

**For Discussion on
17 June 2019**

Legislative Council Panel on Health Services

Dental Care Services

PURPOSE

This paper sets out the Government's dental care policy, the provision of dental care services for persons with special dentistry needs and the latest update on the review of the Oral Health Goals of Hong Kong.

DENTAL CARE POLICY

2. Proper oral health habits are key to the effective prevention of dental diseases. In this regard, the Government's policy on dental care seeks to raise public awareness of oral hygiene and oral health and encourage proper oral health habits through promotion and education. While the Government is aware of the request from the public for provision of dental services for all, this would entail substantial financial resources. As such, apart from promotion, education, publicity and prevention, the Government has to accord priority in deploying limited public resources and focus on provision of emergency dental services for the public through General Public Sessions and dental care for those people with special needs, especially persons with intellectual disabilities who have special dentistry needs and elderly with financial difficulties. In recent years, the Government has launched a series of targeted initiatives to take care of the above groups of people. Moreover, the Oral Health Education Unit (OHEU) of the Department of Health (DH) has implemented oral health promotion programmes targeted at different age groups and disseminated oral health information through different channels to enhance oral health of the community.

SCHOOL DENTAL CARE SERVICE

3. At present, the OHEU administers a "Brighter Smiles for the New Generation" Programme to help children in kindergartens and nurseries establish

good tooth brushing and smart diet habits. Apart from this, “Brighter Smiles Playland” is specifically designed for 4-year-old children to help them learn good oral care habits through interactive games and activities. So far, a total of 858 kindergartens and nurseries have joined the Programme. As for primary school students, the DH has introduced similar programmes named “Bright Smiles Mobile Classroom” and “Bright Smiles Campus” Programme to promote oral health on a school-based and outreaching approach. A total of 123 primary schools have participated in the Programme. The DH will continue to encourage more kindergartens, nurseries and primary schools to actively participate in oral health education activities and programmes organized by the DH.

4. In addition, primary school students in Hong Kong, as well as students aged under 18 years old with intellectual disabilities and/or physical disabilities (such as cerebral palsy) studying in special schools, can join the School Dental Care Service (SDCS) of the DH to receive annual check-up at a designated school dental clinic, which covers oral examination, basic restorative and preventive treatment. SDCS also helps educate students on the importance of maintaining good oral hygiene and preventive care at an early stage. In the past three school years, over 96% of primary school students (i.e. more than 300 000 primary school students studying in ordinary or special schools) have participated in the SDCS each year.

5. To sustain the efforts made in primary schools, the OHEU has launched a school-based programme named “Teens Teeth” for secondary schools since 2005. Under this programme, senior secondary students are trained to promote and educate lower form school-mates about oral health care and hygiene on a peer-led approach (i.e. train-the-trainers).

EMERGENCY DENTAL SERVICES

6. Apart from oral health promotion and prevention, the Government also provides emergency dental service for the public and special oral care service for in-patients and persons with special oral health care needs:

- (a) Free emergency dental treatments (generally referred to as “General Public sessions”) are provided by the DH through designated sessions in 11 government dental clinics. Dental services under the General Public (GP) sessions include treatment of acute dental diseases, prescription for pain relief, treatment of oral abscess and teeth extraction.

The dentists will also provide professional advice based on individual needs of patients. To improve the disc allocation arrangement at the dental clinics with GP sessions, DH is now working on the provision of “self-service kiosks” service. As a start, the establishment of kiosks in Government Dental Clinics expected in November 2019 will be used to assist in attendance taking and eligibility checking. Having reviewed the stability and performance of the systems, the kiosk will then be tried out in dental clinics with GP sessions so as to facilitate disc allocation and avoid the need of long queuing time.

(b) Specialist oral maxillofacial surgery and dental treatment are provided by the DH’s Oral Maxillofacial Surgery & Dental Units (OMS&DU) in seven public hospitals for hospital in-patients, and patients with special oral health care needs and dental emergency needs. Such specialist services can be provided through referral by the Hospital Authority (HA) or private practitioners, etc. OMS&DU will arrange appointments for patients according to the urgency of their conditions. Those with emergency needs, such as cases of dental trauma, will be provided with immediate consultation and treatment. In addition, the HA also provides dental services in four public hospitals, where in-patients, patients with special oral healthcare needs and patients with dental emergency needs under referrals can receive oral maxillofacial surgery and specialist dental treatments by the dentists employed by the HA.

