

**For discussion  
on 19 May 2020**

**Legislative Council  
Panel on Welfare Services  
Panel on Health Services  
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy**

**Anti-epidemic Measures for Long-term Care Services  
during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Epidemic**

**Purpose**

This paper sets out the operation of long-term care services, including home-based, centre-based and residential care services, during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic, as well as other related anti-epidemic measures.

**Operation of Long-term Care Services during the Epidemic**

2. Having regard to the development of the epidemic and to ensure that essential and urgent services are maintained, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has adjusted the operation arrangements of subsidised welfare services (including long-term care services) in order to reduce the risk of infection arising from the gathering of people. Since 27 January 2020, SWD has issued a number of press releases to announce special arrangements for subsidised welfare services, including service suspension, provision of limited services and suspension of groups and programmes, etc. Non-governmental welfare organisations subsidised by SWD may operate their services based on these relevant principles. They may arrange for their staff to either work at office or from home in accordance with their human resource policies.

3. In view of the stabilising epidemic situation, SWD announced on 9 May 2020 that subsidised welfare services operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will be resumed by phases. SWD has reminded service operators that they should keep their service users informed of the latest arrangements. SWD also reminded these NGOs to provide suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) for their staff having

regard to relevant guidelines issued by the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH). SWD will continue to monitor the situation and work with stakeholders to ensure that subsidised welfare services are resumed in a gradual and planned manner. SWD will render assistance to individual service operators who may encounter difficulties in acquiring PPE when resuming their services.

### Home-based Services

4. Notwithstanding the outbreak of epidemic in end-January 2020, to support the needy elderly persons in the community, essential services for elderly persons in need have all along been provided under home-based community care services, including the Integrated Home Care Services (IHCS) and Enhanced Home and Community Care Services (EHCCS). These essential services include delivery of meals, escort, nursing and administration of medicine. As regards persons with disabilities, essential services such as escort, nursing and administration of medicine have continued to be provided under home care services for persons with disabilities (including Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities (HCS) and Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities (ISS)). During the epidemic, service units have also kept in contact with the elderly persons/persons with disabilities and their families/carers by phone to find out the situation and needs of the elderly persons/persons with disabilities concerned and provide appropriate services. NGOs may flexibly deploy their allocated resources to assist service users with as required during the fight against the epidemic.

5. Following the stabilising epidemic situation, in addition to continued provision of essential services, service teams of IHCS, EHCCS, HCS and ISS have provided personal care services for needy service users starting from 8 April 2020, including assistance in personal hygiene and procurement of necessities. For service users with other special or urgent needs, service teams will assess their needs and provide appropriate services. Starting from 15 May 2020, home care service teams have gradually increased service intensity and frequency, gradually resuming rehabilitation training and other assistive services, with a view to resuming the full-range of service provision.

### Centre-based Services

6. Since the outbreak of the epidemic in end-January 2020, centre-based services have not been opened to the public, and services are provided on a limited scale. Day Care Centres for the Elderly, Sheltered

Workshops (SWs), Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres (IVRSCs), Integrated Vocational Training Centres (IVTCs) and Day Activity Centres (DACs), however, have remained open depending on the situation to serve those with special need. Individual service users may, depending on their circumstances or needs, contact the centre or service unit concerned in advance.

7. SWD will keep a vigilant watch over the development of the epidemic situation and resume centre-based services in a gradual and planned manner. In general, there will be no drop-in for centre-based services before the epidemic situation further improves, and the centres will need to properly manage the flow of people in the meantime. The running of groups and small-scale programmes (such as talks) will be resumed on a pre-scheduled and by-appointment basis, with proper infection control measures put in place. Day care centres/units for the elderly should increase service intake gradually to around 30% of the service capacity from 15 May 2020 onwards. Service volume should further increase from 27 May onwards, with the aim of reaching around 50% of the service capacity. Similarly, day rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities in SWs, IVRSCs, IVTCs and DACs have also resumed gradually from 15 May onwards. Starting from 27 May, service users of District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities, Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness, Social and Recreational Centres for the Disabled and Community Rehabilitation Day Centres may join pre-enrolled groups and programmes, while there will be no drop-in's for the time being.

### Residential Care Services

8. Residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) have continued their normal operation since the beginning of the epidemic. They have also continued to receive services from the Visiting Medical Practitioner Service for Residential Care Homes, as well as Visiting Medical and outreach medical treatment and nursing services provided by the Hospital Authority.

