

SFH to attend 2nd Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Chinese Medicine Inheritance, Innovation and Development Conference

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, will lead a delegation to Zhuhai this afternoon (December 4) to attend the 2nd Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Chinese Medicine Inheritance, Innovation and Development Conference to be held tomorrow (December 5).

The conference, organised by the Traditional Chinese Medicine Bureau of Guangdong Province, provides a platform for leaders and the industry in the field of Chinese medicine and the trade in Hong Kong, Macao and other cities in the Greater Bay Area to exchange views and share experience on policies, industry development and scientific research in relation to Chinese medicine.

Professor Chan will deliver a speech and sign the Memorandum of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Chinese Medicine Cooperation with officials from the Mainland and Macao at the opening ceremony of the conference tomorrow. She will also participate in a roundtable meeting to speak with other leaders and guests on building a Chinese medicine community with innovation and a shared future in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Professor Chan said, "With its robust healthcare system and enjoying the advantage of being Asia's world city and a gateway to the Mainland, Hong Kong will continue to capitalise on its unique advantages of East meets West and research in Chinese materia medica standards to develop the 'Hong Kong model' for promoting Chinese medicine overseas. We shall further promote the inheritance and innovation of Chinese medicine, thereby contributing to the development in the Greater Bay Area and the Belt and Road Initiative of our country."

The delegation, comprising representatives from the Food and Health Bureau, the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority, will return to Hong Kong tomorrow afternoon.

During Professor Chan's absence from Hong Kong, the Under Secretary for Food and Health, Dr Chui Tak-yi, will be the Acting Secretary for Food and Health.

IMF commends resilience of Hong Kong's financial system and welcomes Government's policies to support economy and safeguard financial stability

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) Staff Mission has commended the resilience of Hong Kong's financial system and Linked Exchange Rate System (LERS) despite a slowing economy, noting that a history of prudent macroeconomic policies has left Hong Kong with significant buffers to navigate through cyclical and structural challenges. The Mission also expressed support for the Government's various policies to support the economy and safeguard financial stability.

The assessment was made in the Concluding Statement of the IMF Mission published today (December 4), following the 2019 Article IV Consultation with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR).

The Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, said, "I welcome the IMF's recognition of our robust policy framework and significant buffers built up over the years to cushion possible shocks to our economy and financial system, amid weakened economic activity and mounting headwinds on the outlook. I am glad that the IMF supports the relief measures we formulated earlier to cope with the economic challenges. We will stay vigilant and monitor the economic situation closely. We are prepared to roll out further relief measures if necessary."

Mr Chan further said, "I also welcome the IMF's recognition of our ongoing work to enhance Hong Kong's long-term competitiveness. We will step up efforts to capitalise on the emerging opportunities from green finance, fintech and the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA).

The Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA), Mr Eddie Yue, said, "I welcome the IMF's staunch support for the LERS. The IMF's vote of confidence speaks volumes about the LERS's credibility and its importance as an anchor of monetary and financial stability in Hong Kong. Despite increasing global and domestic uncertainties, the LERS continues to operate smoothly and has demonstrated once again its resilience. We have the capability, resources and determination to safeguard the LERS, and we will continue to communicate effectively with the public to maintain international and domestic confidence in our financial and monetary system."

Mr Yue added, "I also welcome the IMF's positive assessment of our regulatory and supervisory framework. As noted by the IMF, the HKMA will

continue to enhance and update our supervisory regime in light of the evolving market landscape and financial stability challenge, particularly with the rapid adoption of technology by the banking industry."

The Concluding Statement notes that Hong Kong's economic activity weakened significantly in 2019 and fell into a technical recession in the third quarter. Hong Kong's real Gross Domestic Product is expected to contract by 1.2 per cent in 2019 and return to positive growth of 1 per cent in 2020, led by a recovery of private consumption. Near- and medium-term risks to the growth outlook are tilted to the downside against the backdrop of US-China trade tensions and the sociopolitical situation in Hong Kong, but the GBA development is expected to improve growth prospects in the medium term.

The Mission reckoned that Hong Kong's financial markets remain resilient despite a slowing economy. It assessed that a history of prudent macroeconomic policies has provided Hong Kong with strong buffers to address cyclical and structural challenges. These buffers include sizeable foreign exchange reserves, a large net international investment position, banks' strong capital and liquidity buffers at levels well above international standards, and large fiscal reserves.