DENTAL CARE SUPPORT FOR THE ELDERLY

7. In recent years, the Government has launched a series of initiatives to provide elders with special needs to receive dental care support services, including the Outreach Dental Care Programme for the Elderly and the Community Care Fund (CCF) Elderly Dental Assistance Programme. Besides, the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme allows Hong Kong elderly persons aged 65 or above to use the vouchers for private dental services. Details are outlined in ensuing paragraphs.

(a) *Outreach Dental Care Programme for the Elderly*

8. In 2011, the Government launched a three-year pilot project to provide basic dental care (covering oral examination, scaling and polishing, and emergency

dental treatments) for elders residing in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) or receiving services in day care centres for the elderly (DEs) through subventing outreach dental teams set up by NGOs. Having regard to the experience gained, the Government converted the pilot project into a regular programme (entitled “Outreach Dental Care Programme for the Elderly” (ODCP)) in October 2014 to continue with the provision of outreach dental services for eligible elders with expanded scope of dental treatments covering fillings, extractions and dentures, etc. The pool of beneficiaries was also expanded to cover those residing in similar facilities (e.g. Nursing Homes for the elderly registered under the DH). Under the ODCP, a total of 23 outreach dental teams from 10 NGOs have been set up to provide free outreach dental services for elders in RCHEs, DEs and similar facilities in the territory. Between October 2014 and April 2019, the number of attendances under ODCP was about 193 100.

(b) Community Care Fund (CCF) Elderly Dental Assistance Programme

9. The Elderly Dental Assistance Programme with funding provided under the CCF was launched in September 2012 to provide free removable dentures and related dental services (covering X-ray examination, scaling and polishing, fillings and extractions) to low-income elders who are users of the home care service or home help service schemes subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). To enable more needy elders to benefit from the Programme, the CCF has expanded the Programme in phases in September 2015, October 2016, July 2017 and February 2019 to cover elders who are recipients of Old Age Living Allowance and aged 65 or above. The Programme has also been extended to February 2022 and the number of target eligible elders will increase by about 500 000. As at end of April 2019, a total of 540 private dentists and 70 NGO dental clinics have participated in the Programme, about 57 800 eligible elders have joined the Programme and about 45 400 of them have completed the required dental treatment. The remaining elders are under different stages of dental services.

(c) Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme

10. The Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme subsidises eligible Hong Kong elders aged 65 or above with an annual voucher amount of \$2,000 to use private primary healthcare services, including private dental services. The Government announced in the 2018 and 2019 Budget that an additional one-off \$1,000 voucher amount would be made available to each eligible elder. Furthermore, the

accumulation limit of vouchers has been increased from \$5,000 to \$8,000 this year and is made a regular measure, so as to enhance the flexibility of use and facilitate elders to plan for the use of their vouchers.

DENTAL CARE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

11. At present, people with disabilities can enjoy the dental services provided by the DH to the public. They can make use of the free emergency dental treatments provided at the General Public Sessions of the 11 government dental clinics and the specialist oral care services provided on referral basis by DH's OMS&DU in seven public hospitals and HA's OMS&DU in four public hospitals (see paragraph 6 above). In addition, the dental clinic operated by Hong Kong St. John Ambulance also provides free and comprehensive dental services to people with intellectual disabilities and other patients with special needs.

12. Noting that concerted efforts from parents and schools are necessary to facilitate children with intellectual disabilities to take care of their oral hygiene themselves, the OHEU has been conducting a special oral health promotion programme named the "Dandelion Oral Care Action" (the Dandelion Programme) since 2005 where a train-the-trainer approach is adopted to train and equip school nurses, teachers and parents of the participating special schools with special tooth cleaning skills. The OHEU trains at least one school nurse or teacher nominated by each school to be the Oral Health Trainers (OHTs). They will be equipped with certain basic oral care knowledge/technique. The OHTs, in turn, will train all teachers in school and conduct workshops to train the parents to take care of their children at home using the same oral care technique. The long-term goal of the Dandelion Programme is to enable children with intellectual disabilities to brush and floss their own teeth competently and independently by the time when they leave school. The oral care skill has become part of the self-care curriculum of the schools. Parents who participated on a voluntary basis have found that the tooth brushing and flossing skills of their children have improved. Currently, 28 schools in Hong Kong have subscribed to the Dandelion Programme.