9. Starting from 27 May 2020, the Multi-disciplinary Outreaching Support Teams for the Elderly and Professional Outreaching Teams for private RCHDs will resume rehabilitation and training service for private RCHEs and RCHDs respectively. Assessors under the Standardised Care Needs Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services will resume care needs assessment service at RCHEs on the same date.

## Flexible Arrangements on Service Requirements under the Funding and Service Agreements

10. In light of the changes brought about by the special arrangements during the epidemic, SWD issued a letter to NGOs on 11 February 2020, informing them that the impact of the epidemic on their service delivery will be taken into full consideration during future assessments. In particular, flexibility will be exercised in considering whether the performance of the NGO's service units meets the service requirements stipulated in the Funding and Service Agreements. SWD issued another letter to NGOs on 8 April, informing them of the details of flexible arrangements to be adopted in implementing the Service Performance Monitoring System, including extension of the deadline for submission of Self-assessment Reports on 2019-20 service performance from 20 April to 30 June 2020. In the event that service units are unable to meet targets (such as the Essential Service Requirements and Output/Outcome Standards) due to circumstances relating to the epidemic, NGOs may give a succinct account of the relevant circumstances leading to the under-achievement(s).

## **Anti-epidemic Measures for Long Term Care Services**

### Guidelines on Epidemic Control

11. For NGOs and subsidised service units to grasp the development of the epidemic and latest information and guidelines related to infection control as soon as practicable, SWD has forwarded a total of nine letters from CHP of DH since January 2020. SWD has reminded NGOs to refer to the guidelines of CHP to take timely and appropriate preventive measures.

12. Regarding residential care services, RCHEs and RCHDs must comply with the various requirements stipulated in the Code of Practice for RCHEs and the Code of Practice for RCHDs respectively, including the implementation of effective infection control measures and provision of isolation facilities. In addition, CHP issued the "Guidelines for Residential Care Homes for the Elderly or Persons with Disabilities for the Prevention of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)" in January 2020. The Guidelines provide comprehensive guidelines for residential care homes on infection control, stepping up personal and environmental hygiene, maintaining physical distancing between staff or residents, visiting

arrangement, arrangements to handle new admissions or residents returning from hospitals, residents or staff returning to Hong Kong from other countries or areas outside Hong Kong and handling of suspected or confirmed cases or close contacts in the homes. The Elderly Health Service of DH has also contacted all RCHEs in Hong Kong since January to remind staff of the measures and key points in the implementation of the Guidelines. Visits to the RCHEs have been conducted for on-site environmental inspection and assessment of the knowledge and skills of staff on infection control. Tailored-made advice and training have also been provided to staff of each RCHE.

13. SWD has emailed all IHCS teams, EHCCS teams, Recognised Service Providers of units providing home-based services under the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly, HCS teams and ISS teams on 4 May 2020. The service teams/units were referred to the “Guidelines for Home-based Services for the Prevention of COVID-19” issued by CHP for reducing the risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19.

14. In light of the latest development of the epidemic, CHP will continue to review related guidelines and make timely updates and revisions. SWD will keep in view these latest CHP guidelines and remind staff of residential care homes and home-based services in a timely manner to study and follow them in order to protect the health of staff, residents and service users.

#### Enhancing Surveillance Programme in the Community

15. For early identification of COVID-19 cases in the community, DH has provided free testing on COVID-19 for samples submitted by private doctors since 9 March 2020 under the Enhanced Laboratory Surveillance Programme. On 17 April, the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) issued a letter to operators of RCHEs and RCHDs. SFH appealed to the operators that if a resident is presented with symptoms of fever or respiratory infection, he/she should be arranged to seek medical consultation as soon as practicable and undergo virus testing for COVID-19 as needed in accordance with the professional assessment of a doctor.

#### Special Allowance to Strengthen Preventive Measures

16. In order to assist welfare service units to strengthen their epidemic prevention measures, SWD has provided relevant service units under

subventions or contracts, and all RCHEs and RCHDs, etc. with three rounds of special allowance (at a rate of \$5,000 or \$3,000 per round for the first two rounds, and \$10,000 or \$6,000 for the third round) for the procurement of PPE and sanitising items, covering about 3 500 beneficiary service units.

