

LCQ6: Emergency respite and emergency home care services for the elderly and persons with disabilities

Following is a question by the Dr Hon Fernando Cheung and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

Some carers of the elderly and persons with disabilities (PWDs) have relayed to me that currently, there is a lack of emergency respite and emergency home care services for the elderly and PWDs, resulting in some carers who were taken ill during late hours having to give up receiving treatment in hospitals. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will examine the provision of subsidised emergency respite and emergency home care services for the elderly and PWDs (including persons with severe disabilities) to be operated round-the-clock in all districts in Hong Kong; if so, of the details (including the timetable); if not, the reasons for that; and

(2) given that subsidised residential care homes (RCHs) often refuse, on grounds of their inability to provide medical care services, to provide respite care service for those who need intensive medical care or those who suffer from impaired consciousness (such as persons with severe dementia and vegetative persons), whether the Government will request the Hospital Authority to provide such service or help subsidised RCHs obtain the relevant resources to provide such service; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the Member's question is as follows:

The Government is committed to providing various community care services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities and support services for carers, assisting elderly persons and persons with disabilities to live in the community, strengthening carers' caring capacity and relieving their stress, so as to improve the quality of life of elderly persons, persons with disabilities and carers. Support services provided by the Government include respite services for elderly persons and for persons with disabilities, which provide temporary and short-term day and residential care services for persons living in the community who require assistance from family members or

relatives in their personal care. This allows carers to be temporarily relieved from their caring responsibilities when necessary, thereby reducing their pressure and allowing them to manage their personal commitments.

At present, the Government provides a total of 170 designated day respite places in 39 subvented day care centres/units for the elderly (DEs/DCUs). All DEs/DCUs can also make use of any of their casual day care vacancies to offer respite service. In addition, the 60 Integrated Home Care Services Teams and 34 Enhanced Home and Community Care Services Teams currently provide home respite service for service users, and would arrange respite service for elderly persons in need. The home care services teams also offer, through hotlines, 24-hour emergency support to provide elderly persons and their carers with necessary information and assistance during emergencies.

As regards residential respite service for elderly persons, in addition to the 55 designated residential respite places provided by subvented residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) and contract RCHEs, the Government also utilises casual vacancies of the subsidised places in all subvented nursing homes (NHs), care-and-attention homes, contract RCHEs, as well as private RCHEs participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme (EBPS) to provide residential respite service. Besides, the Chief Executive announced in the 2018 Policy Address that the Government would, in 2019-20, purchase additional residential places from private RCHEs participating in EBPS to increase the number of residential respite places for elderly persons, and would regularise such an initiative. It is expected that around 270 additional designated residential respite places will be provided.

In addition, the Government currently provides a total of 65 emergency residential places for the elderly in 17 subvented RCHEs and six subvented NHs. The service aims at providing emergency residential care for elderly persons when their carers encounter sudden incidents, such as having to be admitted into hospitals.

As regards respite service for persons with disabilities, the District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities (DSCs) and the two types of home care services, including the Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities and Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities, provide home respite service for their service users.

In addition, day respite services are provided in Day Activity Centres, DSCs, and Care and Attention Homes for Persons with Disabilities, whereas residential respite services are provided in residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs) subvented by the Government. Currently, there are a total of 158 day respite service places and 297 residential respite service places.

All RCHEs providing residential respite and emergency residential service and all RCHDs providing residential respite service operate on a 24-hour basis round the year. These RCHEs and RCHDs would not refuse to provide respite service for elderly persons or persons with disabilities because of

their poor health, physical disabilities or poor cognitive abilities, including severe dementia. Nevertheless, to protect the safety of other residents, elderly persons and persons with disabilities admitted into these types of residential places must be free from contagious disease and mentally fit for communal living, like the other residents of RCHes and RCHDs.

If persons with disabilities have unforeseen residential needs in case of emergency, subvented RCHDs providing residential respite service could cater to such cases in the light of individual circumstances. As regards emergency residential service for elderly persons, in accordance with existing practice, these types of residential places require referrals from social workers to make placement arrangements in advance. If the elderly persons are in need of medical care, medical consultation and treatment can be arranged at suitable medical units, including the Accident and Emergency Department under the Hospital Authority.

