

ExCo Non-official Member speaks on Budget

The following is issued on behalf of the Executive Council Secretariat:

Following is the transcript of remarks by Non-official Member of the Executive Council (ExCo) Mr Chow Chung-kong at a media session on the 2019-20 Budget in the Legislative Council Complex this afternoon (February 27):

Reporter: How do you evaluate the Budget? Is it sufficient to brace Hong Kong for a complicated external economic environment? How do you evaluate that quite a lot of money is being allocated to infrastructure?

ExCo Non-official Member Mr Chow Chung-kong: I think that the Budget has made a very good balance between stabilising the economy, helping industries and companies, providing jobs and preventing unemployment as well as helping people sail through a difficult time. I think it is a very good balance of all these objectives. I do not see actually it has a lot of money allocated to infrastructure investment if you look at it carefully, but mainly a lot of money is being invested into building Hong Kong's future, such as science and innovation, technology, financial services, etc as well as providing relief for the people who need help.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

UGC welcomes Budget proposal for campus facilities enhancement

The following is issued on behalf of the University Grants Committee:

The Chairman of the University Grants Committee (UGC), Mr Carlson Tong, today (February 27) welcomed the Financial Secretary's proposal in the 2019-20 Budget to set aside \$16 billion for UGC-funded universities to enhance or refurbish their campus facilities, including the provision of necessary research equipment, thereby allowing university students and researchers to conduct teaching and research activities in an optimal environment.

Mr Tong said, "I am delighted that the Government has committed to further investing in higher education, which is crucial for enhancing the quality of education and cultivating our future generations, and benefiting the continued innovation and technology development of society."

CSSA caseload for January 2019

The overall Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) caseload in January showed a drop of 567 cases, representing a decrease of 0.3 per cent compared with that of December 2018, according to the latest CSSA caseload statistics released by the Social Welfare Department today (February 27).

The total CSSA caseload at the end of January stood at 225 870 (see attached table), with a total of 322 349 recipients.

Analysed by case nature, all categories of cases recorded a decrease. Low-earnings cases registered a month-to-month decrease of 1.6 per cent to 3 533 cases while unemployment cases showed a drop of 1.1 per cent to 11 691 cases.

Single parent cases fell by 0.6 per cent to 24 543 cases while permanent disability cases dropped by 0.4 per cent to 16 670 cases. Both old age cases and ill health cases slightly slipped by 0.1 per cent to 142 211 cases and 23 085 cases respectively.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, February 27, 2019 is 102.9 (down 0.1 against yesterday's index).

Hospital Authority welcomes budget allocation for 2019-20

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) Chairman, Professor John Leong, welcomed the 2019-20 Budget announced by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan today (February 27) at the Legislative Council, which will increase the recurrent financial provision for the HA by \$5.3 billion to \$68.8 billion, representing a rise of over 8 per cent.

"Apart from the increased financial provision for the HA, we are delighted by the Government's commitment to sustain the development of public healthcare with the establishment of the \$10 billion public healthcare stabilisation fund," said Professor Leong.

Professor Leong also expressed gratitude for the Government's substantial increase in financial provision for 2019-20, in particular the additional recurrent funding allocation of more than \$700 million on staff retention measures. The HA plans to deploy the funding to improve the remuneration and promotion opportunities of frontline staff to boost their morale and retain staff serving in public hospitals.

"We are mindful of the heavy workload that our doctors are facing amid the manpower shortfall. We plan to adjust the rate of Fixed Rate Honorarium for doctors to boost the morale of medical staff. To encourage professional development of nursing staff, we propose to grant an increment to nurses who have attained specialty qualifications. We will also upgrade more Advanced Practice Nurse posts to enhance night shift supervision. Promotion posts will also be added for pharmacists," said Professor Leong.

"Facing a high turnover of supporting staff, we are currently reviewing their remuneration package so as to retain staff and attract more people to work in public hospitals. We will expedite our review with a view to enabling subsequent pay enhancements as soon as practicable, subject to the Board's approval," Professor Leong added.

Other measures to relieve the work pressure of frontline staff include, inter alia, the Special Retired and Rehire Scheme and recruiting more Executive Assistants (Ward).

The HA Chief Executive, Dr Leung Pak-yin, also expressed appreciation for the Government's additional resources to support the HA in improving the working environment and patient services.

"We are especially thankful that \$5 billion has been earmarked by the Government to expedite the upgrading and acquisition of medical equipment to enhance the healthcare quality and efficiency amid the advancement in medical technology," said Dr Leung.

Dr Leung added that the HA plans to open about 500 new hospital beds in 2019-20 to meet service needs. With the Government's strong support, new medical services will continuously be introduced in phases at Hong Kong Children's Hospital, Tin Shui Wai Hospital and North Lantau Hospital in the coming years.

"The coverage of the HA Drug Formulary will be widened, complemented by the new measures to relax the means test mechanisms of the Samaritan Fund and the Community Care Fund. We will also enhance services in the treatment of cancer, diabetes mellitus, renal diseases, stroke and cardiac diseases. Mental health services will be strengthened for patients with common mental disorders, children and adolescents with mental health needs as well as

psychogeriatric outreach services for elderly homes.

"The HA will continue to enhance patients' access to general outpatient and specialist outpatient services, while accident and emergency, operating theatre, diagnostic imaging, endoscopic and pharmacy services will also be enhanced to meet the increasing service demand," said Dr Leung.