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Panel on Welfare Services

Subcommittee on Issues Relating to the Silver Age Card

Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat for the meeting on 31 May 2021

Application of gerontechnology in Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the application of gerontechnology in Hong Kong and gives an account of the discussions of the Panel on Welfare Services ("the Panel") and the Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy ("the Subcommittee") formed under the Panel and the Panel on Health Services on the application of gerontechnology in elderly care services.

Background

Application of gerontechnology in elderly and rehabilitation care

2.　Following the announcement in the Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Address, a $1 billion Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care ("the I&T Fund") was set up in December 2018 to subsidize eligible elderly and rehabilitation service units[1] to procure, rent or try out innovative technology products, with a view to improving the quality of life of service users and reducing the burden and pressure of care

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[1]　Non-governmental organizations and private organizations receiving subsidies from the Social Welfare Department and providing subsidized services for elderly persons or persons with disabilities are eligible for applying for the I&T Fund.　These include, as at December 2020, about 600 residential care homes for the elderly and persons with disabilities and over 1 000 service units providing subsidized community care and support services or day rehabilitation and community support services for the elderly and persons with disabilities.

staff and carers.   The innovative technology products in the case of procurement and rental cover devices, equipment and tools that help enhance the effectiveness and quality of care, as well as mobile applications and high-end hardware and software.   Applicant organizations can also apply for subsidy to trial use newly developed technology products in their service units.   An Assessment Panel is formed to examine and advise on the applications for the I&T Fund and recommend the amount of grants.   The assessment criteria include: (a) the feasibility, sustainability and cost-effectiveness of the innovative technology products; (b) the benefits brought by the innovative technology products to service users and care staff; and (c) the experience, ability and professional knowledge of the applicant organisations and service units to use the innovative technology products, etc. The maximum grants by type of service units for procuring or renting innovative technology products are in **Appendix I**.   The ceiling for the grant under each application for the purpose of trial use of newly developed technology products is $5 million.

3.   The bulk of the $1 billion funding for the I&T Fund is estimated to be progressively disbursed within five years starting from 2019-2020. According to the Administration, three tranches of grants totalling over $200 million have been approved for about 970 elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure or rent over 4 200 items of technology products under the I&T Fund.   For the fourth tranche application which was closed on 2 November 2020 with applications from about 640 service units involving a total of around 3 000 items of technology products were received, the first cluster of approved items has been released.   The fifth tranche was opened for application from 17 February to 4 May 2021.   As regards applications for trial use of newly developed technology products, four applications have been received so far as at April 2021 and vetting is underway.

Gerontechnology Platform

4.   It was announced in the Chief Executive's 2020 Policy Address Supplement that an inclusive Gerontechnology Platform would be designed, developed and operated under the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund ("the SIE Fund")[2] to link up different stakeholders on

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[2]   Launched in 2013, the SIE Fund seeks to alleviate poverty and social exclusion as well as foster the well-being and cohesion of the society by promoting social innovation and nurturing social entrepreneurship.   Established as a Trust Fund under the Secretary for Home Affairs Incorporated, it is overseen by the Commissioner for Efficiency.   A task force under the Commission on Poverty provides advice on policies and procedures governing the operation of the SIE Fund and matters relating to its administration.

the supply and demand sides and enhance synergy by way of engagement, cross-sector partnership and collaboration. The goal was to foster the development and application of gerontechnology as a means to enhancing the well-being, quality of life, independence and self-reliance of the elderly as well as providing support to their families, caregivers, healthcare staff and institutions, particularly under the "new normal".

5.   Following an open invitation exercise to invite proposals in 2019, the SIE Fund has engaged an intermediary[3] in end-2020 to design, develop and operate the Gerontechnology Platform which will comprise four basic functionalities, namely (a) a knowledge hub; (b) network and capacity building; (c) consultancy, localization and testing support for gerontechnology products; and (d) impact assessment. As the second flagship project of the SIE Fund, the Gerontechnology Platform has commenced in January 2021 and will last for three years.

Promoting the use of gerontechnology products

6.   The Social Welfare Department ("SWD") has commissioned the Hong Kong Council of Social Service ("HKCSS") to promote the use of innovative technology in long-term care services and coordinate the collaboration among various stakeholders. In addition, the Administration, HKCSS and the Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation have jointly organized the Gerontech and Innovation Expo cum Summit since 2017 to showcase local and overseas innovative products and concepts, and provided a collaborative platform for various stakeholders to continue to promote the development of gerontechnology.

Deliberations of the Panel and the Subcommittee

7.   Issues relating to the application of gerontechnology in elderly care services were discussed by the Panel and the Subcommittee in January 2018 and June 2020 respectively. The major deliberations and concerns of members are summarized in the ensuing paragraphs.

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[3] A collaborative coalition led by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and comprising the following nine other organizations: Global Centre for Modern Ageing Ltd; Haven of Hope Christian Service; Hong Kong Productivity Council; Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation; Jockey Club Rehabilitation Engineering Centre of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University; Logistics and Supply Chain MultiTech R&D Centre Limited; Marsh (Hong Kong) Ltd; Our Hong Kong Foundation Ltd; and School of Nursing of The University of Hong Kong.

Use of gerontechnology products by elderly and rehabilitation service units

8.   There was a view that the Administration should step up promoting the application of gerontechnology and local research and development ("R&D") of gerontechnological products. Development of tailor-made products and modifications to existing products should be explored. Some members expressed concern that some private residential care homes for the elderly ("RCHEs") were unable to use large-sized gerontechnological products due to lack of space.

