

Government releases Primary Healthcare Blueprint (with photo)

The Government released the Primary Healthcare Blueprint today (December 19) to formulate the direction of development and strategies for strengthening Hong Kong's primary healthcare system to address the challenges brought about by an ageing population and the increasing prevalence of chronic disease, with a view to enhancing the overall health and quality of life of citizens.

The Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau said, "In face of the pressure brought about by an ageing population and the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, it is unsustainable to cope with the ever-rising healthcare demand solely through increasing public healthcare expenditure for subsidising public hospital services. Therefore, Hong Kong needs to introduce a systemic reform of the healthcare system to shift the focus of the present healthcare system from curative treatment to disease prevention, change its emphasis and people's mindset from treatment-oriented to prevention-focused."

He pointed out that primary healthcare is the first point of contact for individuals and families in a continuous healthcare process. It is also the most essential component in a well-functioning healthcare system. The COVID-19 epidemic has further accentuated the importance of a robust community-based primary healthcare system.

"The Blueprint sets out our vision, concrete recommendations and implementation plans, and outlines a strategic roadmap for the future development of primary healthcare in Hong Kong. We hope to push ahead primary healthcare reform through the Blueprint with a view to providing accessible and coherent healthcare services and establishing a sustainable healthcare system, thereby improving the overall health status of the population."

The Blueprint puts forward five major directions of primary healthcare reform. Key recommendations are listed below:

(1) Develop a community-based primary healthcare system

- to further develop the district-based, family-centric community healthcare system based on the service model of District Health Centres;
- to strengthen the concept of "Family Doctor for All";
- to introduce the Chronic Disease Co-Care Scheme to provide targeted subsidies to citizens for diagnosis and management of target chronic diseases (in particular hypertension and diabetes) in the private healthcare service sector; and
- to migrate primary healthcare services under the Department of Health to the district-based community health system progressively to reduce service duplication.

(2) Strengthen primary healthcare governance

- to progressively transform the Primary Healthcare Office currently under the Health Bureau into the Primary Healthcare Commission, with a view to better managing the provision of primary healthcare services, standard setting, quality assurance and training of primary healthcare professionals under one roof;
- to require all family doctors and healthcare professionals providing primary healthcare services to be enlisted on the Primary Care Register to ensure the quality of primary healthcare services; and
- to establish a two-way referral mechanism between primary healthcare services and specialist and hospital services, emphasising the case management and gate-keeping role of primary healthcare service providers.

(3) Consolidate primary healthcare resources

- to make wider use of market capacity and adopt the "co-payment" principle in providing government-subsidised primary healthcare programmes;
- to enhance the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme and other subsidised services;
- to oversee the development and implementation of primary healthcare strategic purchasing programmes via the Strategic Purchasing Office; and
- to enhance the co-ordination of development and redevelopment of government buildings and premises for healthcare facilities at the community level.

(4) Reinforce primary healthcare manpower

- to review the manpower projection model and formulate strategies to project the demand for primary healthcare professionals and increase manpower supply; and
- to strengthen primary healthcare-related training for all primary healthcare service providers and the role of Chinese medicine practitioners, community pharmacists and other primary healthcare professionals in the delivery of primary healthcare services.

(5) Improve data connectivity and health surveillance

- to transform the Electronic Health Record Sharing System (eHealth) into a comprehensive and integrated healthcare information infrastructure for healthcare data sharing, service delivery and process management;
- to require all primary healthcare service providers to use eHealth; and
- to develop a population-based health dataset and conduct on-going data analytics and surveys to support the Government in formulating healthcare policy.

Professor Lo said, "We strongly believe that the recommendations set out in the Blueprint will guide the direction of development of our healthcare

system and enable us to maintain a sustainable and healthy healthcare system that supports every citizen in Hong Kong in the decades ahead."

He thanked the Steering Committee on Primary Healthcare Development for comprehensively analysing the structural situation of the primary healthcare system and offering constructive and invaluable advice to the Government during the formulation of the Blueprint.

"I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude for members' significant contributions. Based on the recommendations in the Blueprint and with the support of the Steering Committee, the Government will engage stakeholders to formulate detailed plans and implementation timetable. We look forward to joining hands with citizens to build a healthier society in Hong Kong."

Full text and pamphlet of the Blueprint are available at the Health Bureau's thematic website (www.primaryhealthcare.gov.hk).

