

Written submission on “Review of Integrated Home Care Services”

To: Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy, Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Health Services, Legislative Council

In Hong Kong there are 78,581 households consisting of just two elderly people, reported the South China Morning Post, but only 27,193 places are available under the home care scheme in question, resulting in almost 5,000 seniors in waiting list. This statistics is the elderly services users alone. If taking the uncounted disabled into account, it's hard to imagine how on earth so many unprocessed cases piled up and how many more out there have been suffering from the government's inaction and ignorance.

As the Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy gathers yet again to deliberate on the past practices of the Integrated Home Care Services in place ever since 2003, what I am presenting is not merely emotionless numbers but things that are fundamentally wrong: from the channels through which this service is being delivered to the mentality on how we have been organising social programmes, including the vested political and economic interests that distorted it.

Delivering tax-payer funded home care through NGOs alone is not enough and not sustainable and scalable. We need social business/enterprise solution and a thorough social innovation. Before too long the population of our senior citizens will reach such a number which will certainly beyond the ability of current Social Welfare Department-contracted NGOs to cope with. A contracted consultancy or even certain government offices themselves must be fully funded to support social businesses/enterprises in the marketplace to carry out home care services. The global social business/enterprise movement in the past decade has proved its viability, both in terms of business models and service qualities. Contracting social businesses/enterprises is not privatisation of government social service as these are private companies with clear social mandates.

As there are no legislations in Hong Kong yet to legally define and register social business/enterprise, I suggest Muhammad Yunus's seven-principal as the judging criteria, that is a social business/enterprise must dedicate itself to solving a social problem, operate on self-sustainable basis, not pay dividend beyond the shareholder's principal investment, retain profits within the organisation, not create additional environmental problems, improve staff and worker's salaries and working conditions, and have a joyful workforce.

Maybe we should try, really try this attempt to leverage the unlimited innovativeness of conscientious entrepreneurs. I suggest we contract certain social businesses/enterprises to clear up the prevailing waiting list whilst evaluate its effectiveness before gradually levelling it on par with NGOs' processing capacity.

This alone, of course, is nowhere near caring our home-stay seniors, who have contributed their entire life to make Hong Kong what it is today. Their choice of staying where they live and be who they are, instead of being transferred so early and so irreversibly to elderly homes, must be respected. If a universal pension scheme free of means test that will allow the needy to buy private care is a disruption and displacement of existing political and economic interests then disrupt and displace we have to. Not only a universal pension, but a fundamental reshuffle of our fiscal policy which reaps the government tens of billions of surplus dollars every year whilst at the same time so many of us, the ordinary and decent

people, are struggling to make ends meet. Planning a surplus for each year must be abandoned. The times demand a substantial funding of social programmes, even if the only choice is to run a moderate deficit.

Our current social programmes are mean and lack a holistic security network. In absolutely every aspect, be it those that already receive some relief or those totally neglected, additional funding needs to be injected. A moderate deficit by itself would probably fall short of meeting all social programmes, all that we the people need to live with dignity, so revolutionising tax structures are not only inevitable, but the right thing to do. The wealthy, the powerful, the vested interests all need to pay more. Likewise, corporations running a profit above a certain level, number of employees or stock market price should have no place to hide. The current tax structure charging in so few categories so heavily that a radical expansion, together with a concentration on incremental income brackets of the top earners must become a policy focus.

There is no justice and morality when so few have so much and so many have so little.

Democratic socialism is the solution. It best combines individual freedom with social justice. But this won't be easy, and possibly risky. However with enough political will and readiness to sacrifice there is nothing that we cannot accomplish.

I am a centrist and a democratic socialist. I shall give it my all and see it realised before too long.

