

CE's speech in delivering "The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address" to LegCo (10)

Labour Support

133. The prevailing manpower shortage has constrained the pace of economic recovery of Hong Kong. To meet the imminent needs, we have, on a time-limited and non-permanent basis, enhanced the mechanism for admission of talents and labour. The Government attaches great importance to giving priority to local workers on employment. We will strengthen the training, support and protection for local workers, expand the potential labour force, enhance the productivity of our workers and create high-quality employment opportunities to cater for the need of our workers.

Strengthen Training to Promote Re-employment

134. To encourage the latent labour force to enter the labour market, we will complete the legislative amendments early next year regarding increasing the maximum monthly retraining allowance by nearly 40% from \$5,800 to \$8,000 early next year. Furthermore, the Employees Retraining Board (ERB) will roll out a two-year pilot scheme in the first quarter of next year, allowing employers to arrange enterprise-based pre-employment training, with the provision of retraining allowance. The first phase of the pilot scheme will target trades facing severe manpower shortage, such as healthcare, catering, retail and hotel hospitality services. Upon completion of training, trainees will be offered employment contracts by the participating enterprises, lasting for no less than one year and with salary above the prevailing market wage. The ERB will also offer the trainees six-month placement follow-up services and skill training.

135. The ERB will review its service scope, training strategies and operation mode, etc. to better meet the needs of Hong Kong's economic development and manpower training, and promote continuous learning and skills development for all. It will submit recommendations in the third quarter of next year.

136. The Government will launch a three-year Re-employment Allowance Pilot Scheme, targeting at elderly and middle-aged persons aged 40 or above who have not been in paid employment for three consecutive months or more. To encourage these persons to rejoin the workforce, those who have worked for six consecutive months will be provided with a maximum allowance of \$10,000, while those who have worked for 12 consecutive months will be given an additional maximum allowance of \$10,000. Some 6 000 persons are expected to be benefitted.

Statutory Minimum Wage

137. The Minimum Wage Commission will submit a report by the end of this

month on how to enhance the review mechanism of the Statutory Minimum Wage. The Government will consider and follow up on the recommendations made by the Commission, and decide on the way forward of the review mechanism in six months' time.

The "Continuous Contract" Requirement

138. The Labour Advisory Board (LAB) is discussing how to revise the "continuous contract" requirement (commonly referred to as the "418" requirement). Under this requirement, an employee is entitled to comprehensive employment benefits only if he/she is employed by the same employer for four weeks or more and has worked for 18 hours or more each week. The LAB has agreed in principle to revise the requirement by using the aggregate working hours of four weeks as the basis of calculation, and is deliberating on the working hour threshold. The Government will amend the Employment Ordinance as soon as possible after the LAB has reached a consensus.

Healthy Hong Kong

Develop into a Health and Medical Innovation Hub – Establish a Drug Approval Authority based on "Primary Evaluation" in the Long Run

139. With our high-quality medical care services and efficient healthcare system, Hong Kong is among the places with the longest life expectancy in the world. We are determined to leverage Hong Kong's medical strengths with the long-term objective of establishing an authority that registers drugs and medical devices under the "primary evaluation" approach, i.e. to directly approve applications for registration of drugs and medical devices based on clinical data, without relying on other drug regulatory authorities. We will endeavour to attract more pharmaceutical and medical device enterprises, both locally and from around the world, to conduct R&D and clinical trials in Hong Kong, and build up the capacity, recognition and status to ensure that the eventual approval mechanism of drugs and medical devices of Hong Kong would be widely recognised internationally and by the Mainland. We will:

(i) set up a preparatory office for the Hong Kong Centre for Medical Products Regulation (CMPR) – A preparatory office will be set up to study the potential restructuring and strengthening of the current regulatory and approval regimes for medicine, medical devices and medical technology. The office will also put forward proposals and steps for the establishment of the CMPR which will be a step towards the transition to the "primary evaluation" approach in approving applications for registration of pharmaceutical products, and explore the upgrading of the CMPR as a standalone statutory body in the long run. This will help accelerate the launching of new drugs and medical devices to the market, and foster the development of R&D and testing of medical products and related industries;

(ii) accession to the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH) – We will pursue Hong Kong, China's accession to ICH as an observer to familiarise with and promote the latest development of drug regulation, and to pave the way for

developing Hong Kong into an internationally recognised regulatory authority for drugs and medical devices in the long run;

(iii) establish the Greater Bay Area International Clinical Trial Institute—We will establish the Greater Bay Area International Clinical Trial Institute in the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone next year to provide a one-stop clinical trial support platform for medical research institutions. The Institute will co-ordinate clinical trial resources in the public and private healthcare sectors in Hong Kong, including researchers, supporting services, data banks, sample banks, laboratories, etc. We will discuss with the Shenzhen Municipal Government regarding a cooperation framework, with a view to achieving coordinated development of the Hong Kong and Shenzhen Parks. We will also explore cooperation with the clinical trial networks in the Mainland, in particular the GBA, through the Institute, and co-ordinate clinical trial work between the two places to comply with national and international standards;

