

CE's speech in delivering "The Chief Executive's 2024 Policy Address" to LegCo (10)

(C) Take Forward the Construction of Transport Infrastructure

Promote Major Transport Infrastructure Development

183. The Government is actively following through the Major Transport Infrastructure Development Blueprint for Hong Kong, under which the Hung Shui Kiu Station and the NOL Main Line are to commence construction this year and next year for tentative completion in 2030 and 2034 respectively. In parallel, cross-boundary railway projects are pressed ahead at full speed, including the Hong Kong-Shenzhen Western Rail Link (Hung Shui Kiu-Qianhai) and the NOL Spur Line, to enhance linkage between Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

Build Smart and Green Mass Transit Systems

184. Devoted to take forward the three smart and green mass transit systems, and for compressing the time required for construction, we invited suppliers and operators to submit expressions of interest for the East Kowloon and Kai Tak projects this August. We will invite expressions of interest for the Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen projects later this year. Through innovative implementation mode and construction methods, we aim to complete the Kai Tak project three years ahead of the original target completion date.

(D) Deepen Reform of the Healthcare System

185. To enhance the health of the people of Hong Kong, improve healthcare protection and quality, and capitalise on our healthcare professions' strengths, the Government will conduct a comprehensive review on the positioning and objectives of the healthcare system. The review will cover the following areas: reforming the functions and division of work among the Hospital Authority (HA), the Department of Health (DH) and the Primary Healthcare Commission (PHC Commission), strengthening health promotion and disease prevention in primary healthcare, and improving public healthcare services. In parallel, we will reform private healthcare services in terms of their quality, cost-effectiveness and price transparency, providing the public with high quality, cost-effective and affordable healthcare service options. We will also support manpower training and technology innovation, helping to uphold the global standing and regional advantage of Hong Kong's healthcare professions. This will also be conducive to the development of Hong Kong into an international health and medical innovation hub, an advanced medical service centre in Asia, a place where medical professionals cluster, as well as a bridge for East-West healthcare exchanges.

Advance Primary Healthcare Development

186. The Government will promote the development of primary healthcare on all fronts, including:

(i) formulating legislation to strengthen the regulatory framework of primary healthcare and authorise the PHC Commission to set up quality assurance and monitoring mechanisms;

(ii) developing a community drug formulary and launching a community pharmacy programme to help the public obtain affordable, primary healthcare drugs through central purchasing and the community network;

(iii) devising health promotion strategies by adopting a life course framework to formulate health management plans for the public according to age and health conditions;

(iv) revamping maternal and child health and family planning services to strengthen pre-pregnancy counselling and parental education and promote healthy fertility;

(v) strengthening the Whole School Health Programme to recommend targeted school-based measures for physical activities, meals and other matters for each school to improve students' physical and psychological well-being;

(vi) upgrading more District Health Centre Expresses into District Health Centres (DHCs), and expanding the service network, and integrating the services of Woman Health Centres and Elderly Health Centres;

(vii) expanding the Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme to cover blood lipid testing; positioning the HA's general outpatient services as the comprehensive, primary healthcare service providers for the underprivileged;

(viii) formulating risk-based screening programmes for prevalent cancers on a gradual basis, including breast cancer screening, exploring the use of AI to assist lung cancer screening, and implementing hepatitis B screening to prevent liver cancer;

(ix) launching a Primary Dental Co-care Pilot Scheme for Adolescents to encourage the prevention of dental diseases, as well as a Community Dental Support Programme to enhance dental services for underprivileged groups. This would include elderly persons in financial hardship, replacing the Community Care Fund Elderly Dental Assistance Programme, and introducing preventive dental services for pre-school children; and

(x) continuing efforts in tobacco control.