The Mission reaffirmed the IMF's support for the LERS, noting that it has continued to function well amid increased global financial market volatility. The Mission underlined that the LERS remains an appropriate arrangement for Hong Kong, anchoring the stability of its highly open economy and globally integrated monetary and financial system.

The Mission welcomed the Government's recent introduction of fiscal stimuli to support the economy, which include support for small- and medium-sized enterprises, further tax relief, extra social security payments and subsidies for households. The Mission considered that expansionary fiscal policy is needed to support the slowing economy in the near term.

The Mission commended Hong Kong for strengthening the regulatory and supervisory framework for safeguarding financial stability and noted that its solid anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing system is delivering good results. The Mission also reckoned that the development of green finance and the GBA offers opportunities for Hong Kong to maintain its competitiveness as a global financial centre.

The Mission supported the Government's three-pronged approach of increasing housing supply, implementing countercyclical macroprudential measures and implementing demand-management stamp duties to contain housing market risks and increase housing affordability. It considered that the current macroprudential stance should be maintained.

The Mission visited Hong Kong from October 23 to November 4 for the 2019 Article IV Consultation with the HKSAR. It held discussions with government officials, regulators and private sector representatives. The Mission's Concluding Statement is attached in the Annex. The full report of the Article

IV Consultation will be discussed by the IMF Executive Board later this month.

S for IT to visit Beijing

The Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Mr Nicholas W Yang, will leave for Beijing this evening (December 4). He will call on the Minister of Science and Technology, Mr Wang Zhigang, tomorrow (December 5) and return to Hong Kong at night.

In his absence, the Under Secretary for Innovation and Technology, Dr David Chung, will act as Secretary for Innovation and Technology.

LCQ18: Health impacts of tear gas residue

Following is a question by the Hon Wu Chi-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

The Government has repeatedly stated that given the short duration of combustion of tear gas rounds, cyanide produced during combustion will be in a very small quantity and will quickly disperse in the air, and that no literature on dioxin poisoning cases caused by the use of tear gas has been found. However, some members of the public are still concerned about the adverse health impacts of tear gas. Several secondary schools in the vicinity of the locations where a massive quantity of tear gas rounds had been fired suspended classes earlier and hired experts to carry out thorough checking and cleaning at the campus. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the Government provides services for checking and removing residues of tear gas at public facilities such as schools, hospitals, elderly centres and MTR stations; if so, of the respective numbers of times for which such checking and removal services were provided since June this year, and set out by name of facility the dates on which such services were provided and whether tear gas residue was found; if it does not provide such services,

whether it will do so;

(2) whether the Government has issued guidelines to the managers of such public facilities to advise on the precautionary measures to be taken during the firing of tear gas rounds by the Police, as well as the arrangements on checking and cleaning to be made afterwards so as to reduce the impacts of tear gas residue on users of such facilities; if so, of the details;

(3) given that the Police have recently fired a massive quantity of tear gas rounds at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and in the vicinity of Nathan Road, of the measures the Government has put in place to ensure that the indoor air quality of the Hong Kong Science Museum and the Hong Kong Museum of History conforms with the safety standards;

(4) of the measures in place to assist owners of the private properties (e.g. shopping malls and housing estates) in the vicinity of the locations where tear gas rounds were fired in ensuring that the indoor air quality of their properties conforms with the safety standards;

(5) whether the Environmental Protection Department will send staff to collect environmental samples from the locations where the Police have fired a massive quantity of tear gas rounds repeatedly (e.g. the campus of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Nathan Road) so as to test if there are toxic substances from tear gas rounds remaining in the community; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(6) whether it has been stated in the guidelines issued by the authorities to the cleansing service contractors for cleaning streets or public housing estates that at the locations where tear gas rounds have been fired, practices which will stir up residual materials (e.g. the use of high pressure water jets) should not be adopted; if so, of the details?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Home Affairs Bureau, the Development Bureau, the Environment Bureau and the Transport and Housing Bureau, my reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has all along been concerned about the environmental hygiene conditions of public places and provide street cleansing services on a routine basis. After large-scale public order events, the FEHD will, subject to road conditions, provide timely street cleansing services and increase the frequency of cleaning the affected streets.