(iv) promote clinical research and trials under the HA—The HA will establish the Cluster Clinical Research Support Office in 2024-25. The office will provide advisory and support services for frontline staff, introduce additional measures to encourage medical teams to participate in clinical researches and trials, expedite the process of ethics review of clinical research, and strengthen the systems and mechanisms for supporting clinical research and data sharing; and

(v) establish the new "1+" mechanism to expedite the approval of new drugs—To accelerate patients' access to new chemical or biological entities (NCEs) and promote the development of clinical trials and research and development of drug in Hong Kong, we will enhance the existing drug regulatory regime by establishing the new "1+" mechanism this year. Under this mechanism, pharmaceutical products containing NCEs for life-threatening or severely-debilitating diseases with local clinical data will be allowed to register conditionally with only one certificate of pharmaceutical product (instead of two under the prevailing arrangement) issued by reference drug regulatory authorities (e.g. the National Medical Products Administration).

Continue to Promote Primary Healthcare Development

140. The Government released the Primary Healthcare Blueprint late last year, which sets out the development direction and strategies for coping with the challenges brought about by an ageing population and the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases. We are pressing ahead with our work on various fronts, which include: advocating the concept of "family doctor for all", with 3 400 family doctors enrolled in the Primary Care Directory (representing an increase of around 20%); providing subsidised hypertension and diabetes mellitus screening and management service for persons aged 45 or above starting from this November; enhancing the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme to include audiologists, dietitians, clinical psychologists, speech therapists; and allowing the shared use of elderly health care vouchers between spouses and rolling out a new reward scheme. The Government will continue to work with the healthcare sector and NGOs to implement the

blueprint.

Strengthening Capacity to Combat Communicable Diseases

141. While Hong Kong has successfully combatted the COVID-19 pandemic, we must possess a sense of crisis for better preparation of emerging communicable diseases. The Government will enhance the local capacity in surveillance, early warning and prevention and control; strengthen the joint disease prevention and control as well as manpower training with the Mainland authorities; and promote, through local university, international cooperation in scientific research in areas such as vaccines. To that end, the Hong Kong Jockey Club will provide funding of \$3 billion to support related efforts.

Digital Healthcare Record

142. The Government will roll out the eHealth+ to build a comprehensive healthcare information infrastructure over the next five years. We aim to develop a personalised eHealth account for every resident to deposit their digital health records in both public and private sectors, and to integrate the healthcare service processes. eHealth+ will allow users to check and carry electronic health records as well as scheduled appointments through mobile phones anytime. The new system will also support various healthcare policies and reforms more effectively, especially on cross-boundary medical collaboration within the GBA.

Enhance Public Healthcare Services

143. The HA will continue its efforts to enhance public healthcare services including:

(i) reducing the waiting time of stable new case bookings for two specialties, namely Ear, Nose and Throat, and Orthopaedics and Traumatology, by 10% in 2024-25;

(ii) setting up Hong Kong's first Chest Pain Centre in Queen Mary Hospital in 2025 in accordance with national accreditation standards, with a view to optimising patient journey for patients suffering from cardiovascular diseases, improving treatment outcome and increasing survival rate; and

(iii) establishing a breastmilk bank and formulating the related mechanism for breastmilk donation in 2025 to provide breastmilk for infants and young children who cannot be breastfed by their biological mothers, and especially to minimise the chance of serious illness in premature or severely-ill babies.

Oral Health

144. In the light of the views of the Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care, established last year, the Government will accord priority to enhancing the oral health of the community. In the coming two years, we will:

(i) launch the Primary Dental Co-care Pilot Scheme for Adolescents to promote preventive dental care among adolescents through the provision of partial

subsidies for private dental check-up services for adolescents aged between 13 and 17;

(ii) collaborate with NGOs to enhance emergency and special care dental services to the under-privileged, vulnerable groups with special needs, and persons with disabilities; and

(iii) enhance the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme to allow more eligible elderly persons to receive dental treatment services such as dental check-ups, scaling and polishing, fillings and extractions.