Enhance Public and Private Healthcare Services

187. The Government will strengthen the HA's public healthcare services, including:

(i) reviewing the structure and levels of the HA's fees and charges to encourage prudent use of services and direct resources to patients who need them most and for those with serious or critical conditions, while increasing

support for patients with financial difficulties and strengthening the financial sustainability of the targeted subsidisation of public healthcare services;

(ii) strengthening the centralised procurement of drugs and medical devices by various clusters of the HA system in order to enhance their bargaining power and to expedite, in a more proactive manner, the introduction of new drugs, meeting efficacy and cost-effectiveness standards to the Drug Formulary;

(iii) formulating a directory for inherited and rare diseases by using the Hong Kong Genome Institute's genomic data, thereby facilitating early diagnosis and treatment by clinical teams, while supporting relevant research and clinical trials to promote precision medicine;

(iv) fully integrating the paediatric services of various clusters at Hong Kong Children's Hospital and developing more advanced healthcare services to make the best use of the Children's Hospital;

(v) finalising the projects and timetable of the Second Hospital Development Plan to dovetail with the development of the Northern Metropolis and to address the needs of local districts;

(vi) setting up, in accordance with national accreditation standards, the first stroke centre and the second chest pain centre;

(vii) enhancing the triage system and referral arrangements for specialist out-patient services, including setting up inter-specialty, integrated, out-patient clinics to avoid the need for multiple referrals; and

(viii) increasing the service capacity for cataract surgeries by at least 20%.

188. The Government will also enhance the quality and efficiency of healthcare services, including:

(i) establishing a professional platform for developing evidence-based clinical protocols and exploring the feasibility of devising service quality and efficiency standards for public and private healthcare sectors;

(ii) developing quality indicators for public and private healthcare systems and exploring legislating for private healthcare price transparency to enhance service efficiency and address the issue of medical inflation, with the plan to consult the healthcare sector next year; and

(iii) amending relevant legislation to require all healthcare providers to deposit essential health data in the personal eHealth accounts of members of the public, enabling the latter to have more complete electronic health records and enhance continuity of medical care.

Bring in More Healthcare Professionals

189. We will promote the use of the legislation passed earlier to proactively

admit more non-local doctors, nurses and dentists to enhance manpower. The Government will introduce a bill on the admission of qualified non-locally trained supplementary medical professionals next year.

Support Establishment of a Third Medical School

190. In addition to increasing training places of the existing two medical schools, the Government supports the plan, by local universities, to establish a third medical school, increasing the number of doctors and supporting the city's development as an international health and medical innovation hub. A task group will be set up, inviting universities interested in establishing the new medical school to submit proposals. The Government will set aside sites in the Northern Metropolis Ngau Tam Mei to develop the new medical school campus and build an integrated medical teaching and research hospital.

Promote Development of Chinese Medicine

191. To develop Hong Kong into a bridgehead for the internationalisation of Chinese medicine (CM), the Government will make use of Hong Kong's advantages in its healthcare system, regulatory regime, standard-setting, clinical research and trade, and other areas. We will publish the CM Development Blueprint next year, and take forward the following measures:

- (i) exploring the application of big data to foster international research collaboration on herb-drug interaction to discover more evidence of clinical significance, promoting the internationalisation of CM;
- (ii) expanding integrated Chinese-Western medicine services to cover more diseases in which CM has an advantage, including respiratory diseases and knee osteoarthritis, and to progressively extend the cancer care programme to all hospital clusters;
- (iii) rolling out the first Chinese Medicine Hospital and the permanent premises of the Government Chinese Medicines Testing Institute, which are expected to be completed and begin phased operation next year; and
- (iv) organising the first edition of the Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Cultural Festival to promote the culture of CM in collaboration with the industry.

