

**For discussion on
20 December 2024**

Paper FC 10/2024

Family Council

**The Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address
Family-Related Policy Initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau**

PURPOSE

We briefed the Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services in November 2024 on the new and on-going initiatives pertaining to the welfare portfolio as covered in the Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement. The relevant paper is at **Annex**. Members are invited to note the paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
December 2024**

For Information
on 11 November 2024

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

2024 Policy Address Policy Initiatives of the Labour and Welfare Bureau

Introduction

This paper sets out the new and on-going welfare initiatives announced in the 2024 Policy Address and Policy Address Supplement.

Summary of Policy Priorities/New Initiatives

2. The Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and Social Welfare Department (SWD) will implement the following new welfare initiatives :

- Introducing targeted poverty alleviation projects having regard to the needs of the target groups (paragraph 3);
- Providing more choices for cross-boundary elderly care (paragraphs 4 to 6);
- Increasing the number of Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly (RCSV) to strength support for frail elderly persons (paragraph 7);
- Exploring feasible ways to enable elderly persons to receive portable cash assistance more conveniently (paragraph 8);
- Making preparation for the implementation of the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance (the Ordinance) (paragraph 9);
- Piloting Community Parents and Children Centres to strengthen the prevention of child abuse from the source (paragraph 10);
- Strengthening the support for working parents (paragraph 11);
- Strengthening the support for carers to relieve their pressure (paragraphs 12 to 13); and

- Raising the quality and quantity of rehabilitation services to address the different needs of persons with disabilities (paragraph 14).

Details of Policy Priorities/New Initiatives

Targeted Poverty Alleviation

3. The Government has adopted the strategy of targeted poverty alleviation by directing resources to those most in need. This approach is well-received by the community. We will focus on the following key areas:

- (i) expanding the Strive and Rise Programme – We launched the third cohort of the programme in October this year to recruit 4 000 mentees. We will also encourage youth leaders of the Alumni Club to organise activities for self-development and enhance training for mentors;
- (ii) extending the Pilot Programme on Community Living Room (CLR) – We will set up three additional CLRs next year in areas clustered with subdivided units (SDUs). These CLRs are expected to benefit about 1 300 target households, serving about 200 000 attendances a year. Including the four CLRs already launched, they are expected to serve about 3 050 SDU households, serving about 470 000 attendances a year;
- (iii) enhancing the School-based After-School Care Service Scheme – From this school year, the number of primary schools covered by the Scheme has increased from 50 to over 110, enabling students in need to stay at school outside school hours for care and learning support, allowing their parents to take up jobs. Subject to actual utilisation and outcome of the scheme, we plan to encourage more schools to participate in the scheme in the 2025/26 school year, without capping the number of places; and
- (iv) subsidising elderly persons receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) to reside in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) in the Guangdong Province – Funding will be sought from the Community Care Fund to launch a three-year pilot scheme in 2025 for subsidising elderly CSSA recipients who opt to retire in Guangdong to reside in designated RCHEs in the Province to improve

their living environment and quality of life. Each eligible elderly person will receive a monthly subsidy of \$5,000 and 1 000 quotas will be provided.

Care for the Elderly

More choices for cross-boundary elderly care

4. The Government has, since November this year, added seven new Mainland RCHEs to the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong (GDRCS Scheme), increasing the total number of participating RCHEs from 4 to 11. These RCHEs are located in five Mainland cities in the Greater Bay Area, namely Guangzhou, Foshan, Shenzhen, Zhongshan and Zhaoqing. Specifically, five of them are operated by Mainland organisations with a minimum of two years of operational records and are rated four stars or above on the “List of Star-rated Senior Care Organisations” compiled by the Department of Civil Affairs of Guangdong Province based on the standards of “Classification and Accreditation for Senior Care Organisation of China”. This initiative provides frail elderly persons in need of care with more choices of cities and RCHEs for receiving quality residential care services in the cities concerned.

5. Taking into account the concerns of elderly persons over the medical costs incurred in Guangdong, the Government will, on a pilot basis, share part of the medical expenses that elderly participants of the GDRCS Scheme need to bear on their own under the National Basic Medical Insurance Policy with an annual ceiling of RMB10,000 per head for outpatient services and RMB30,000 per head for inpatient services. We are ironing out the implementation details and target to launch the two-year pilot scheme in the second half of 2025.