13. Apart from the Dandelion Programme, the Government has further stepped up support measures for students with intellectual disabilities and/or physical disabilities (such as cerebral palsy) starting from the 2013/14 school year by allowing these students, who are studying in special schools participating in the SDCS, to continue to enjoy the dental services under the SDCS irrespective of their

grades until they reach the age of 18. If necessary, the SDCS would refer these students to the OMS&DU in the seven public hospitals for further dental treatment under sedation or general anesthesia.

14. Over the past few years, the Food and Health Bureau has coordinated with the Hong Kong Dental Association, the Hong Kong Special Care Dentistry Association and the Evangel Hospital to launch a “Pilot Project on Dental Service for Patients with Intellectual Disability” (the Pilot Project) (also known as “Loving Smiles Service”). Adult patients with intellectual disabilities and with economic difficulties will be subsidized to receive check-up, dental treatment and oral health education in the dental clinics participating in the Pilot Project. The Pilot Project provides dental services supplemented with special support measures such as special anesthetic procedures and behavior management to ease the anxiety of patients with intellectual disabilities, so as to improve their willingness to cooperate with the dentists and to receive appropriate dental treatment. If necessary, they would be arranged to receive other dental services under intravenous sedation or general anesthesia in the participating hospital. The Pilot Project has ended in July 2018 and over 3 000 eligible adult patients with intellectual disabilities received dental service.

Healthy Teeth Collaboration

15. In light of the experience from the “Loving Smiles Service”, in order to work out the best way forward in meeting the dental care needs of patients with intellectual disabilities, a new 3-year programme named “Healthy Teeth Collaboration” (HTC) was launched by DH on 16 July 2018. The objective of the programme is to provide free oral check-ups, dental treatments and oral health education for adults with intellectual disabilities. All non-governmental organisations (NGOs) operating dental clinics and providing services to the public were invited to participate in HTC. At least one of the Registered Dentists assigned by the NGO must have received formal / recognised training on provision of dental services for Persons with intellectual disabilities for participating in HTC. The training course provided by the Prince Philip Dental Hospital on dental care for people with intellectual disabilities is one of the recognised training programmes fulfilling the above requirement.

16. Through five NGO dental clinics participating in the project, namely Christian Family Service Centre Tokwawan Dental Clinic, Haven of Hope S K Yee

Hang Hau Clinic, Loving Smiles Special Care Dental Centre, Hong Kong Tuberculosis Association Rusy M Shroff Oral Health Services Limited and TWGHs Ho Yuk Ching Community Dental Clinic, the Government provides free dental care services including oral check-ups, dental treatments and oral health education to eligible persons. Scope of dental services include radiographs, preventive treatment, treatment of gum diseases, fillings, extractions (including wisdom teeth), and/or pulp treatment. If necessary, arrangements will be made for applicant to receive dental treatments under sedation or general anaesthesia at a designated collaborating private hospital.

17. As at end of April 2019, about 1 800 adults with intellectual disabilities have registered under Healthy Teeth Collaboration. Among them, about 1 600 have received first consultation. The Government will keep in review the implementation of the scheme and the dental service needs of the adults with intellectual disabilities, so as to consider how to improve the service and enhance the effectiveness of the service.

18. Besides, to improve the oral health of children with intellectual disabilities, DH will set up a Special Oral Care Service (SOCS) in Q3 2019 in collaboration with the HA at the Hong Kong Children's Hospital for pre-school children under 6 years old with intellectual disabilities for early intervention and prevention of common oral diseases.

PEOPLE WITH FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

19. As for people with financial difficulties, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme provides a dental grant for its recipients who are aged, disabled or medically certified to be in ill-health to pay for dental treatments services (including extraction, dentures, crowns, bridges, scaling and polishing, fillings and root canal treatment). Eligible CSSA recipients can approach the 67 dental clinics designated by the SWD for dental examination and cost estimation. They may then choose to obtain relevant dental treatments from any registered dentists in Hong Kong, including those of the SWD designated dental clinics. The amount of grant payable will be based on the exact fee charged by the clinic, the cost estimated by the designated clinic or the ceiling amount set by the SWD, whichever is the less.

