

For information
16 December 2019

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

OVERVIEW OF MEDICAL AND DENTAL BENEFITS FOR CIVIL SERVANTS, PENSIONERS AND ELIGIBLE DEPENDANTS

PURPOSE

This paper provides Members with the latest overview of the provision of medical and dental benefits (hereafter referred to as “civil service medical benefits”) for civil service eligible persons (CSEPs)¹.

BACKGROUND

2. The Government, as the employer of civil servants, has a contractual obligation to provide civil service medical benefits. The scope of the benefits is set out in the Civil Service Regulations, Civil Service Bureau Circulars and Circular Memoranda. Those provisions form part of the terms and conditions of employment of civil servants.

ENHANCED SERVICES

3. In recent years, with the support of the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA), we have enhanced the provision of medical and dental services for some 560 000 CSEPs on various fronts. The relevant measures are set out in paragraphs 4 to 13 below.

¹ Civil service eligible persons consist of –

- (a) monthly paid civil servants and their eligible dependants;
- (b) retired civil servants living in Hong Kong and in receipt of a pension or an annual allowance and their eligible dependants living in Hong Kong;
- (c) eligible dependants of civil servants killed on duty and living in Hong Kong;
- (d) eligible dependants living in Hong Kong and in receipt of a pension under the Widows and Orphans Pension Scheme or the Surviving Spouses’ and Children’s Pension Scheme following the death of civil servants while in service or after retirement; and
- (e) other persons who are eligible for civil service medical benefits by way of their terms of appointment.

(a) Families Clinic Services

4. Currently, DH provides general out-patient services for CSEPs through six Families Clinics, including the Sai Kung Families Clinic which commenced service in December 2018. Of the six Families Clinics, two are on Hong Kong Island, one in Kowloon and three in the New Territories. We have also started the planning work for the seventh Families Clinic in Tseung Kwan O and the eighth Families Clinic in Kwun Tong.

5. Apart from providing general out-patient services for CSEPs, Families Clinics also provide or will provide the following services -

- (i) In view of the importance of healthy diet in preventing and treating certain diseases, the scope of services in Families Clinics has been expanded to cover dietitian services since 2013, providing individual and group dietary counselling and organising health talks;
- (ii) To improve CSEPs' abilities in coping with pressure, Families Clinics have been providing clinical psychological services since 2016, offering individual counselling, as well as organising health talks to enhance mental health education;
- (iii) To set up a multi-disciplinary team including experienced nursing and allied health professionals (comprising optometrist, physiotherapist, dietitian and clinical psychologist) to deliver a systemic health care programme called the Integrated Care Programme (ICP)² for patients with diabetes mellitus (DM) in Families Clinics, starting from March 2020. ICP is an evidence-based programme which seeks to improve the quality of care for DM patients in Families Clinics by providing them with appropriate care and health education to prevent and identify complications early, with a view to better controlling the disease progression and reducing utilisation of specialist out-patient services and emergency services as well as hospitalisation; and
- (iv) Many CSEPs are patients of chronic diseases such as hypertension and hyperlipidaemia. The different time intervals between doses and medication instructions may give rise to drug-use hazards. To reduce improper drug use by patients and enhance drug use safety, Families Clinics will launch a Stable Drug Use pilot programme from March 2020 where patients with stable chronic diseases will be invited to participate. Participating patients will be arranged to meet the pharmacist who will

² Formerly known as Risk Assessment and Management Programme.

first seek an understanding of the patients' drug-use situation to ensure that they will take their drugs properly and safely before dispensing the same drugs to them again. Depending on their clinical conditions, participating patients will also be arranged to receive counselling from nurses and/or dietitians as necessary. We expect that the pilot programme will reduce the need for patients with chronic diseases to receive follow-up consultations with doctors, thus releasing the consultation slots for other CSEPs in need.

(b) Enhancement of Priority Discs Arrangement for Civil Servants

6. Besides the Families Clinics, CSEPs may also visit the General Outpatient Clinics (GOPCs) under the management of the HA free of charge. Through its GOPCs, the HA provides general out-patient services to the general public, including CSEPs. As of 30 September 2019, of the 73 GOPCs under the HA, 65 of them have reserved a number of priority discs for serving civil servants so as to enable them to receive medical treatment with the use of priority discs and return to work, if considered fit, as early as possible to maintain normal workforce. To enhance the priority discs arrangement in the GOPCs and having regard to the utilisation of priority discs in various GOPCs, the HA has since April 2019 redistributed the priority discs among six GOPCs such that priority discs in clinics with lower demand were redistributed to those with higher demand, with a view to better utilising the priority discs resources and enabling serving civil servants to receive appropriate medical services. We have been closely monitoring the utilisation of priority discs together with the HA and plan to redistribute the priority discs of another six GOPCs starting from April 2020 to further enhance the priority discs arrangement.