6. In addition, we will engage a Hong Kong non-governmental organisation with social services experience in the Mainland to provide care services for elderly participants of the GDRCS Scheme as well as their families. The organisation concerned will, through measures including regular visits and telephone calls, help the elderly persons adapt to living in the RCHEs in Guangdong. It will also assist Hong Kong elderly persons who have settled down in the Mainland cities in the Greater Bay Area in applying to join the GDRCS Scheme, and conducting the Standardised Care Need Assessment

Mechanism for Elderly Services for them in their place of residence.

Increasing the number of RCSV

7. The Government launched the RCSV Scheme in March 2017 to provide an additional choice for elderly persons assessed with residential care services need and waitlisted for subsidised residential care services. The RCSV Scheme adopts the principles of “users pay in accordance with affordability” and “money follows the users”. Participating elderly persons can choose to stay in quality RCHEs without queueing. The RCSV Scheme also encourages the sector to keep improving their service quality under market competition. As at end September 2024, about 4 400 eligible elderly persons were receiving subsidised residential care services under the RCSV Scheme. Starting from the second quarter of 2025, the Government will raise the total number of vouchers from 5 000 to 6 000 so as to benefit more elderly persons.

Elderly persons to receive portable cash assistance more conveniently

8. The Government currently implements the Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme as well as the Guangdong Scheme and the Fujian Scheme under the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme to provide cash allowance to Hong Kong elderly persons who opt to retire in the Guangdong and Fujian Provinces. The Hong Kong Monetary Authority and SWD are exploring with the banking sector on feasible ways to enable these elderly persons to receive cash assistance from the Government more conveniently.

Protect Children

9. The Legislative Council enacted the Ordinance in July this year to specify that professionals in the social welfare, education and healthcare sectors must report serious child abuse cases, creating a wide and effective protection web for children. The Ordinance will come into operation in January 2026, signifying a milestone in child protection in Hong Kong. During the 18-month transitional period, the Government is making the necessary preparation in full swing together with the sectors concerned, including provision of training for mandated reporters, formulation of the Mandated Reporter Guide, increase of emergency places for residential child care, and enhancement of professional support for child abuse victims and their families, with a view to ensuring that the various support measures are properly put in place upon the commencement of the Ordinance, so that the

mandated reporters can discharge their statutory duties, and the children and families in need can receive appropriate and timely care.

10. To strengthen the prevention of child abuse from source, SWD will set up four Community Parents and Children Centres on a pilot basis to promote parent-child interaction through play-based services and instil positive parenting skills in parents, render support for families with parenting needs, and refer families with other needs to various appropriate services of the Government and the community. SWD will re-position four Children and Youth Centres to Community Parents and Children Centres, focusing on families with children aged below 6, and at the same time providing general services to families with children aged 6 or above. Through home visitation and referrals of the Maternal and Child Health Centres or other welfare service units, the Community Parents and Children Centres will approach families of socio-economic deprivation to provide therapeutic counselling and tailor-made group programmes etc. The selected centres will undergo renovation to provide space suitable for children's play and parent-child activities having regard to the new service targets of the Centres. The four Community Parents and Children Centres are planned to commence operation progressively starting from 2026.

Supporting Working Parents

11. To support working parents, the Government announced the setting up of 10 aided standalone child care centres (CCCs) in phases last year. On this basis, we will set up one more aided standalone CCC, providing 100 additional places for day child care services. In other words, over the three years from 2024, SWD is setting up a total of 11 aided standalone CCCs in phases, increasing the total number of CCCs to 26 and the total number of service places to reach around 2 000. The Government will also further enhance the service of the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project by further increasing the service places from 2 000 to 2 500. It is estimated that the number of children to be benefitted will increase from 20 000 to 25 000 correspondingly.