MANPOWER FOR DENTAL SERVICES

20. Apart from the above services, curative dental care services, such as scaling and polishing and fillings, are provided mainly by the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Hong Kong. As at mid-April 2019, there are around 2 340 registered dentists in Hong Kong. According to the Health Manpower Survey, about 74% registered dentists worked in the private sector and NGOs. With the introduction of new dental initiatives by the Government, notably the ODCP, the CCF Elderly Dental Assistance Programme and the HTC Project on Dental Service for Patients with Intellectual Disabilities, it is expected that demand for subsidised dental services, and for that matter dental manpower, will increase significantly in the coming years. To prepare for the surge, the Government has increased the University Grants Committee-funded first-degree intake places for dentistry from 73 to 80 in the 2019/20 to 2021/22 triennium. The students will graduate from 2025 and become registered dentists. There will be 53 first-degree graduates who will become registered dentists after summer this year. The Dental Council of Hong Kong has also increased the licensing examination for non-locally trained dentists to two sittings a year starting from 2015, and has further improved the arrangement of certain parts of the Licensing Examination and updated its result retention policy and examination admission arrangement, so as to attract more qualified personnel to practise in Hong Kong and contribute to the diversity of the local dentistry workforce.

REVIEW OF ORAL HEALTH GOALS OF HONG KONG

21. The Fédération Dentaire Internationale World Dental Federation (FDI) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) jointly established the first Global Oral Health Goals in 1981 to be achieved by 2000. A review of these goals revealed that while a majority of populations had achieved or exceeded them, a significant proportion of the world's population still does not have the capability to achieve these goals. Therefore, in 2003, FDI and WHO have suggested the concept "*Think globally Act locally*" and considered that it would be more practical for different countries and regions to decide oral health goals that suit their situation. They have also proposed more general directions so as to facilitate regional and local oral health policy development and organization of various activities in order to achieve to local goals. Hong Kong has established the oral health goals to be achieved by year 2010 and 2025 as early as 1991 and planned for the

implementation of the recommendations¹. The Audit Commission Report No. 68 published in 2017 on provision of dental service has recommended that the oral health goals established in 1991 should be reviewed.

22. Before formulating policies and targets for oral health in Hong Kong, the DH needs to collect pertinent information on the oral health status and related behaviour of the people in Hong Kong for planning and evaluation of oral health programmes, and to plan for future oral health care development. The first community-wide Oral Health Survey (OHS) was conducted in 2001 and the DH undertook to carry out OHS every 10 years. The OHS 2011 was therefore conducted to collect information on oral health status of the people of Hong Kong and the next round of OHS will be held in 2021.

23. The objectives of the OHS 2021 include :

(a) to assess and update the oral health status of the HK population by conducting oral examinations among different age groups according to the recommendations of the World Health Organization;

(b) to collect information on demographic background, oral health knowledge, attitude and behavior, motives and barriers on oral care seeking behavior and treatment needs through questionnaire surveys among different age groups in order to correlate with their oral health status; and

(c) to provide updated oral health data for the DH to support Government policy and oral health goals formulation and plan for future dental services for the community.

24. The DH has set up an Expert Group in May 2019 comprising members from the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of Hong Kong, representatives from the Hong Kong Dental Association, representative from the College of Dental Surgeons of Hong Kong and dental experts from the DH. The Expert Group will review and establish appropriate oral health goals of Hong Kong taking into account the targeted groups included in the 2001 and 2011 Oral Health Surveys and the local situation.

¹ According to a Medical Development Advisory Committee paper issued in 1991 by the then Health and Welfare Branch of the Government Secretariat, the Government had agreed with the recommendations of the Dental Sub-Committee that operational oral health care goals should be established for Hong Kong for the years 2010 and 2025.

25. As a next step, the DH will set oral health goals for people of different age groups in Hong Kong by making reference to the results of the 2021 Oral Health Survey. DH will also explore ways to improve dental care services and recommend possible measures (including publicity and education) to the Government for achieving the goals.

ADVICE SOUGHT

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

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