Like Lord Tennyson wrote almost two centuries ago, "One equal temper of heroic hearts. Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will. To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

Hongyu Wang

See appendix for published articles of mine on social business/enterprise solution (appendix 1) and running fiscal deficit to fund social programmes (appendix 2-5)

Appendix 1: *How companies should respond as social business goes global*

Published on 11 July 2015 on online media EJ Insight:

<http://www.ejinsight.com/20150711-how-companies-should-respond-as-social-business-goes-global/>

Appendix 2: *Fiscal deficit needed to run social programmes*

Published on 20 November 2016 on online media VJ Media:

<http://style.vjmedia.com.hk/2016/11/20/20343>

Appendix 3 (in Chinese): *施行財政赤字以擴大社會福利開支*

于 2016 年 11 月 29 日刊登在網絡媒體獨立媒體: <http://www.inmediahk.net/node/1046142>

Appendix 4: *People first policies would pay*

Published on 4 December 2016 issue (volume LXX, Number 49) of Sunday Examiner as well as on Sunday Examiner's website: <http://sundayex.catholic.org.hk/node/3792>

People first policies would pay

We are in an unfathomable place. The government reaps tens of billions of surplus dollars every year while at the same time so many of us are struggling on the streets and in crumbling homes just to make ends meet.

This is not news. We know about inequality; all too well and all too painfully. During election campaigns, social issues dominate the debate and every candidate seems to have a God-given mandate to raise the poor and the needy from their misery.

The government does have a commission on poverty, but still work hours go up and the purchasing power people take home goes down. Destitution and despair. No way out. No outlet. Something's wrong.

It begins with fiscal policies. A fundamental revolution is badly needed and planning a surplus for each year must be abandoned. The times demand a substantial funding of social programmes, even if the only choice is to run a moderate deficit.

Our current social programmes are mean and lack a holistic security network.

In absolutely every aspect, be it those that already receive some relief or those totally neglected, additional funding needs to be injected.

Means testing, whether on the

grounds of income, assets or retirement, should be abolished. We need housing provident funds and mandated workplace schemes, as well as government contributions.

A retirement plan must be universal, so the less you possess at the age of 65 the more you collect from the public coffers, either in cash or kind.

Unemployment benefits as a right must be recognised. Exploitation under the guise of a free market must be taken off the radar and offending company directors prosecuted.

University enrollment needs expanding so the next generation can grow up seeing it as part of their life journey and a God-given right, rather than a privilege.

The list of what the people need to live with dignity goes on and on.

Reducing inequality and guarding against further fracture in the social fabric of society are not the only things calling for a moderate budget deficit, as maintaining continued growth as 2047 draws near will also be necessary. A deficit to fund social programmes would inject enormous confidence into our economy.

The current tax structure operates in so few categories that a radical expansion, together with a concentration on incremental income brackets of the top earners must become a policy focus

As the edge in technology and financial services, as well as trade and logistics is ebbing away, the political future becomes vaguer and more repressive. It will depend on our willingness and readiness to invest in people in the street to instil and maintain confidence in the marketplace.

A moderate deficit by itself would probably fall short of meeting all funding requirements, so taxing more and revolutionising tax structures are not only inevitable, but the way to go.

The wealthy, the powerful, vested interest and the octagons in the Executive Council and Functional Constituency all need to pay more.

Likewise, corporations running a profit above a certain level, number of employees or stock market price should have no place to hide.

The current tax structure operates in so few categories that a radical expansion, together with a concentration on incremental income brackets of the top earners must become a policy focus.

In this way, no social programme should be left under- or unfunded.

That would attack the mentality

of how we have been organising economic activities and social structures that have bequeathed brutal labour relations, an ossified work environment and indifferent interpersonal relations to an otherwise civilised society.

Blame goes to the legitimisation of exploitation of labour in the name of a laissez-faire philosophy. The repercussions are everywhere. There is little justice or morality when so few have so much and so many have so little.

Social programmes and democracy are not contradictory, but a combination of individual freedom with social justice. A representative government popularly mandated through the ballot box that is willing and able to intervene forcefully does not belong to a utopia, but a reality we must all strive for.

Think big, not small. Fiscal deficit is a starting point, but there will be more, including the breaking up of monopolistic property developers, banks and insurance companies, as well as the abolishment of illegal land hoarding demons.

With enough political will and readiness to sacrifice there is nothing that we cannot accomplish.

The promise of equality for all shall return once more to our ancient and great homeland, where there will be no more impoverishing of the poor to enrich the rich.

● Hongu Wang

Appendix 5 (in Chinese): 施行財政赤字以擴大社會福利開支

于 2016 年 12 月 16 日刊登在網絡媒體評台：<http://wp.me/p2VwFC-kNC>