

**For discussion
on 1 June 2020**

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

Provision of Healthcare Support for Persons with Disabilities

Purpose

This paper provides an overview of the various healthcare-related services and financial assistance currently provided by the Government for persons with disabilities (PWDs).

Public Healthcare Services

2. Public healthcare is the cornerstone of Hong Kong's healthcare system, serving as a safety net so that no residents (including PWDs) will be denied necessary healthcare services due to lack of means. The Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA) are committed to providing quality healthcare services and ensuring that all members of the community have access to comprehensive, affordable, professional and people-centred preventive, curative and rehabilitative services in their times of need. Generally speaking, as with all members of the community seeking medical attention from the public healthcare system, arrangements will be made for PWDs having medical needs to receive consultation and treatment at the appropriate medical units. Some of the healthcare services provided for PWDs under the public healthcare system are set out below.

DH's Clinic Services

3. The Student Health Service of DH aims to promote and safeguard the physical and psychological health of students and to provide health promotion and disease prevention services according to students' health

needs at various stages of their development. Eligible primary and secondary school students (including special school students) who have enrolled in student health services will be arranged to receive an annual free health check at a designated Student Health Service Centre.

4. The Pneumoconiosis Clinic and Chest Clinics of DH, together with other relevant medical units including those under HA, provide assessment, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services for patients with pneumoconiosis. Besides, the Social Hygiene Service of DH has introduced biologic therapy service at HA's Chai Wan Social Hygiene Clinic at the Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital since June 2018 to provide treatment for serious psoriasis patients.

Dental Care

5. PWDs are entitled to receive public dental services in accordance with the current dental care policy, including emergency dental services provided for the public by the Government, as well as special oral care services provided for inpatients and patients with special oral care needs. Furthermore, in recent years, the Government has prioritised its resources to care for persons with special dental care needs, in particular those with intellectual disability. In the past few years, under the coordination of the Food and Health Bureau, the Hong Kong Dental Association, the Hong Kong Special Care Dentistry Association and the Evangel Hospital launched the Pilot Project on Dental Service for Patients with Intellectual Disability (also known as "Loving Smiles Service"). Adult patients with intellectual disability and economic difficulties were subsidised to receive oral check-ups, dental treatments and oral health education at participating dental clinics. The Pilot Project ended in July 2018 with dental services provided to over 3 000 eligible adult patients with intellectual disability.

6. In light of the experience from the "Loving Smiles Service", DH launched a three-year programme named "Healthy Teeth Collaboration" (HTC) in July 2018. With the participation of non-governmental organisations, this programme continues to provide free oral check-ups, dental treatments and oral health education for adults with intellectual disability who are receiving either Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), Disability Allowance (DA) or medical fee waiver of

HA. As at end April 2020, around 2 800 adults with intellectual disability had registered under the HTC and 2 600 of them had received their first consultation.

7. Primary school students in Hong Kong, as well as students aged under 18 with intellectual and/or physical disabilities (such as cerebral palsy) studying in special schools, can join DH's School Dental Care Service to receive an annual dental check-up at a designated school dental clinic, which covers oral examination as well as basic restorative and preventive dental care treatments. To improve the oral health of children with intellectual disability, a Special Oral Care Service was set up by DH in September 2019 in collaboration with HA at the Hong Kong Children's Hospital for pre-school children aged under six with intellectual disability for early prevention and treatment of common oral diseases. Besides, CSSA recipients who are disabled can apply for a dental grant under the CSSA Scheme. Eligible CSSA recipients can approach the 73 dental clinics designated by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for examination and cost estimation of the treatments required. They may then choose to obtain relevant dental treatments from any registered dentists in Hong Kong, including those of the SWD designated dental clinics.

Vaccination

8. On vaccination, persons receiving DA and persons with intellectual disability are eligible for free or subsidised seasonal influenza vaccination (SIV). Under the Government Vaccination Programme, patients receiving DA or persons with intellectual disability currently attending public clinics and hospitals may receive free vaccination during follow-up consultation or hospitalisation. Besides, DA recipients and persons with intellectual disability may receive subsidised vaccination from private doctors enrolled under the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme. The Government also provides free SIV for residents of residential care homes for PWDs under the Residential Care Home Vaccination Programme and persons with intellectual disability (non-institutionalised) receiving services at designated institutions catering for persons with intellectual disability.

Financial Assistance

9. Public healthcare services in Hong Kong are heavily subsidised by the Government such that the charges are affordable by the general public. To ensure that no residents (including PWDs) will be denied appropriate medical care due to lack of means, DH and HA have put in place a medical fee waiver mechanism and various financial assistance programmes to provide financial support to those in need. In addition, SWD also provides allowances to PWDs through its Social Security Scheme and other support programmes.

Medical Fee Waiver

10. To ensure that no residents will be denied appropriate medical care due to lack of means, DH and HA have put in place a medical fee waiver mechanism to provide assistance to patients in need (including PWDs). Patients receiving CSSA as well as Higher Old Age Living Allowance recipients aged 75 or above are waived from payment of their public healthcare expenses, including the charges for standard drugs in the Drug Formulary. As regards other patients seeking medical attention at public hospitals and clinics, if they cannot afford medical fees due to financial difficulties, they may apply for a fee waiver at the Medical Social Service Units of public hospitals and clinics or the Integrated Family Service Centres of SWD.