As for non-public places, cleansing services should be provided by venue owners/management. Health information on tear gas, with details on post-exposure treatments and recommendations on cleaning procedures, has been made available to the public on the website

(www.chp.gov.hk/en/healthtopics/content/460/102308.html) of the Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health.

Specifically, it is preferable to use disposable cleaning items for cleaning up tear gas residues. Suitable personal protective equipment such as masks, rubber gloves and rubber aprons, etc. should be worn. In general, surface with residual materials can be wiped using a cloth soaked with soapy water, but hot water should not be used in order to avoid evaporation of the residues. Also, residual materials should not be stirred up and therefore tools such as high pressure water jet and brooms, as well as electric fans, should not be used. The disposable cleaning items should be properly packed (such as in a sealed plastic bag) after cleaning and then disposed of.

(3) In response to the unforeseen circumstances that occurred lately in the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and its vicinity, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) took necessary measures at the Hong Kong Science Museum and the Hong Kong Museum of History, including co-ordinating with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) to close the fresh air dampers of the air-conditioners with a view to reducing the impact of outdoor environment on the indoor air quality. Both museums were closed from November 17 to 26, 2019, during which the venues were cleaned up by the LCSD and arrangement was made for the EMSD to clean or replace the filters of the air-conditioning system. This was to ensure that the indoor conditions of the museums are suitable for public visits. The two museums are now re-opened.

(4) and (5) Tear gas is mainly a particulate compound. Since it is heavier than air, it will settle on the ground soon after it is launched. The residue in general will settle on surface of objects, and it will not suspend in the air for a long time as well as its dispersion is limited.

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) has analysed the particulate matter (PM) data recorded at the air quality monitoring stations near the areas where tear gas was launched since June 2019. The analysis is done by comparing the PM levels recorded at the monitoring station during the period when tear gas was launched and the period before, as well as comparing the data with those recorded at other monitoring stations near areas where no tear gas was launched. According to the analysis, the EPD did not find any anomalies in the PM levels recorded at the monitoring stations near the areas where tear gas was launched. This shows that tear gas does not cause any significant increase in the PM concentration in the area.

On the other hand, there were instances showing that when arson activities took place near a monitoring station, the PM concentrations recorded at the station increased to a high level, which was almost double the normal levels for that day, for several hours. This reflects that arson activities will significantly affect the air quality in the vicinity.

(6) The FEHD has issued guidelines to its staff and cleansing service contractors, while the Housing Department, having referred to the CHP's health information, has done the same for its cleansing service contractors. These guidelines contain points to note on cleaning chemical residues and

stipulate that high pressure water jet should not be used in order to avoid stirring up the residual materials. Also, when operating street washing vehicles, staff of the FEHD should either turn off the auxiliary engines or adjust the water pressure of the nozzles to the minimum to avoid stirring up the residual materials.

LCQ8: Services for the elderly

Following is a question by the Hon Leung Yiu-chung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

For those elderly persons who have been confirmed after assessment to have the needs for long term care services, their applications may be put on a Central Waiting List for Subsidised Long Term Care Services (CWL) to wait for provision of subsidised long term care services, i.e. residential care services (RCS) or community care services (CCS). In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the number of elderly persons who requested their names be removed from CWL and the reasons for that, and (ii) the number of elderly persons who had been allocated a place in a residential care home (RCH) but eventually declined the offer and the reasons for that, in each of the past five years; among such elderly persons, the number of those who were assessed to be suitable for receiving RCS only;

(2) as it is learnt that those elderly persons on CWL who are soon to be placed to a RCH will be included in the small pools list, of the following details in each of the past five years:

(i) the average time span from the elderly persons being included in the small pools list to being allocated a RCH place;

(ii) among the elderly persons on the small pools list, the number and percentage of those who had been allocated a RCH place but eventually declined the offer, and the reasons for that; and

(iii) among the elderly persons who had waited for RCS, the number and percentage of those who declined to be included in the small pools list;

(3) of the average (i) monthly and (ii) full-year numbers of vacant places and the vacancy rates in the total number of subsidised RCH places in Hong Kong in each of the past five years; the average (iii) monthly and (iv) full-year numbers of vacant places and the vacancy rates of those RCHs preferred by the elderly persons on the small pools list, in each of the past five years;