Support Carers

12. The Government is committed to supporting carers. In addition to providing carers' allowance, respite services, a one-stop information gateway and the 24-hour Designated Hotline for Carer Support 182183 (Designated Hotline), we launched the District Services and Community Care Teams – Pilot Scheme on Supporting Elderly and Carers in Tsuen Wan and Southern District this March. Trained by the SWD, Care Teams of those two districts

proactively identify and reach out to households in need, and provide support to the elderly and carers who seek help from the Designated Hotline. In the past six months, the Care Teams visited 4 700 families and referred about 900 cases to social welfare organisations for follow-up, which have achieved good results. Next year, we will extend the scheme to across the territory, supporting elderly persons and carers in all 18 districts.

13. We will also explore the setting up of an inter-disciplinary and inter-organisation database. It will cover carers of elderly persons and carers of persons with disabilities and the use of tools designed by university teams for the detection of high-risk cases and early intervention and support.

Support Persons with Disabilities

14. To address the multifarious needs of persons with disabilities, the Government provides a variety of rehabilitation services catering to different types and levels of disability. These services include pre-school rehabilitation, residential care, vocational rehabilitation and a series of community support services. The Government will continue to strengthen the support in this regard, including the following measures:

- (i) enhance community support for persons with mental health needs - regularise the Pilot Project on Transitional Support Service for Persons in Mental Recovery in the first quarter of 2026 to continuously support persons in mental recovery who are discharged from hospitals and waitlisting for halfway house service, and set up an additional Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness in Tung Chung, as well as set up an online support platform for the emotional wellness of young people to provide enhanced services in the second quarter of 2025;
- (ii) set up 14 Integrated Community Rehabilitation Centres (ICRCs) across the territory in phases, including regularising the Pilot Project on ICRC from the third quarter of 2025 onwards, as well as enhancing the functions of the four existing Community Rehabilitation Day Centres and converting them into ICRCs, for providing flexible and integrated community support services through a case management approach;
- (iii) provide additional 1 040 places for day, residential and pre-school rehabilitation services in 2025-26, and explore the feasibility of setting up special child care centres on vacant kindergarten premises;

- (iv) provide additional 1 280 day community rehabilitation and home care service places for persons with severe disabilities, 90 additional peer supporter posts, and set up an additional District Support Centre for Persons with Disabilities in New Territories East so as to enhance the support for persons with disabilities and their carers; and
- (v) strengthen support for employment of persons with disabilities, including regularising the Pilot Project on Enhancing Vocational Rehabilitation Services in Sheltered Workshops and Integrated Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres to provide training to persons with disabilities according to their personal interests and abilities, helping them develop their potential and enhancing their employment opportunities. In addition, we will promote the establishment of more social enterprises engaging persons with disabilities, and introduce the “Caring Employer” medal to commend employers who actively engage persons with disabilities.

On-going Initiatives

Strengthening Support for Ethnic Minorities (EMs)

15. SWD has commissioned non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with employment of EM staff for setting up outreaching teams in order to proactively reach out to and connect EM individuals in need with mainstream welfare services and to provide referral service, telephone enquiry service and transitional support to them. SWD has also extended the Ethnic Minority District Ambassador pilot scheme for three years until September 2026 and continues to engage EMs or persons who are familiar with the culture or language of EMs to constantly strengthen the welfare support for EMs. SWD will review the implementation and effectiveness of the pilot scheme regularly in order to determine the future direction.

Cash Assistance Schemes

CSSA Scheme

16. The CSSA Scheme provides a safety net of last resort for those who cannot support themselves financially due to old age, ill health, disability, single parenthood, unemployment, low earnings or for other reasons to help them meet their basic needs. At present, the average amount of CSSA payable to an elderly singleton is around \$8,300 per month, while that payable

to a four-member household is around \$18,900 per month¹. Separately, all CSSA recipients enjoy waiver of public healthcare services fees. The Government has substantially improved the CSSA Scheme in recent years, and has implemented a host of enhancement measures² since February 2021 to benefit most recipients. As at end September 2024, there were about 200 000 CSSA cases, covering some 260 000 recipients. In 2024-25, the estimated recurrent expenditure of the CSSA Scheme is about \$22.5 billion.