Samaritan Fund and Community Care Fund Medical Assistance Programmes

11. HA provides financial assistance to patients who meet the specified clinical criteria and passed the means test by subsidising certain self-financed drugs or medical items¹ through the Samaritan Fund (SF) and the Community Care Fund (CCF) Medical Assistance Programmes. The SF covers a number of medical items required by PWDs in the course of medical treatment at public hospitals or clinics, including appliances for

¹ Guided by the principles of evidence-based medical practice, targeted subsidy and opportunity cost consideration, the standard fees and charges in public hospitals and clinics do not apply to designated Privately Purchased Medical Items and self-financed drugs. Patients who need such drugs and items and can afford the relevant fees have to purchase them at their own expense.

physiotherapy and occupational therapy services (e.g. prosthesis), as well as home use equipment and appliances (e.g. wheelchairs, shower chairs and breathing apparatus). To relieve the burden on patients and their families arising from the relevant medical expenses, the Government and HA introduced measures in early 2019 to enhance the means test mechanism² for the SF and CCF Medical Assistance Programmes.

12. With the support of the CCF, SWD implements the Pilot Scheme on Providing Special Subsidy for Persons with Permanent Stoma from Low-income Families for Purchasing Medical Consumables, which provides a maximum monthly subsidy of \$1,000 to relieve the financial burden of persons with permanent stoma from low-income families. This Pilot Scheme will be regularised. With the support of the CCF, SWD also implements the Special Care Subsidy for the Severely Disabled, which provides a maximum monthly subsidy of \$2,000 to assist persons aged below 60 living in the community and receiving the Higher DA in purchasing care goods and services or for other purposes related to nursing care.

Assistance for Specified Diseases

13. Eligible persons who suffer from pneumoconiosis and/or mesothelioma are entitled to compensation payable by the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board under the Pneumoconiosis and Mesothelioma (Compensation) Ordinance (Cap. 360). Compensation items include monthly compensation for pain, suffering and loss of amenities, monthly compensation for incapacity, compensation for care and attention, expenses for medical treatment, expenses for medical appliances and compensation for death resulting from pneumoconiosis and/or mesothelioma.

14. The Council for the AIDS Trust Fund approved the set up of the Support Fund for HIV/AIDS Patients and their Families in 2003.

² The enhancement measures include modifying the calculation method of annual disposable financial resources for drug subsidy applications by taking into account only 50% of patients' household net assets and refining the definition of "household" adopted in the means test.

Administered by SWD, the Fund provides temporary financial assistance for HIV/AIDS patients in Hong Kong in need.

Social Security Scheme and other Support Programme

15. SWD administers a number of non-contributory Social Security Schemes. Specifically, persons with severe disabilities may apply for the non-means-tested and non-accountable DA³ for assisting in meeting any special needs arising from their disabilities. The Normal DA is \$1,770 per month and the Higher DA is \$3,540 per month. Eligible PWDs who have financial difficulties may also apply for CSSA under which they may receive standard rates higher than those available to able-bodied persons as well as a range of supplementary and special grants taking account of their disabilities.

16. Furthermore, SWD's Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities provides integrated home-based support services as well as a maximum monthly cash subsidy of \$5,000, subsidising respiratory support medical equipment dependents' renting of such equipment and/or purchase of medical consumables.

Suggestion of Provision of Healthcare Vouchers for PWDs

17. As mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, public healthcare is the cornerstone of Hong Kong's healthcare system and serves as the safety net for the residents. PWDs with medical needs can seek medical attention from the public healthcare system to receive appropriate medical consultation and treatment. Meanwhile, the Government has dedicated substantial resources in providing various specific healthcare services and financial assistance for PWDs. The Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme launched in 2009 subsidises eligible elderly persons in Hong Kong to choose private primary healthcare services in their local communities that best suit their health needs, in order to supplement the existing public healthcare services. The Scheme is not subject to any means or asset tests.

³ Persons with severe disabilities who need substantial help from others to cope with their daily lives may apply for the Normal DA; and those eligible for applying for the Normal DA and in need of constant attendance from others in their daily lives may apply for the Higher DA (if they are not receiving such care in government subvented institutions or medical institutions).

Eligible elderly persons aged 65 or above are given an annual voucher amount of \$2,000. Elderly persons with disabilities may also use the vouchers. Taking into account the need to ensure efficient use of resources and the fact that PWDs generally require more specialised treatments and healthcare services, in order to not fragmentise or complicate the mode of subsidisation, the Government currently has no plans to set up a dedicated healthcare voucher for PWDs. The Government will continue to provide suitable healthcare services and financial assistance to PWDs under the existing mechanisms and will enhance the various measures as necessary.

Advice Sought

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

Food and Health Bureau
Labour and Welfare Bureau
Hospital Authority
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