practitioners consultations, newspapers and magazines consumption, etc. Elderly recipients are also entitled to other special grants to meet their special needs, such as glasses, dental treatment and removal expenses, travelling expenses to and from hospital/clinic, costs of medically recommended special diets, costs of rehabilitation and medical appliances, and relevant fees for Day Care Centre / Unit for the Elderly, Home Help Services / Integrated Home Care Services and Enhanced Home and Community Care Services. Families with elderly recipients are entitled to an annual long-term supplement for the replacement of household and durable goods if they have received CSSA continuously for 12 months or more. These special grants and supplements would help relieve carers' additional financial burden arising from their taking care of the special needs of their elderly members.

(2) Carers of Persons with Disabilities

Training and Support

13. The Administration fully recognises the right of persons with disabilities to live independently and to participate in the community, and is committed to providing the required community support and care services for persons with disabilities to facilitate their continued living in the community. SWD provides a wide range of community care and support services which seek to assist persons with disabilities in developing their physical, mental and social

capabilities to the fullest possible extent and to promote their integration into the community. These services also aim at strengthening the carers' capacity and relieving their stress so as to provide a better quality of life for persons with disabilities and themselves. Training and support services rendered to carers of persons with disabilities are as follows -

(a) *District Support Centre for Persons with Disabilities*

There are 16 District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities (DSC) in Hong Kong. By adopting a one-stop service approach, DSC provides a wide range of community support services for persons with disabilities and their families/carers. Such services aim at enhancing the domestic living and community living skills of persons with disabilities so as to facilitate their integration into the community. DSC also provides training and support services to the families/carers of persons with disabilities so as to strengthen their capacity and to relieve their stress.

(b) *Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities*

SWD has, since March 2011, launched a three-year Pilot Scheme on Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities (the Pilot Scheme) to provide a package of home-based personal care, rehabilitation training and nursing care services for persons with severe disabilities who are living in Kwun Tong, Wong Tai Sin, Kwai Tsing and Tuen Mun districts and on the waiting list for subvented residential care service. As the Pilot Scheme has achieved its intended objective and received positive response, SWD will regularise the service upon the expiry of the pilot project in March 2014, and extend it to persons with severe disabilities in all the districts in Hong Kong, irrespective of whether they are on the waiting list for residential care services or not, with a view to continuously providing integrated home care service to persons with severe disabilities, relieving the pressure of their families/carers and enabling those persons with severe disabilities to live in the community.

(c) *Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness*

SWD has revamped the community mental health support services and set up 24 Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness (ICCMWs) operated by non-governmental organisations in 18 districts since October 2010 to provide diversified, one-stop and district-based support services for discharged mental patients, persons with suspected mental health problems, their families and carers and residents living in the community. These services include casework counselling, therapeutic and supportive groups, outreaching services, day training, drop-in services, social and recreational activities, public education programmes etc. to enhance community understanding of mental health. Referrals to the Hospital Authority (HA) will be made where necessary for clinical assessment or psychiatric treatment. ICCMWs provide a series of support services ranging from prevention to crisis management for the families and carers of the patients; organise educational activities to enhance the families and carers' understanding of mental illness and their acceptance of the patients, as well as enhance their skills in handling the patients; and help them establish emotional support networks with family members of other patients.

(d) *Parents/Relatives Resource Centres*

Parents/Relatives Resource Centres provide emotional support and practical advice to parents and relatives of persons with disabilities/ex-mentally ill persons to enhance their understanding and acceptance of their dependants with disabilities, and help them obtain suitable training to strengthen their abilities in taking proper care of their family members with disabilities at home.

(e) *Day Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities*

Day Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities provides a range of centre-based day care services for persons with severe intellectual/physical disabilities who are aged between 15 and 59, including nursing and personal care, social and rehabilitation services, etc., while strengthening family members and carers' abilities in taking care of them, so as to enable more persons with severe disabilities to continue living in the community.

(f) *Residential Respite Service*

Residential respite service, attached to subvented residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs), provides short-term residential care for persons with disabilities aged 15 or above so that their families or carers may, with advance planning, take a short break (such as taking a sightseeing trip away from Hong Kong) or attend to some personal affairs (such as undergoing a medical operation). This also helps temporarily relieve the families or carers from their caring duties and alleviate their stress. Starting from April 2008, SWD has extended the service in some of the RCHDs to cover children with disabilities aged 6 to 14.

Financial Support

14. At present, the CSSA Scheme provides higher standard rates for persons with disabilities together with a range of supplements and special grants. These include “Grant to cover fees for Home Help Service/Integrated Home Care Service”, “Grant to cover costs of Enhanced Home and Community Care Services” and “Grant to cover costs of Community-based Support Projects for People with Disabilities and Their Families” for those recipients requiring special attention in care services. For those medically certified to be in need of constant attendance, such as tetraplegic recipients living at home, a “Care and Attention Allowance” might also be provided to cover the costs of care and attention services at home (including the cost of hiring a carer) on social worker’s recommendation.

15. In addition, the Community Care Fund (CCF) provides assistance to people facing economic difficulties. The “Special Care Subsidy for Persons with Severe Disabilities” under CCF provides persons with severe disabilities who are from families with financial difficulties, living in the community and not receiving CSSA, with a monthly special care subsidy of \$2,000, so as to facilitate them to obtain the necessary support. The “Special Subsidy to Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities for Renting Respiratory Support Medical Equipment” provides persons with severe physical disabilities who are from families with financial difficulties, living in the community and not receiving CSSA, with a monthly special subsidy of \$2,000 or \$2,500 for a maximum period of 12 months for renting necessary respiratory support medical equipment.

Self-help Organisations

16. The Administration has been promoting the development of self-help organisations (SHOs) to promote the spirit of self-help and mutual help among persons with disabilities and their families/carers, and to encourage persons with disabilities and SHOs to actively participate in the formulation of rehabilitation policies so as to ensure that planned services are tailored in such a way that the special needs of service users can be met.

17. Since 2001, SWD has been providing funding support to SHOs of persons with disabilities/chronic illness through the “Financial Support Scheme for Self-help Organisations of People with Disabilities/Chronic Illness” (the Scheme). The Scheme aims at promoting the spirit of self-help and mutual support among persons with disabilities and their families. Programmes/activities are organised to foster full integration of persons with disabilities into the community. Under the current round of the Scheme (i.e. 2012 to 2014), a total of 68 SHOs have benefitted from the Scheme and an allocation of over \$9.7 million has been granted each year. SWD also allocated one-off special grants to SHOs in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 respectively to further strengthen the SHOs’ functions of providing support for persons with disabilities and their families/carers.

Pilot Scheme of Carer Allowance for the Elderly

18. We attach great importance to the provision of appropriate support to elderly persons in the community. A pilot scheme on carer allowance for the elderly (carer allowance) is worth exploring, and is in line with our “ageing in place” policy direction. The Elderly Commission (EC) has preliminarily discussed the idea of introducing carer allowance. CCF Task Force of the Commission on Poverty would study the feasibility of introducing a pilot scheme on carer allowance under CCF, with a view to helping families in need to further assist their elderly members to age at home.

19. The subject matter is still at the initial stage of study. No specific details nor timetable have been set for the time being. The Administration is open to ideas and views on the scale and arrangement of the project, with a view to developing a practicable pilot scheme.

Advice Sought

20. Members are invited to note the contents of the paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
May 2013**