Mental Health

145. The Government attaches great importance to mental health, and will continue to adopt an integrated approach to promote mental health, which covers prevention, early identification, as well as provision of timely intervention, treatment and rehabilitation for persons in need. We strive to implement the 10 enhanced measures announced in June for supporting persons in mental recovery and those with mental health needs, which include:

(i) expedite case management—The HA will optimise the ratio of case manager to patients with severe mental illness to no higher than 1:40 under the Case Management Programme. For new cases triaged as Priority 1 (urgent) and Priority 2 (semi-urgent) at psychiatric specialist outpatient clinics, the median waiting time will be maintained at no longer than one week and four weeks respectively;

(ii) enhance community support and training of social workers—The SWD will enhance the services of Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness next year, including strengthening early identification of persons with mental health needs and early intervention, and exploring to scale up the training of social workers in community mental health service units to raise their capacity in handling complicated cases;

(iii) provide mental health assessment in the community—A pilot scheme will be launched in three District Health Centres next year in collaboration with community organisations to provide mental health assessment for those in need, and to provide early follow-up and referral for high-risk cases;

(iv) strengthen training of Care Team members—Care Team members will be provided with mental health support training to assist in the early referral of persons in need in the local communities for support; and

(v) launch a "Mental Health Literacy" resource kit—The EDB will launch a "Mental Health Literacy" resource kit suitable for upper primary and junior secondary levels in the 2023/24 school year, and prepare the same for lower primary and senior secondary levels, with a view to enhancing student awareness of mental health and assisting schools in promoting it.

Healthcare Manpower Supply and Training

146. To alleviate the shortage of dentists and nurses, the Government will introduce amendment bills to the Dentists Registration Ordinance and the

Nurses Registration Ordinance by mid-2024 to provide new pathways for admission of qualified non-locally trained dentists and nurses for serving in specified institutions under the premise that the professional standards and patients' welfare are maintained. Furthermore, we will, starting from the 2023/24 academic year, gradually increase the training places of ancillary dental workers and provide tuition sponsorship to attract more people to join the industry. The Government will also explore amending the Supplementary Medical Professions Ordinance to provide new pathways for admitting qualified non-locally trained supplementary medical professionals to serve in the HA and the Department of Health.

147. We will strengthen the two-way training and exchange of healthcare talents between Hong Kong and the Mainland, while continuing to take forward the "Hospital Authority Healthcare Talents Visiting Programme". Building upon the successful experience of the first phase of exchanges with the Guangdong Province recently, we will take forward talent exchanges with other Mainland regions/cities, such as Shanghai, to promote continuous mutual learning and clinical exchange between different clinical healthcare professionals from the two places, including doctors, nurses and Chinese medicine practitioners, etc.

Chinese Medicine Development

148. The Government will actively promote the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. We will:

(i) promote testing of and scientific research on Chinese medicine—Leveraging on the platform of the Government Chinese Medicines Testing Institute, we will accelerate the promotion of Chinese medicine informatisation and digitalisation, and facilitate the sharing of information. For instance, a Digitalised Chinese Medicines Information Platform will be launched early next year for Chinese medicine identification and educational purposes;

(ii) formulate the Chinese Medicine Development Blueprint—The recruitment exercise for the post of Commissioner for Chinese Medicine Development is at its the final stage. It is anticipated that the Commissioner can assume office early next year, who will co-ordinate the professional and policy development of Chinese medicine, and liaise with the Chinese medicine sector to formulate a comprehensive Chinese Medicine Development Blueprint for release in 2025;

(iii) strengthen integrated Chinese-Western medicine services—Starting from 2023-24, Chinese medicine rehabilitation will be incorporated to the clinical framework for "stroke care", and a new pilot project on "cancer care" will be launched at day chemotherapy centres. We will continue to explore the extension of integrated Chinese-Western medicine services to cover more disease areas, such as elderly degenerative diseases; and

(iv) take forward the preparatory work for Hong Kong's first Chinese Medicine Hospital (CMH)—The first CMH in Hong Kong is expected to commence service in phases starting from the end of 2025. It will establish a co-

operation mechanism with another CMH in the Mainland to support its continuing development.

Cross-boundary Medical Collaboration

149. We will strengthen medical collaboration with the Mainland, and contribute to the national strategy of "Healthy China". We will:

(i) support the internationalisation of national hospital accreditation standards—The HA will resume the hospital accreditation programme to ensure its management and services attaining international standards, and support the Shenzhen Hospital Accreditation Research Centre to set up an office in Hong Kong in the future with a view to contributing to the internationalisation of the national hospital accreditation standards and improving the overall healthcare quality of the GBA;

(ii) rolling out the "Elderly Health Care Voucher Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme"—We will extend the coverage of the elderly health care vouchers initially to about five suitable medical institutions in the GBA as trial service points for provision of primary healthcare services. It will also cover individual designated medical institutions providing dental services at places near Hong Kong, e.g. Shenzhen; and

(iii) making optimal use of healthcare services in the GBA—We will strategically procure healthcare services for the people of Hong Kong from suitable healthcare institutions in the GBA (including the University of Hong Kong – Shenzhen Hospital) so as to alleviate the pressure on service demand of our public hospital services and shorten the waiting time of our residents.