(c) Dental Services

7. There are currently 39 General Dental Clinics (GDCs) under the DH providing dental benefits for CSEPs. In early 2020, the DH will set up a new GDC in the newly constructed West Kowloon Government Offices in Yau Ma Tei with 16 general dental surgeries coming into operation by phases. Upon the full commissioning of these additional general dental surgeries, the DH will have a total of close to 260 general dental surgeries for the exclusive use by CSEPs.

8. As regards specialised dental services, the Government has also been putting in resources continuously to enhance service capacity and reduce the waiting time of CSEPs for specialised dental services. In 2018-19, a total of five new surgeries commenced operation for enhancing the orthodontic and prosthodontic services. The DH plans to set up additional surgeries, three for prosthodontic service and another three for periodontal service, in the coming few

years. With the full operation of these 11 specialised dental surgeries, it is expected that an additional capacity of 18 000 attendances will be provided each year.

9. In addition, to further enhance the dental services for CSEPs, the DH will create more Dental Hygienist posts by phases starting from 2019-20. The duties of the additional manpower will focus mainly on the provision of oral cleansing treatment and oral care education for patients with a view to fostering good habits of dental care and hygiene among CSEPs.

(d) Reimbursement of Medical Expenses

10. In 2018-19, the DH approved about 98 700 applications for reimbursement of medical expenses from CSEPs³, involving a cost of some \$760 million. As compared with 2017-18, the number of applications approved has increased by approximately 4.5%, with an increase of approximately 10.6% in reimbursement expenditure. Around 83.6% of the total reimbursement expenditure was covered by the direct payment arrangement, which is comparable to the 85.6% in 2017-18.

11. To meet an anticipated increase in the demand for the reimbursement of medical expenses, the provision under the Original Estimate earmarked for reimbursing medical expenses to CSEPs in 2019-20 has been increased to \$1.1011 billion.

(e) Dedicated Imaging Services

12. The Government set up an Imaging Centre at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in 2011 to provide dedicated general Computed Tomography, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and ultrasound scanning services for CSEPs to reduce their waiting time for such services at HA hospitals. We extended the service hours of MRI service and introduced mammographic service at the Imaging Centre in January and March 2019 respectively to further enhance the imaging services for CSEPs.

³ In case the relevant drugs, equipment and services are prescribed by the attending HA or DH doctor on medical grounds but are not available in HA or DH, CSEPs may apply to DH for reimbursement of the relevant medical expenses. If drugs on HA's self-financed items list and some specified self-financed equipment or services are prescribed by the attending HA doctor on medical grounds and such items are available in HA, the CSEP also will not be required to make any payment out-of-pocket. DH will, upon receipt of application from the CSEP, arrange for direct payment of the relevant medical expenses to HA in accordance with the direct payment arrangement.

CHINESE MEDICINE SERVICES

13. Following the Chief Executive's announcement in her 2018 Policy Address of introducing Chinese Medicine as part of the civil service medical benefits, we have immediately proceeded to work out the appropriate arrangements for providing Chinese medicine services to CSEPs. To expedite the implementation of the new service, we will provide the service in the form of a pilot scheme at two Chinese Medicine Centres for Teaching and Research (CMCTRs). At present, CMCTRs are operating under a tripartite collaboration model involving the HA, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local universities, with the NGOs being responsible for the management and daily operation of the CMCTRs. We will set up Chinese Medicine Clinics for civil servants at two CMCTRs located respectively in Eastern District of Hong Kong Island (Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital) and Tsuen Wan of the New Territories (Yan Chai Hospital) to provide free Chinese medicine general consultation and acupuncture services to CSEPs. The pilot scheme is expected to be launched in March 2020 and the annual service quota will be around 63 000.

WAY FORWARD

14. Within the parameters of the existing or new medical facilities, we will continue to work closely with the DH and HA to further enhance the medical benefits for CSEPs.

15. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Civil Service Bureau
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