Promote Mental Health

192. The Government will extend integrated services based on a medical-educational-social collaboration model to promote mental health. Relevant measures include:

- (i) formulating a stepped care model for mental health—We will develop a multi-disciplinary framework with tiers, from dealing with general emotional problems in the frontline to handling cases requiring follow-up and more serious mental illnesses cases. The framework sets out the roles of different professionals (such as teaching staff, social workers and healthcare workers) and their division of work in the provision of mental health services for cases in each tier, enabling them to work together and

perform their respective roles smoothly;

(ii) raising community awareness of mental health—An annual promotional theme will be set for the Mental Health Workplace Charter, and recognition will be given to participating organisations for achieving targets. We will also promote the 4Rs Mental Health Charter in schools to promote the mental health of students, teaching staff and parents in a more holistic manner;

(iii) enhancing support for children and adolescents—We will extend and enhance the Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism, and launch the "Mental Health Literacy" resource packages for senior secondary and lower primary levels. A real-time, online youth emotional support platform will be set up in the second quarter of next year;

(iv) facilitating the integration of persons in mental recovery into the community—We will set up Transitional Support Service Teams for Persons in Mental Recovery, offering support to discharged patients waitlisted for halfway house service. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) will also set up an additional Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness; and

(v) strengthening teacher training and parent education—We will strengthen teachers' capacity in the early identification of, and support for, students with mental health needs, and assist parents in acquiring the knowledge and skills in addressing children's mental health.

(E) Build a Caring and Inclusive Society

193. I attach great importance to building a harmonious and stable community, one that is caring and inclusive, providing targeted assistance to the underprivileged and families in need. Social welfare tops public expenditures of all policy portfolios, with more than \$300 million spent on social welfare each day. This underlines the Government's emphasis on social welfare.

Targeted Poverty Alleviation

194. The Government has adopted the strategy of targeted poverty alleviation by directing resources to those most in need. This approach is well-received by the community. We will focus on the following key areas:

(i) expanding the Strive and Rise Programme—We will launch the third cohort of the programme this year to recruit 4,000 mentees. We will also encourage youth leaders of the Alumni Club to organise activities for self-development, enhance training for mentors and related initiatives;

(ii) extending the Pilot Programme on Community Living Room (CLR)—We will set up three additional CLRs next year in areas clustered with SDUs. They are expected to benefit about 1,300 target households, serving about 200,000 attendances a year. Including the four CLRs already launched, they are expected to serve about 3,050 SDU households, drawing about 470,000 attendances a year;

(iii) enhancing the School-based After-School Care Service Scheme—Beginning this school year, the number of primary schools

covered by the Scheme will increase from 50 to over 110, enabling students in need to stay at school outside school hours for care and learning support, allowing their parents to take up jobs. Subject to actual utilisation and outcome of the scheme, we plan to encourage more schools to participate in the scheme, without capping the number of places, in the 2025/26 school year; and

(iv) subsidising elderly recipients of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) to reside in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) in the Guangdong Province—We will launch a three-year pilot scheme next year to subsidise elderly CSSA recipients retiring in Guangdong to reside in designated RCHEs in the Guangdong Province. Each eligible elderly person will receive a monthly subsidy of \$5,000, subject to a quota of 1000.

Care for the Elderly

195. The Government attaches great importance to caring for the elderly in need and has been constantly strengthening elderly services. The total number of vouchers under the Residential Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly will be increased by 20% to 6000, allowing more frail elderly persons to be admitted to RCHEs of their choice and receive subsidised care services without waiting.

196. We will enhance the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong to provide more choices and support for elderly persons who opt to stay in RCHEs in the province. Relevant measures include:

(i) increasing the number of participating RCHEs from the existing 4 to 11 in November 2024;

(ii) sharing part of the elderly participants' medical expenses in Guangdong; and

(iii) engaging organisations to provide care services for participating elderly persons to help them adapt to living in Guangdong.

197. We are providing, through the Special Scheme to Import Care Workers for RCHs, additional manpower support for local residential care homes (RCHs) and enhancing their staff quality. We are also conducting a holistic review of the skill and qualification requirements of RCH staff providing health and rehabilitation services, including the creation of promotion ranks for incumbent health workers and the relaxation of the academic qualification for the Certificate in Progression Training for Care Workers programme. The review is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

198. The Government is also discussing with the banking sector possible ways to enable Hong Kong elderly persons retiring in Guangdong and Fujian Provinces to receive portable cash assistance from the Government more conveniently through banks.

