

Enhancement of Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme to allow shared use of health care vouchers between spouses to launch this Friday

The Department of Health (DH) today (July 24) announced that with effect from this Friday (July 28), eligible Hong Kong elderly persons can share-use health care vouchers (Vouchers) with their spouse. In addition, starting from the same date, the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (EHVS) will implement the use of electronic consent (e-consent) and introduce real-time short messaging service (SMS) to provide further convenience to elderly persons using the Vouchers.

The Chief Executive announced in the 2022 Policy Address a series of enhancement measures of the EHVS, including allowing couples to share-use the Vouchers. At present, over 950 000 elderly persons aged 65 and above in Hong Kong are married, and they will be able to benefit from this new share-use arrangement.

In firming up the arrangements of the plan, one of the key principles adopted by the Government is to provide convenience to elderly persons. Elderly couples (both parties aged 65 or above) who intend to share-use the Vouchers are not required to register in advance for pairing up their accounts. When either party of an elderly couple uses the Voucher to pay for healthcare services, both of them only need to attend the practice of any healthcare service provider participating in the EHVS for pairing up their Voucher accounts. During the registration process, elderly persons are not required to provide any documentary proof of spousal relationship. However, they need to declare their spousal relationship and give consent to share-use their Vouchers to ensure their eligibility when registering for pairing up accounts in front of a healthcare service provider. Elderly persons will be directly requested by the Government to provide supporting documents for verification when necessary later. Upon completion of registration for pairing the accounts, there is no further need to register for pairing accounts again when Vouchers are used.

If either party of an elderly couple is unable to register in person due to exceptional circumstances (e.g. immobility or being bedridden), they need to complete and sign the "Consent of Sharing Health Care Vouchers between Voucher Recipients in Spousal Relationship" (downloadable from the EHVS website (www.hcv.gov.hk)), which have to be submitted by the elderly person attending a healthcare service provider's practice by bringing along a copy of a valid Hong Kong identity card (HKIC) (or Certificate of Exemption (CoE), if applicable) of the spouse who is unable to attend to complete the registration process.

Following the completion of account pairing, the elderly person and

his/her spouse can, upon exhaustion of his/her own Voucher account balance, use the Voucher balance in his/her spouse's account. Every time spouse's Vouchers are used, the elderly person is required to provide a copy of the latest HKIC (or CoE, if applicable) of the spouse to the healthcare service provider for verification.

To safeguard the interest of both parties with accounts paired, an elderly person and his/her spouse with the account successfully paired will each receive an SMS at his/her designated contact mobile phone number to ensure that both of them are aware that their accounts have been paired. Whenever their Voucher balance has been used by his/her spouse in future, they will also receive SMS notifications.

Apart from allowing the use of Vouchers between spouses, from the same date, the EHVS will also launch the use of e-consent to replace the previous paper-based consent to confirm the agreement of using Vouchers. When elderly persons use Vouchers to pay for service fees, they only need to insert their HKIC into the smart identity card reader for expressing agreement to the use of the relevant Voucher amount. They are no longer required to sign on the paper consent form. All elderly persons using Vouchers can provide a local mobile phone number which can receive an SMS to the healthcare service provider. When Vouchers are used to pay for healthcare services, the system will send a real-time SMS notification (including the Voucher amount used) to provide extra security.

A spokesman for the DH reminded, "The EHVS aims to provide convenience and subsidy to elderly persons to receive private primary healthcare services that best suit their health needs in terms of disease prevention and health management. In share-using Vouchers between spouses, elderly persons must consider their own needs and should fully communicate with their spouse to make thorough plans on how to make the best use of their Vouchers after pairing up their accounts. Moreover, Vouchers cannot be used solely for purchasing goods, medication, medical equipment and products, or redeemed for cash."

To ensure the proper use of public money, the DH will conduct regular or sampling checks in accordance with the monitoring mechanism. All suspected cases of false declaration about a spousal relationship will be strictly dealt with and referred to law enforcement agencies for investigation. Making a false declaration is a criminal offence and offenders are liable to a fine or imprisonment upon conviction.

The spokesman added, "The DH and healthcare service providers will not, in relation to the use of Vouchers (including Voucher account pairing), ask for any bank account details (including passwords) of the elderly persons via phone calls or SMS, nor will they ask the elderly persons to click on any website links. Elderly persons must stay vigilant against scams."

To facilitate understanding of the procedures for pairing of elderly couple's Voucher accounts, the DH has held a total of 10 briefing sessions from July 19 to 24 for healthcare service providers, and explained to relevant healthcare personnel the relevant measures and answered their

queries.

Members of the public may refer to the EHVS website (www.hcv.gov.hk) for more information, or call the EHVS hotline (2838 2311) for enquiries.