

Family Council

The Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address: Primary Healthcare Policy Initiatives of the Health Bureau

PURPOSE

In the Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address (2024 PA), the Government re-affirmed its commitment to promote the development of primary healthcare on all fronts. This paper briefs Members on the key primary healthcare initiatives announced in the 2024 PA.

PRIMARY HEALTHCARE INITIATIVES

Life-course Approach Health Promotion Strategy

2. The Department of Health (DH) has been adopting a life-course and settings-based approach to raise public awareness on health issues through educational and promotional efforts. Having regard to Hong Kong's demographic structure and the health needs of different social groups, it is announced in the 2024 PA that the Government will formulate a life-course approach health promotion strategy (the Strategy) to draw up health management plans for the public according to different age groups and health statuses.

3. The Strategy will cover all age groups and different stages of life, from infancy, entering school, adulthood, and employment, to pregnancy and the transition to older age. Furthermore, under the context of medical innovation development, the Strategy will also encompass the use of innovative technologies to comprehensively, systematically and efficiently enhance public health.

4. The DH will establish a dedicated task force for formulating the Strategy. The task force will use an evidence-based approach coupled with local epidemiological conditions to formulate priority areas and necessary health promotion measures for different age groups. The task force aims to complete the formulation of the Strategy within 2025.

Promoting Healthy Fertility and Parenting

5. It is announced in the 2024 PA that the Government will re-orientate the maternal and child healthcare and family planning services, and enhance fertility counselling and childcare education in order to promote healthy fertility.

6. The DH will launch the new pre-pregnancy health services in the Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) in phases in 2025. The new pre-pregnancy services aim to raise awareness on pre-pregnancy health, assist prospective parents in obtaining necessary health information and support, promote healthy pregnancy and foetal development, and reduce potential risks during pregnancy and childbirth, thereby enhancing the health of mothers, foetuses, and newborns. The benefits will continue even after the child reaches adulthood, as the roots of certain common chronic diseases in adults can be traced back to the foetal stage. The pre-pregnancy health service will include health consultation and counselling, health assessment, blood tests and other investigations, as well as dietary and lifestyle advice. The DH will also review and adjust the scope of the subsidised family planning service currently provided by non-governmental organisations, which dovetails with the Government's policy of encouraging and promoting healthy fertility.

7. Meanwhile, the MCHCs will strengthen support for healthy parenting, including enhancing the provision of parenting education service, childcare information and individual counselling, so as to boost parents' confidence and skills in parenting, thereby minimising the likelihood of future child behavioural issues.

Whole School Health Programme

8. The DH launched the Health Promoting School Programme as a pilot project in 30 local primary and secondary schools from the 2019/20 to 2022/23 school years to provide professional guidance to participating schools in carrying out school-based health promotion work according to the Health Promoting School (HPS) framework advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO). Taking into consideration the opinions of stakeholders from various sectors and the results of the evaluation, the DH has regularised the HPS Programme since the 2023/24 school year and renamed it as the "Whole School Health Programme" (WSHP), with a view to assisting the participating schools in becoming health-promoting schools.

9. The successful implementation of the WSHP relies on multi-sectoral collaboration. In this regard, the DH established a cross-sectoral multi-disciplinary Health Promoting School Advisory Committee (HPSAC) to advise the Government on the planning and implementation of the WSHP and the development of the HPS model in Hong Kong.

i. Development of the WSHP

10. As stated in the Chief Executive’s 2024 Policy Address, the WSHP will be strengthened and extended to cover all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. Health reports will be compiled for each participating school to recommend school-based measures for promoting physical activities, healthy eating and other matters for each school to improve students’ physical and mental health. Starting from the 2024/25 school year, schools signing the Education Bureau’s “4Rs Mental Health Charter”¹ will also be signing the DH’s WSHP and “Mental Health Workplace Charter” in order to achieve synergy. As of mid-November 2024, over 700 schools have joined the WSHP in the 2024/25 school year, covering about 60% of all primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong.

ii. Content and services of the WSHP

11. The WSHP covers four health themes, including physical activity, healthy eating, mental health, and social well-being, as well as six key domains advocated by the WHO, including: (1) healthy school policies; (2) school’s physical environment; (3) school’s social environment; (4) community links; (5) action competencies for healthy living; and (6) school health care and promotion services. The DH will assist schools to systematically review and assess their health promotion measures in place, and set out the priorities and strategies for development of school-based health promotion according to their actual circumstances and students’ health needs through the guidelines and checklist.

12. The DH will compile an annual school health report for each participating school using the annual health assessment results of students’ attendance at the Student Health Service Centres and the checklists submitted by the schools to summarise the students’ health status and behaviours and provide advice on health promotion. The DH will also provide health promotional activities, workshops, and a designated website for information sharing and assist participating schools and the public in carrying out school-based health promotion.

¹ The Education Bureau has launched the “4Rs Mental Health Charter” in local primary and secondary schools in the 2024/25 school year to strengthen mental health promotion. 4Rs stem from “Rest”, “Relaxation”, “Relationship”, and “Resilience”.

District Health Centre Scheme and integration of Woman Health Centres

13. District Health Centres (DHCs) and interim DHC Expresses (DHCEs) of a smaller scale have been set up in all 18 districts across the territory by the end of 2022 to establish personalised health plans for the public according to their age, gender and lifestyle, etc. As announced in the 2024 PA, the Primary Healthcare Commission (PHCC) will gradually upgrade the DHCEs into DHCs in a phased approach. In 2025-26, the three DHCEs in Central and Western, Eastern and Yau Tsim Mong districts will be upgraded into DHCs.

14. The PHCC will also strengthen the multi-disciplinary primary healthcare service network, with priority given to integrating the services of the DH's Woman Health Centres into DHCs. The PHCC will take over the existing sites of the Woman Health Centres in Chai Wan, Lam Tin and Tuen Mun by the second quarter of 2025. A new service model of woman health services with multidisciplinary approach will be integrated into the district health network to provide comprehensive preventative care and health promotion services to women, including providing woman health risk assessment and counselling according to age-specific needs.

Chronic Disease Co-Care (CDCC) Pilot Scheme

15. The CDCC Pilot Scheme was launched in November 2023 to provide subsidised diabetes mellitus (DM) and hypertension (HT) screening services in the private healthcare sector to Hong Kong residents aged 45 or above with no known medical history of DM or HT. After 1 year of the Scheme's operation, the Government will review the service model and operational details of the CDCC Pilot Scheme in a timely manner, and enhancements will be made to ensure its effectiveness.

16. Due to the challenges brought by an ageing population and increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, the service scope of the CDCC Pilot Scheme will be expanded in 2025 to cover blood lipid testing, in order to enable more comprehensive assessment and proper management of cardiovascular disease risk factors, including the "three highs" (including high blood pressure, high blood sugar and high cholesterol).

Risk-based Hepatitis B Screening

17. It is announced in the 2024 PA that in response to cancer incidence trends, the Government will formulate risk-based screening programmes for prevalent cancers on a gradual basis. In particular, to prevent liver cancer, a new programme will be launched by the end of 2025 to subsidise hepatitis B screening, under which DHCs/DHCEs and family doctors will provide risk-based hepatitis B screening and management through strategic purchasing. The programme enables early detection and treatment of chronic hepatitis B to reduce the risk of complications (such as cirrhosis and liver cancer). Details will be announced in the last quarter of 2025.

ADVICE SOUGHT

18. Members are invited to note the content of the presentation and provide comments.

**Health Bureau
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