(4) of the number, in each month of the past two years, of the elderly persons on CWL who had been assessed to be suitable for both RCS and CCS; among these elderly persons, (i) the number of those "inactive" cases in which the elderly persons chose to receive CCS, and (ii) the number of cases in which the elderly persons had initially chosen to wait for RCS but subsequently received CCS;

(5) among the elderly persons on CWL, of the respective numbers and percentages, in each month of the past two years, of those elderly persons who, after assessment, were arranged to wait for (i) RCS only and (ii) CCS only;

(6) given that the Government reinstated in October last year the population-based planning ratios for elderly services facilities in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines, of (i) the number of places for the two aforesaid types of services that should be provided according to the calculation based on such ratios, and (ii) the actual number of places available for these two types of services, in each District Council district at present, as well as the details of the calculation methods; when the Government will review such ratios; and

(7) whether the Government, when planning the elderly service places on a territory-wide basis, has included the service quotas under the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly and under the Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly?

Reply:

President,

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

(1) and (2) From 2014 to 2018, amongst the applicants on the Central Waiting List (CWL) for subsidised residential care places for the elderly, the numbers of applicants withdrawing their applications, rejecting offers of placement, and being assessed to be suitable for residential care services (RCS) only amongst those rejecting offers of placement are as follows –

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of applicants withdrawing applications	2 205	2 244	2 191	1 961	2 606
Number of applicants rejecting offers of placement	2 221	2 283	2 211	1 988	3 355
Number of applicants being assessed to be suitable for RCS only among those rejecting offers of placement	577	526	562	575	829

Applicants withdraw applications and reject offers of placement for various reasons, such as being in receipt of subsidised community care services (CCS), changing preferences for location and dietary requirements of residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), etc. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) does not maintain statistics on average waiting time between applicants' entry to the small pool and admission to RCHEs, applicants declining admission to RCHEs after entering the small pool and applicants refusing to enter the small pool.

(3) At present, the demand for subsidised residential care places for the elderly is acute. Whenever vacancies arise, the SWD will arrange admission by applicants on the CWL. The SWD does not maintain statistics on the duration of subsidised residential care places for the elderly remaining vacant.

(4) and (5) From 2017-18 to 2018-19, the number of applicants assessed to be suitable for both RCS and CCS, suitable for RCS only and suitable for CCS only in assessments conducted are as follows –

	2017-18	2018-19
Number of applicants suitable for both RCS and CCS	19 210	20 165
Number of applicants suitable for RCS only	11 634	11 332
Number of applicants suitable for CCS only	447	441

For the applicants assessed to be suitable for both RCS and CCS, when they receive CCS, their applications for RCS will automatically be classified as "inactive". These applicants can seek to re-activate their RCS option if needed in future. Amongst the applicants assessed to be suitable for both RCS and CCS, the SWD does not maintain statistics on the number of RCS cases being classified as "inactive" upon receipt of CCS and those initially admitted to RCS but later accepted CCS.

(6) According to the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines updated in December 2018, the standard of RCS provision is 21.3 subsidised beds per 1 000 elderly persons aged 65 or above. The SWD plans RCS on a five-cluster basis (i.e. Hong Kong, Kowloon East, Kowloon West, New Territories East and New Territories West). The Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines should be applied flexibly at the cluster level, with the SWD considering a number of factors, particularly the distribution of RCS in various districts within the cluster. Other factors to be considered include the land supply in different districts within the cluster, service demand as a result of population growth and demographic changes, as well as provision of different types of RCS in the clusters. As at October 2019, there are in total around 28 000 subsidised RCS places in the territory.

For CCS, the planning standard is 17.2 subsidised places per 1 000 elderly persons aged 65 or above. The planning standard should be applied flexibly at the district level, with the SWD considering a number of factors, including the distribution of CCS, the land supply and service demand as a result of population growth and demographic changes. As at October 2019, there are in total around 13 700 service places for CCS in the territory.

(7) Adopting the "money-following-the-user" funding mode, the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher (CCSV) for the Elderly and the Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher (RCSV) for the Elderly provide additional choices for the elderly persons. Voucher users can select and switch recognised service providers according to their individual preferences. As the two schemes are still at the pilot stage, they are not included in the number of service places stated in the reply for Part 6 above. The Government has commissioned consultants to conduct evaluation studies on the two schemes, and will consider the way forward and long-term arrangements for the CCSV and RCSV with reference to the findings of the studies.