LCQ5: The Belt and Road Office

Following is a question by the Hon Chung Kwok-pan and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

In order to help Hong Kong grasp the opportunities brought by the Belt and Road Initiative, the Government set up a Belt and Road Office in 2016 to take forward the relevant work effectively and on a sustained basis. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) in respect of the Office, of its current staffing establishment, whether there will be any increase in its future manpower, its annual expenditure since establishment, and its future estimated expenditure;

(2) whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the work of the Office since its establishment and if the anticipated results have been achieved; if it has assessed, of the outcome, including the achievements of the work of the Office on aspects such as liaising with mainland institutions and ministries, promoting Hong Kong to the countries along the Belt and Road, and seeking business opportunities that Hong Kong businessmen need; and

(3) whether it has set the future work targets and plans for the Office; if so, of the details and timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI) has gradually developed economic and trade co-operation corridors spanning Europe, Asia and Africa, which has created greater room for Hong Kong's economic and social development. The current-term Government has been playing the role of "facilitator" and "promoter" to proactively implement policies and measures to seize the opportunities brought by the B&RI. Riding on our various unique advantages, and in view of the opportunities and challenges, we have formulated a five-pronged Belt and Road (B&R) key strategy on continuous engagement with the Mainland and B&R related countries and regions. These themes include (i) enhancing policy co-ordination; (ii) fully leveraging Hong Kong's unique advantages; (iii) making the best use of Hong Kong's position as the professional services hub; (iv) promoting project participation; and (v) establishing partnership and collaboration.

Replies to the three parts of the Hon Chung Kwok-pan's questions are as follows:

(1) At present, the Belt and Road Office (BRO) has a total establishment of 19, and this will increase to 21 in 2019-20. Since the setting up of the BRO in August 2016, its expenditure in 2016-17 and 2017-18 was \$5.306 million and \$13.968 million respectively, while the anticipated expenditure for 2018-19 is \$21.185 million. The estimated expenditure of the BRO for 2019-20 is \$39.958 million.

(2) Progress has been made in respect of the work by the BRO. On enhancing policy co-ordination, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has stepped up co-operation with mainland authorities in participating in the B&RI, and an Arrangement between the National Development and Reform Commission and the Government of the HKSAR for Advancing Hong Kong's Full Participation in and Contribution to the Belt and Road Initiative was signed on December 14, 2017 to provide a blueprint for mutual co-operation. It puts forward specific collaboration measures, covering various areas such as finance and investment; infrastructure and maritime services; economic and trade facilitation; people-to-people bond; project interfacing and dispute resolution services; as well as taking forward the Greater Bay Area Development. In accordance with the Arrangement, a Joint Conference mechanism has been set up between the HKSAR Government and relevant mainland authorities for regular and direct communication, and the first Joint Conference meeting was convened in mid-June 2018.

In addition, the Government has been actively promoting strategic partnership between enterprises in Hong Kong and on the Mainland as well as Hong Kong professional services sector to capitalise on Hong Kong's advantages and make the best use of our position as the prime professional services platform, and seeking collaboration with relevant professional associations and chambers of commerce to explore B&RI business opportunities for enterprises and professional services sector of Hong Kong. These include organising exchange seminars and project interfacing activities and visits to B&R related countries and regions. For example, the Government organised a large-scale seminar in February 2018 under the theme of "Leveraging Hong

Kong's Advantages, Meeting the Country's Needs" in conjunction with the Belt and Road General Chamber of Commerce in Beijing, which sought to facilitate establishment of direct contact between enterprises and professionals in the Mainland and Hong Kong. The Government also co-organised with the Hong Kong Trade Development Council (TDC) the 2nd and 3rd Belt and Road Summit respectively on September 11, 2017 and June 28, 2018, and supported TDC's work in B&RI related investment and business matching.

Furthermore, sharing sessions respectively on economic and trade co-operation zones; B&R trade and investment policies; and risk management of B&R projects were held in conjunction with the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council and the Ministry of Commerce in Hong Kong on August 14, 2018, November 12, 2018 and February 25, 2019.

The Government is committed to enhancing the capacity of the Hong Kong professional services sector under the B&RI, with a view to better equipping the professional services to capitalise on the opportunities and meet the challenges brought by the Initiative. The Commerce and Economic Development Bureau (CEDB) supported the development of the Belt and Road Cross-Professional Advancement Programme, which has received funding from the Professional Services Advancement Support Scheme (which is being managed by the CEDB). The Programme was launched on December 12, 2018, and is being undertaken by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, with support from a number of professional associations and chambers of commerce.

(3) The HKSAR Government will continue to strengthen policy exchanges and co-ordination with the mainland authorities and follow up on the implementation of the Arrangement by means of the various established direct communication platforms, including the Belt and Road Joint Conference mechanism established with the relevant ministries, and the Belt and Road Task Group established with the Ministry of Commerce. The second Belt and Road Joint Conference is tentatively scheduled to be held in mid-2019.

The Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development is currently (from March 18 to 23) leading a business and professional mission to visit Georgia and Hungary to meet with local government officials responsible for commerce and industry, investment and infrastructure development. The delegation will gain a better understanding of the latest local market situation, as well as foster connection and co-operation between Hong Kong enterprises and professional associations with local enterprises thereof. The BRO will plan for visiting to other B&R countries later this year, with a view to assisting enterprises/professionals to explore market opportunities.

To help Hong Kong enterprises and investors expand their overseas markets, we will continue to strengthen our economic partnerships with other economies, and actively seek to forge Free Trade Agreements and Investment Promotion and Protection Agreements with more trading partners (including B&R related countries and regions), with a view to facilitating the long-term economic development of Hong Kong.

The Government and TDC will co-organise the 4th Belt and Road Summit on September 11 and 12, 2019 to continue to promote and foster Hong Kong as an international commerce and trading platform for the B&RI. "Hong Kong IN: Creating and Realising Opportunities" will be the theme of this year's Summit, which will continue to feature investment and business matching sessions and one-to-one business matching meetings to encourage business partnerships.

The Government will continue to adopt a whole-government approach and the five-pronged key strategy in the pursuit of the B&RI, with a view to establishing Hong Kong as both a key link and the prime B&R services platform.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, March 20, 2019 is 103.2 (same as yesterday's index).

LCQ10: Erection of bus shelters

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (March 20):

Question:

Quite a number of members of the public have pointed out to me that as currently a large number of quite heavily used roadside bus stops do not have any shelters, passengers waiting for buses there have to put up with the scorching heat of the sun or lashing rains. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers and percentages of roadside bus stops with and without shelters at present, with a breakdown by District Council district;

(2) whether it has issued guidelines to the franchised bus companies on the construction of bus stops with shelters; if so, of the details, and how the Government handles the situation where a bus company has breached such guidelines;

(3) of the procedure for vetting and approval of applications for the

construction of bus stops with shelters, including which government departments are involved, what items require approval, and the time taken in general;

(4) as the construction of shelters for some bus stops is infeasible due to the presence of underground public utilities there, whether the Government has co-ordinated the public utilities companies concerned to make complementary arrangements, so that works for the construction of shelters can be carried out; and

(5) of the current number of bus stops with shelters that are fitted with advertising lightboxes, and the percentage of such number in the total number of bus stops; the procedure for the franchised bus companies to apply for the construction of bus stops with shelters fitted with advertising lightboxes?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been encouraging franchised bus companies to enhance the bus stop facilities, including the erection of bus shelters at locations where the geographical environment permitted, for the convenience of passengers and better waiting environment. Our reply to the various parts of Hon Chan Han-pan's question is as follows:

(1) The existing number of sheltered bus waiting areas, by District Council district, is tabulated below:

Area	District Council district	Total number of sheltered waiting areas erected by franchised bus companies				Total number of bus stops
Hong Kong Island	Central and Western	101	517			
	Wan Chai	105	435			
	Eastern	109	540			
	Southern	138	566			
Kowloon	Yau Tsim Mong	119	602			
	Sham Shui Po	139	430			
	Kowloon City	186	477			
	Wong Tai Sin	168	358			
	Kwun Tong	293	609			

New Territories	Kwai Tsing	203	453
	Tsuen Wan	98	366
	Tuen Mun	164	490
	Yuen Long	224	601
	North	172	312
	Tai Po	193	354
	Sha Tin	362	761
	Sai Kung	213	450
	Islands	174	432
Total	3 161 (about 37 per cent of the total number of bus stops (Note))	8 753	

(2) The Transport Department (TD) has issued guidelines for erection of bus shelters by franchised bus companies. The guidelines stipulate the procedures for application for erection of shelter, relevant technical requirements (such as the required clearance between the shelter and the road carriageway; and sufficient access to be reserved for pedestrians), the design standard of the shelter (such as the standard shelter type to be used under different geographical environments), the requirements for the provision of advertisement panel at sheltered waiting areas (such as sufficient space to be reserved for passenger passage), the requirements of relevant government departments (including the Highways Department, the Drainage Services Department and the Water Supplies Department, etc). According to the guidelines, the franchised bus companies may start the works for erection of bus shelters at the location under application upon obtaining the agreement from the TD. If contravention of the guidelines is found or complaint is received upon completion of the erection of the relevant shelter, the TD will conduct follow-up investigation and request the franchised bus companies concerned to take improvement measures as appropriate, including replacing the shelters with other appropriate designs or removing the advertisement panels.