A Liveable and Vibrant City

Sports Development

150. In recent years, Hong Kong athletes have achieved great results in major sports events. In the recent Asian Games in Hangzhou, Hong Kong won a record high of 53 medals. The Government will continue to promote sports development in Hong Kong, supporting elite sports, enhancing professionalism, maintaining Hong Kong as a centre for major international sports events, developing sports as an industry, and promoting sports in the community.

151. On promoting elite sports and professionalism, the new building of the Hong Kong Sports Institute, to be completed in mid-2024, will provide more advanced training facilities for elite athletes. We will also allocate additional resources to enhance its Sports Medicine Centre. CSTB will continue to implement the 10-year Development Blueprint on Sports and Recreation Facilities, providing sports and recreation facilities such as sports centres, sports grounds and parks, amongst which include a swimming pool suitable for hosting international competitions, as well as an arena with fencing training and competition facilities. Furthermore, we will collaborate with the Sports Federation & Olympic Committee of Hong Kong, China (SF&OC) in mid-2024 to offer more professional training and internship

opportunities to coaches. This will enhance the professional standards of our coaches and the quality of training for our athletes.

152. On maintaining Hong Kong as a centre for major international sports events and developing sports as an industry, over 15 major international sports events supported by the "M" Mark system will be held in Hong Kong this year, the highest number ever. These events have attracted elite athletes and visitors around the world to visit Hong Kong. The supported events include the FIA World Rallycross Championship, the Aramco Team Series Hong Kong, as well as the Hong Kong Tennis Open, which will be staged in Hong Kong for the very first time. Being the largest sports infrastructure built in Hong Kong, the Kai Tak Sports Park, to be completed by the end of next year for opening in 2025, will be a premier venue for major events, such as international football and rugby matches as well as concerts. This will boost our soft power as a sports hub and foster the development of the related industries.

153. On promoting sports for all, we will collaborate with the SF&OC to organise Festival of Sport events on the Sport For All Day so that more people of Hong Kong may participate. The LCSD will also consider opening its sports facilities for free admission on specific festive occasions every year, where thematic sports days will be held for public participation. From next year onwards, the LCSD will set up self-test fitness corners at its sports centres, and introduce smart fitness equipment to its outdoor recreation venues. This will allow users to store or retrieve data of their physical activities and access information on sports and health via mobile applications. In addition, we will encourage and assist community organisations to arrange various sports activities and competitions.

Environmental Protection and Ecological Conservation

154. In order to achieve the "dual carbon" targets, the Government is striving to achieve carbon neutrality before 2050 and reduce Hong Kong's carbon emissions by 50% before 2035 as compared to the 2005 level. The Government has established the Office of Climate Change and Carbon Neutrality to help achieve the carbon neutrality targets of our country and Hong Kong, and tackle the carbon emission problem at source. We will:

(i) enhance energy conservation and decarbonisation in buildings—We will consult the trade this year on the proposal of amending the Buildings Energy Efficiency Ordinance, including extending the scope of regulation to more types of buildings, mandating the disclosure of information in energy audit reports, and shortening the interval of energy audit. Our target is to commence the legislative exercise next year;

(ii) extend the recovery and recycling schemes to more products—We will introduce a bill next year to establish a common legislative framework applicable to different products and make relevant subsidiary legislation. Our target is to gradually extend, starting from 2025, the producer responsibility schemes to five types of products: plastic beverage containers, beverage cartons, electric vehicle batteries, vehicle tyres and lead-acid batteries;

(iii) establish the Sam Po Shue Wetland Conservation Park...We will enhance the ecological quality and biodiversity of the Northern Metropolis, providing quality outdoor eco-education and recreation facilities for public enjoyment. Modernised aquaculture will also be introduced in the park. The relevant strategic feasibility study is expected to be completed in the first half of next year; and

(iv) protect Hong Kong's ecosystems...We will update and implement the Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan based on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, endorsed at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and having regard to the actual situation of Hong Kong.

District Environment

155. The Government will launch the "Shining City Project" to enhance the beautification work of our city. The project will focus on developing the Shing Mun River and Yuen Long Nullah into flower viewing hotspots, implementing landscaping improvement works at the central dividers and roundabouts of major roads during major festivals, and injecting art and design elements in suitable pitches/courts, as well as the external walls of sports venues and washrooms. The Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration will be in charge of co-ordinating these efforts.

Stay United to Tell Good Stories of Hong Kong

156. We will unite patriots with affection for the country and our city to actively promote, in the local and the international arenas, the success story of "One Country, Two Systems", presenting the openness and cultural vibrancy in Hong Kong and our distinctive advantage as a conduit between our motherland and the world. We will also be telling our local and international audiences the true and good stories of our city.

(To be continued.)