SSA Scheme

17. The SSA Scheme (including the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA), Old Age Allowance and Disability Allowance) helps severely disabled Hong Kong residents or people aged 65 or above meet special needs arising from severe disability or old age. Thereof, OALA is the social security payment with the highest number of elderly recipients, benefitting over 700 000 elderly persons and accounting for over 40% of persons aged 65 or above. In 2024-25, the estimated recurrent expenditure of the SSA Scheme is about \$55 billion.

18. The Government continually enhances the SSA Scheme, including merging the Normal and Higher OALAs³ with effect from September 2022 and relaxing the absence limit under the pre-application one-year continuous residence requirement of the SSA Scheme from 56 days to 90 days starting from September 2023 to facilitate applicants' longer period of absence from Hong Kong.

The Working Family Allowance (WFA) Scheme

19. The Government introduced the WFA Scheme in April 2018 to support lower-income working households with longer working hours which are not on CSSA. Under the principle of rewarding hard work and to encourage self-reliance, the WFA Scheme provides different rates of allowance based on working hours and income levels. The Government has comprehensively reviewed and made multiple improvements to the WFA Scheme in recent years. These measures include relaxing the eligibility criteria (such as extending the Scheme to singleton households), substantially increasing the rates of allowances thrice (including the latest increase of rates

¹ This refers to the situation when CSSA households do not have income other than CSSA payments (including standard rates, supplements and special grants).

² The relevant measures include significantly increasing the maximum level of the disregarded earnings by 60% to \$4,000, substantially raising the maximum rent allowance (by as much as 27% depending on household size), as well as extending various supplement and special grants to eligible non-elderly able-bodied recipients, such as the community living supplement, grant to cover costs of glasses and grant to cover costs of dental treatment.

³ The merged OALA adopts the more relaxed asset limits of Normal OALA and the payment rate of Higher OALA, while the monthly income limits remain unchanged.

by 15% with effect from the claim month of April 2024), and allowing household members to aggregate their working hours to apply for WFA Scheme. As at end September 2024, there were around 51 000 WFA “active households”⁴, which involved around 173 000 persons including around 72 000 children. The Government will continue to promote the Scheme to encourage more eligible households to apply for the allowances.

Elderly Services

Supporting Ageing in Place

20. The Government will continue to adhere to the policy of promoting “ageing in place as the core, with institutional care as back-up” to provide support to the elderly. At present, the Government provides subsidised community care and support services to over 64 000 elderly persons in need each year.

21. The Government increases the number of Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly by 1 000 to a total of 11 000 in 2024-25, and will further increase the number to 12 000 in 2025-26, benefiting more eligible frail elderly persons.

Increasing subsidised residential care service places for the elderly

22. As at October 2024, about 2 800 additional subsidised residential care service places for the elderly have commenced service. The Government will continue to increase the number of subsidised residential care service places for the elderly, with a view to meeting the demand in the community.

Enhancing the manpower supply and staff quality of residential care homes

23. In the face of a rapidly ageing population, there is an increasing demand for residential care services for the elderly in the community. The Government continues to implement relevant manpower initiatives, including rolling out the Special Scheme to Import Care Workers for RCHs, and concluding the Review of Manpower for Healthcare Services in Residential Care Homes by the end of this year, with a view to addressing the challenges of acute manpower shortage in the sector, and providing training and a career progression path to local job seekers.

⁴ Referring to households which have been approved with WFA and submitted the latest application in the past six months.

Promoting Gerontechnology

24. The Government allocated \$1 billion to set up the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care (I&T Fund) in December 2018, with a view to improving the quality of life of service users and reducing the burden and pressure on care staff and carers. As at August 2024, the I&T Fund had approved grants totalling \$750 million, subsidising about 2 000 elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure or rent over 21 000 technology products. In 2024-25, additional \$1 billion is injected into the I&T Fund to enhance the subsidies to elderly and rehabilitation service units and expand its scope to cover the gerontechnology product for household use.

Support for the Disadvantaged

Improving rehabilitation services

25. The Government is committed to increasing the number of rehabilitation (including day, residential and respite care) service places for persons with disabilities (PWDs) from about 35 100 in 2021-22 to about 38 800 by 2026-27, and will further increase to about 39 900 by 2028-29. By end-August 2024, the total number of service places has been increased to 37 300.