9.   The Administration advised that it would explore the inclusion of gerontechnological products which had become widely used by service units into the Furniture and Equipment List of the Lotteries Fund as standard items for elderly and rehabilitation service units. Under the I&T Fund, HKCSS would give advice to applicant organizations on the types of products to be used as appropriate. Applicant organizations might also identify suitable technology R&D companies as working partners to try out the latter's newly developed gerontechnological products. Trial use of products enabled customization of the products concerned to suit the needs of the applicant organizations. Many R&D companies had also taken into account the environment of local RCHEs when designing gerontechnological products.

10.   Members were concerned that due to slow internet speed and outdated computer software, some RCHEs were unable to use some popular video chat applications (e.g. Zoom) for residents to communicate with their family members when no visit was allowed to RCHEs during the coronavirus disease 2019 epidemic. The Administration advised that with an allocation of about $205 million through the Lotteries Fund, a four-year pilot project had been launched to provide free Wi-Fi service in a progressive manner at around 1 350 welfare service units operated by subvented organizations from January 2020 to encourage them to make use of technology products to improve elderly and rehabilitation care services.

11.   Some members considered that the Administration should evaluate whether application of gerontechnology had helped RCHE residents enhance physical functions and maintain life skills, cognitive status and social abilities. The Administration advised that applicant organizations were required to explain how gerontechnological products would benefit service users and their staff in their applications for the I&T Fund. Besides, applicant organizations were required to allow members of the elderly care and rehabilitation sector to visit their service units to see how the products subsidized by the I&T Fund had benefited service users and staff of the service units.

Application of gerontechnology to facilitate ageing in place

12.   Members noted that the Government's elderly care policy was "ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up". There was a view that the I&T Fund should accept applications from users of home-based services who were assessed as having the need for using gerontechnological products at home. These members enquired whether the I&T Fund would be extended to subsidize needy elderly persons to procure or rent gerontechnological products, so as to help delay the deterioration of their health conditions and relief the stress of their carers. The Administration advised that it had no plan to accept applications from individuals under the I&T Fund at this stage. It should be noted that since gerontechnological products would be used by welfare service units in delivering community care and home-based services for the elderly, users of these services would also benefit from the I&T Fund.

13.   Members noted that the Innovation and Technology Bureau had launched the Innovation and Technology Fund for Better Living ("FBL") in May 2017 to fund innovation and technology projects which would make people's daily living more convenient, comfortable and safer, or address the needs of specific community groups. Non-governmental organizations receiving subvention from SWD were eligible to apply for FBL. In response to members' enquiry about the target beneficiaries of FBL, the Administration advised that FBL covered various project themes and some of them were related to elderly and rehabilitation care. Projects funded by FBL should be able to benefit the public at large or specific groups (such as the elderly or disabled) and the deliverables could be in the form of mobile apps, products, devices, equipment, tools, services and software.

Relevant papers

14.   A list of the relevant papers on the Legislative Council website is in **Appendix II**.

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**Maximum grant by type of service units under the Innovation and Technology Fund
for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care**

Table 1: Elderly Services

Type of Service Units	Maximum Grant ($ million)
Residential Care Service (per home)	
1. Residential Care Home for the Elderly / Nursing Home	
- with a capacity of 50 or below	0.3
- with a capacity of 51 to 150	0.6
- with a capacity of above 150	0.9
Community Care and Support Service (per centre / unit)	
2. District Elderly Community Centre	
3. Pilot Scheme on Multi-disciplinary Outreaching Support Teams for the Elderly	0.5
4. Neighbourhood Elderly Centre	
5. Day Care Centre for the Elderly	
6. Enhanced Home and Community Care Services	
7. Integrated Home Care Services	
8. Home Help Service	0.3
9. Recognised Service Provider under the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly	
10. Bought Place Scheme on Day Care Units for the Elderly	
11. Social Centre for the Elderly	0.2

Table 2: Rehabilitation Services

Type of Service Units	Maximum Grant ($ million)
Residential Care Service (per home)	
1. Residential Care Home for Persons with Disabilities / Residential / Transitional Care and Support Centre for Tetraplegic Patients	
- with a capacity of 50 or below	0.3
- with a capacity of 51 to 150	0.6
- with a capacity of above 150	0.9
Day Rehabilitation and Community Support Service (per centre / unit)	
2. Day Activity Centre (with 80 places or above)	
3. Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centre (with 80 places or above)	
4. Sheltered Workshop	0.5
5. Integrated Vocational Training Centre – Day Service	
6. District Support Centre for Persons with Disabilities	
7. Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness	
8. Day Activity Centre (with below 80 places)	
9. Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centre (with below 80 places)	
10. Special Child Care Centre	
11. Early Education and Training Centre	
12. Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities	
13. Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities	0.3
14. Transitional Care and Support Centre for Tetraplegic Patients	
15. Community Rehabilitation Day Centre	
16. On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services	
17. Pilot Scheme on Professional Outreaching Team for Private Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities	
18. Parents / Relatives Resource Centre	
19. Social and Recreational Centre for the Disabled	
20. Community Rehabilitation Network	
21. Rehabilitation and Training Centre for Visually Impaired Persons	0.2
22. Multi-service Centre for the Hearing Impaired Persons	
23. Communication and Information Service for Visually Impaired Persons	

Source: Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care Manual published by Social Welfare Department (February 2021 version)

Relevant papers on application of gerontechnology
in elderly care services

Meeting	Date of meeting	Paper
Panel on Welfare Services	8 January 2018 (Item IV)	Agenda Minutes
Joint Subcommittee on Long-term Care Policy	1 June 2020 (Item I)	Agenda Minutes CB(2)1250/19-20(01)

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