

LCQ1: Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong

Following is a question by Dr the Hon Dennis Lam and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (July 10):

Question:

According to the Hong Kong Population Projections 2022-2046 published by the Census and Statistics Department, the proportion of elderly population in the total population will increase from 20.5 per cent in 2021 to 36 per cent in 2046, meaning more than one in every three Hong Kong people will be an elderly. On the other hand, it is learnt that ageing in the Mainland has become a common phenomenon in recent years. Regarding the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong (the GD Scheme), will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the Social Welfare Department relaxed the eligibility criteria for operators under the GD Scheme in July last year by allowing non-governmental and private organisations alike to register their residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) located in the Mainland cities within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) as Recognised Service Providers, of the respective numbers of applications from such organisations received and approved by the Government since the relaxation of the GD Scheme;

(2) as the Government indicated in May this year that it was exploring the expansion of the GD Scheme to include RCHEs solely operated by Mainland entities this year, and that it was liaising with relevant departments in the GBA cities to conduct on-site inspections and jointly select suitable RCHEs, of the progress of the relevant work; and

(3) of the average monthly expenditure incurred by the Government on each subsidised RCHE place purchased under the GD Scheme?

Reply:

President,

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

(1) Since July 28, 2023, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has relaxed the eligibility criteria for service operators to join the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong (GDRCS Scheme). Hong Kong organisations, including non-governmental and private ones, which have experience and a good track record in providing subsidised residential care services for the elderly, may apply for inclusion of their residential care homes for the

elderly (RCHEs) located in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) in the GDRCS Scheme. The SWD has received seven applications so far, among which two applications have been approved and have joined the GDRCS Scheme since May 2024, while one application has been rejected. The SWD is vetting the remaining four applications.

(2) The 2023 Policy Address announced that the Government would explore expanding the GDRCS Scheme to include specific RCHEs operated by Mainland organisations in 2024, i.e. RCHEs which do not have experience in operating residential care homes in Hong Kong, so that elderly persons will have more retirement choices in the Mainland cities of the GBA. In November 2023, the Labour and Welfare Bureau signed a letter of intent on collaboration with the Department of Civil Affairs of Guangdong Province. Both sides would kick-start exploring the selection of RCHEs operated by Mainland organisations in designated Mainland cities of the GBA to join the GDRCS Scheme. The RCHEs concerned must be rated four stars or above on the "List of Star-rated Senior Care Organisations" by the Department of Civil Affairs of Guangdong Province based on the standards of the national "Classification and Accreditation for Senior Care Organisation", and have at least a two-year record of operation. With the assistance of the Mainland government departments, the SWD has been visiting RCHEs for selecting more suitable RCHEs to join the GDRCS Scheme, with a view to providing more choices for Hong Kong elderly persons retiring in the Mainland cities of the GBA.

(3) The estimated expenditure for the GDRCS Scheme in 2024-25 is about \$32.5 million. As at end-March 2024, there were about 170 Hong Kong elderly persons joining the GDRCS Scheme. The number of places to be purchased by the SWD each year depends on the number of participating elderly persons. The expenditure on purchasing the places is affected by various factors, e.g. the city and location where the RCHEs are situated, and the facilities and service level of the RCHEs. To avoid affecting the ongoing negotiations on the purchase of places between the SWD and the RCHEs concerned, the Government should not disclose the average monthly expenditure for subsidising the places for the elderly.