Increasing the number of representatives of PWDs and their carers in the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee

26. The Rehabilitation Advisory Committee currently has a total of 30 non-official members, including the Chairman and Vice-chairman, of which nine are persons with disabilities or carers. The Government will further increase the number of representatives of PWDs and their carers in the new term of the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee in 2025 to better gauge their needs.

Support the Development of Welfare Services Organisations

27. On the front of supporting the development of welfare services organisations, the Government launched a dedicated fund of \$500 million in end-May 2024 to help NGOs operating subvented welfare services meet their development needs for staff training and system enhancement, particularly in enhancing professional knowledge of their staff and strengthening awareness of inter-disciplinary collaboration, as well as encouraging and promoting the application of information technology, etc., with a view to assisting relevant

organisations to better implement the Government's social welfare policies, provide high-quality services and support to service targets, and make the best use of social welfare resources.

Conclusion

28. The recurrent expenditure on social welfare in the financial year 2024-25 is estimated to be \$127.4 billion, accounting for around 22% of the recurrent expenditure of the Government. The Government will continue to strengthen collaboration with different sectors of the community, plan for and deliver suitable social welfare services.

29. To monitor the progress and effectiveness of implementing various policies, the indicators set by LWB are listed in the Annex.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
November 2024

Indicators on Welfare initiatives

Continue to take forward the strategy of targeted poverty alleviation

- Roll out the third round of the Strive and Rise Programme **by end-2024**, enabling no less than **70%** of mentees who have completed the one-year programme to achieve improvement in terms of personal development and positive thinking.
- Launch **three** additional projects under the Pilot Programme on Community Living Room **within 2025**, with the target of enabling no less than **70%** of service users to experience an enhancement in their living space, sense of belonging to the community and interpersonal networks, and complete the evaluation **within 2025-26**.
- Launch the School-based After School Care Service Scheme in no less than **110** primary schools **in the 2024/25 school year**, with the target of having no less than **70%** of student beneficiaries who have completed the scheme to indicate that they have received more appropriate care and learning support, and no less than **70%** of parent/guardian beneficiaries to indicate that the scheme helps reduce their child care pressure and allows them to consider seeking/taking up jobs, and complete the comprehensive evaluation **in the 2025/26 school year**.
- Launch a pilot scheme with **1 000** quotas in **2025** to subsidise elderly persons receiving CSSA who opt to retire in Guangdong to reside in designated RCHes in the Province.

Improve elderly services

- Provide around **15 000** learning places under the Elder Academy Scheme in **2024-25** to encourage more elderly persons to engage in lifelong learning and integrate into the community.
- Provide **6 200** additional subsidised residential care service places for the elderly **by end-2027**.
- Provide **900** additional subsidised day care service places for the elderly **by end-2027**.

Strengthen protection/care for children

- Prepare for setting up **four** Community Parents and Children Centres on a pilot basis **within 2025** so as to commence service progressively **starting from 2026**.
- Increase the number of beneficiaries under the Fee-waiving Subsidy Scheme of the After School Care Programme for low income families to **4 600 by the end of the 2026/27 school year**, an increase of no less than 60% over the 2021/22 school year.
- Increase the number of service places under the After School Care Programme for Pre-primary Children from 672 to **1 176 by end-2027**.
- Further increase the number of Aided Standalone Child Care Centre service for parents who cannot take care of their young children temporarily to about **2 000 by end-2027**, an increase of 94% over 2022-23.

Caring and Inclusive Community

- Extend the “District Services and Community Care Teams – Supporting Elderly and Carers Scheme” to 18 districts over the territory in **Q2 2025**.

Improve rehabilitation services and enhance the support for persons with disabilities

- Increase the number of rehabilitation (including day, residential and respite care) service places from about 37 300 in 2023-24 to about **39 900 by 2028-29**.
- Gradually increase around **500** service places of the Extended Care Programme in Day Activity Centres and about **800** places of the Work Extension Programme **within three years from 2024-25**.

Enhance support for persons in mental recovery and those with mental health needs

- Set up **four** additional Parents/Relatives Resource Centres **by Q3 2025**.

- Extend and enhance the Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism until **end-December of 2025**.