17. Furthermore, for the procurement of PPE and sanitising items, SWD has provided two rounds of special allowance at a rate of \$5,000 and \$6,000 respectively. The special allowance was disbursed to the beneficiaries of the Financial Support Scheme for Self-help Organisations of Persons with Disabilities/Chronic Illnesses (Financial Support Scheme) in 2018-19 and 2019-20, and Community-based Support Projects for Persons with Disabilities or related services receiving time-defined funding support from SWD on a project basis. The special allowance covered about 110 beneficiaries and service projects. From 14 to 23 March 2020, the Government also distributed some 850 000 face masks donated by various sectors to the beneficiaries of the Financial Support Scheme to provide them with better protective equipment.

#### Provision of Face Masks for Residential Service Units

18. The Government announced in February 2020 that it would provide one million face masks for the staff of subsidised, contract, self-financing and private residential service units (including RCHEs and RCHDs licensed by SWD) so as to assist them to continue to provide services. It was further announced on 21 March that the Government would double the monthly supply of face masks for the above residential care homes from one million to two million. Since late-February, SWD has distributed a total of five million face masks to the above residential service homes in six batches.

#### Special Allowance for Manpower Support for Residential Care Homes and Home-based Care Service Units

19. It was noted that some residential care homes and home care service teams had their regular staff being put under quarantine arrangements during the early stage of the epidemic and thus faced manpower shortage. SWD issued a letter on 11 February 2020 to inform relevant operators that a one-off special allowance for manpower support would be provided to SWD-subsidised residential care homes and home-based care service units, licensed RCHEs, RCHDs and Drug Dependent Persons Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres, and residential Child Care Centres registered under SWD. In the event of their staff being unable to

return to work due to their going into self-isolation, staying at home or being put under quarantine arrangements at home or other venues as a result of their return to Hong Kong from the Mainland during the period from 27 January to 29 February, the allowance facilitated relevant homes/units/centres to arrange additional manpower (including hiring of temporary staff/relief workers or internal deployment of manpower to work overtime, etc.) and maintain daily operations. The special allowance covered additional manpower expenses incurred arising from staff being absent during the period from 27 January to 13 March for the aforementioned reasons.

#### Special Allowance for Residential Service Staff

20. Staff of subsidised residential care homes have remained committed to work during the epidemic, providing comprehensive residential care service for the frail elderly, persons with disabilities, as well as children and youth in need of residential care service, while assisting residential care homes in ramping up preventive measures and stepping up cleansing and sterilisation of the premises. SWD issued a letter to subsidised NGOs on 26 February 2020, setting out a special allowance for the staff of subsidised residential care homes to show recognition and appreciation of their efforts in maintaining residential care services. The special allowance amounted to 10% of the monthly salary of an employee with a cap at \$4,000 for no less than four months (i.e. the period from February to May, and the expenses incurred in April and May are being disbursed after the passage of the Appropriation Bill 2020). The special allowance involves an expenditure of around \$208 million. The special allowance is expected to benefit 745 subsidised residential care homes with around 20 000 employees.

#### Provision of Anti-virus Coating Spray Subsidy for RCHEs and RCHDs

21. To step up infection control for residential care homes, SWD launched an Anti-virus Coating Spray Subsidy on 4 May 2020. The subsidy would support all RCHEs and RCHDs (around 1 000) to apply an anti-virus coating spray to their premises. The total subsidy amount is \$80 million. All subvented, contract, self-financing and private RCHEs and RCHDs with a valid licence as at 30 April 2020 are eligible to apply for the subsidy. The ceiling of the subsidy amount for each RCHE or RCHD is calculated on the basis of the floor area of the home. After a simple confirmation by SWD, the residential care homes concerned may procure the anti-virus coating service on their own for one-off or multiple applications of coating to provide disinfection protection for an aggregate

of no less than 180 days. The residential care homes should start the anti-virus coating spray on or before 31 August 2020.

Measures to Help Recognised Service Providers under the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly Tide Over Financial Difficulties

22. SWD has provided a one-off special allowance for a total of 136 service units providing day care services on a co-payment basis under the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly. The special allowance helped the service units to tide over financial difficulties arising from the suspension or reduction of service, involving an expenditure of around \$17 million.

**Advice Sought**

23. Members are invited to note the content of the paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau  
Food and Health Bureau  
Social Welfare Department  
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