(3) Upon receipt of an application for erection of a bus shelter from a franchised bus company, the TD will, in accordance with the guidelines mentioned above, examine the application and study the possible impacts of the proposed bus shelter on pedestrian flow, the sight of other road users and the merchants nearby. The TD will also consult relevant government departments (including the Highways Department, the Drainage Services Department and the Water Supplies Department, etc) on the details of application. In addition, the TD will consult the local communities through the District Offices. In general, the TD will complete the assessment within three months after the submission of the application from the franchised bus company. After obtaining the approval of the TD, the franchised bus company concerned may then immediately apply to the Highways Department for the excavation permit for the commencement of the works for erecting the bus shelter.

(4) In the event that the erection of a shelter is not possible because of the underground utilities at the bus stop, the TD will arrange site meeting with the franchised bus company concerned and relevant government departments as appropriate to discuss the solution, such as slightly shifting the location of the bus shelter and/or the bus stop to avoid the underground utilities, so as to continue the erection works for the shelter as far as practicable.

(5) As the advertisement panel is a connected part of a sheltered waiting area, franchised bus companies in general will apply for the provision of advertisement panels, if feasible, at the same time when they apply for erection of bus shelters. The franchised bus companies may also apply to the TD for the provision of advertisement panels at existing sheltered waiting areas. Among the existing sheltered waiting areas erected by franchised bus companies, 802 of them were provided with advertisement panels, which account for about 25 per cent of the total number of sheltered waiting areas. The requirements for the provision of advertisement panels have been covered by the guidelines mentioned in part (2) above while the application procedures are basically the same as those mentioned in part (3) above.

Note: Some bus stops would share one shelter.

Government welcomes passage of Inland Revenue and MPF Schemes Legislation (Tax Deductions for Annuity Premiums and MPF Voluntary Contributions) (Amendment) Bill 2018

The Government has welcomed the passage of the Inland Revenue and MPF Schemes Legislation (Tax Deductions for Annuity Premiums and MPF Voluntary Contributions) (Amendment) Bill 2018 by the Legislative Council today (March 20).

The new Ordinance gives effect to the tax deductions proposed in the 2018-19 Budget. From the year of assessment 2018/19, taxpayers are entitled to tax deductions under salaries tax and personal assessment for their premiums paid to qualifying deferred annuities and contributions made to tax deductible Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) voluntary contribution accounts. The maximum tax deductible limit is \$60,000 each year per taxpayer.

A spokesman for the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau said, "We

hope that the tax deductions can be an incentive to encourage the working population to make early retirement savings in order to cope with the financial risk arising from longevity. The relevant maximum tax deductible limit is an aggregate limit for qualifying deferred annuity premiums and tax deductible MPF voluntary contributions to allow for greater flexibility."

Under the new arrangement, a taxpayer can claim tax deduction for deferred annuity premiums covering the taxpayer's spouse as joint annuitant, or either the taxpayer or the taxpayer's spouse as a sole annuitant. A taxpaying couple is allowed to allocate tax deduction for deferred annuity premiums amongst themselves in order to claim the total deductions of \$120,000, provided that the deduction claimed by each taxpayer does not exceed the individual limit. Tax deductible MPF voluntary contributions are subject to "preservation requirements", meaning that the accrued benefits can be withdrawn only upon reaching the age of 65 or based on statutory grounds.

The spokesman added, "It is most ideal to have a basket of financial tools for retirement financial planning. Deferred annuities or tax deductible voluntary contributions are suitable financial planning tools for retirement. But the public should understand their characteristics and consider different factors, such as liquidity needs, bequest motives, financial discipline, other alternatives and more when choosing suitable retirement financial tools. The public should also understand that investing in an MPF is investment risk-bearing. As for a deferred annuity, it is a long-term insurance contract for the purpose of assisting policyholders to convert their capital into long-term stable income for retirement, but not for pursuing a high return. In addition, surrender of policy within the contractual period may incur financial loss."

The Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau is collaborating with the Investor and Financial Education Council to launch publicity and public education. The public may learn the features of qualifying deferred annuities and tax deductible voluntary contributions through the website of "The Chin Family" (www.thechinfamily.hk) to evaluate whether the two tax deductible financial planning tools suit their own needs. In addition, starting from April 1, 2019, the Insurance Authority and the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Authority will publish the list of the qualifying deferred annuity products and the list of MPF schemes offering tax deductible MPF voluntary contribution accounts on their websites (www.ia.org.hk and www.mpfa.org.hk) respectively for public information.