Support Carers

199. The Government is committed to supporting carers. In addition to providing carers' allowance, respite services, a one-stop information gateway and the 24-hour Designated Hotline for Carer Support 182-183, we launched the District Services and Community Care Teams-Pilot Scheme on Supporting Elderly and Carers in Tsuen Wan and Southern District this March. Trained by the SWD, Care Teams of the two districts identify and reach out to households in need, and provide support to the elderly and carers who seek help from the Designated Hotline. The scheme has achieved good results. In the past six months, the Care Teams visited 4700 families and referred about 900 cases to social welfare organisations for follow-up. Next year, we will extend the scheme to across the territory, supporting elderly persons and carers in all 18 districts.

200. We will also explore the setting up of an interdisciplinary and inter-organisation database. It will cover carers of elderly persons and carers of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and the use of identification tools designed by university teams for the detection of high-risk cases and early intervention and support.

Strengthen Support for Persons with Disabilities

201. We will further enhance the rehabilitation services for PWDs, including:

(i) establishing 14 Integrated Community Rehabilitation Centres across the city with the provision of 1280 additional service places, to support PWDs based on their individual needs and rehabilitation progress through an integrated, case-management approach;

(ii) creating 90 additional peer-support posts to enhance peer assistance for PWDs and their carers;

(iii) setting up an additional District Support Centre for PWDs in New Territories East; and

(iv) providing about 1040 additional places for day, residential and pre-school rehabilitation services, and exploring the establishment of Special Child Care Centres on vacant kindergarten premises.

202. To encourage and support PWDs to engage in employment, the Government will introduce the "Caring Employer" medal, commending employers who actively engage PWDs; promote the establishment of more social enterprises engaging PWDs; and enhance the services and training models of sheltered workshops and integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres, building a better vocational rehabilitation and training ladder for PWDs.

Promote Women's Development

203. There are many women in Hong Kong playing leading roles. To promote women's workplace development, we will establish a network run by leading women from all walks of life and launch a mentorship programme "She Inspires". Under the programme, female university students will be paired with mentors from the senior management of different sectors.

Support Working Parents

204. To support working parents, I announced the setting up of 10 aided, standalone, child care centres last year. The Government will set up one more child care centre providing 100 additional places for day child care services. Service places under the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project will be increased by 25%, to 2500, with the estimated number of beneficiaries increasing to 25000.

Protect Children

205. The LegCo has enacted the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance to require professionals in the social welfare, education and healthcare sectors to report serious child abuse cases. To strengthen parental education, the SWD will launch a pilot scheme to set up four Community Parents and Children Centres to promote parent-child interaction and pass on positive parenting skills to parents through play-based services, supporting families in need.

Provide Support for Ethnic Minorities

206. To help ethnic minorities (EMs) better integrate into the community, I announced the setting up of two additional support service centres for EMs last year, which will begin operation by the end of this year. The Government will engage one more support service centre to provide interpretation and translation services for EMs next year, reducing language barrier concerns. The EDB will strengthen Chinese learning support and parental assistance for non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students (including EM students), providing after-school Chinese language courses, enhancing the Online Chinese Language Self-learning Resources and organising cross-school, teacher-learning communities. The EDB will also provide parental education activities for the parents of NCS children.

Care Teams

207. Care Teams are the Government's key service teams under the improved district governance structure. Fully launched across the city last year, all 452 Care Teams have been working diligently and providing a wide range of caring and support services for the community. To date, they have visited about 23000 elderly households and other households in need, and provided over 22000 counts of simple household care or other support services. Their service have been well-received by the public. The Government will regularise the funding provision for Care Teams and increase funding by 50% in the next term of service in support of their work.

(To be continued.)