

LCQ13: Provision of support for elderly singletons

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Ka-piu and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (June 28):

Question:

According to the data in the 2021 Population Census, the number of domestic households with elderly persons aged 65 and above was about 1.02 million in 2021 and, among them, the proportion of elderly singletons to all domestic households with elderly persons was 18.5 per cent. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the number of households with elderly singletons aged 60 or above in public housing estates across the territory, with a breakdown by the age group of such households (i.e. aged 60 to 69, 70 to 79, 80 to 89, 90 to 99, and 100 or above);
- (2) of the number of members of elderly centres subsidised by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and, among them, the number of members who are elderly singletons; whether it has assessed the effectiveness of the services of such elderly centres;
- (3) of the current number of elderly singletons assessed by the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services as frail cases, with a breakdown by the age group of such elderly persons (i.e. aged 60 to 69, 70 to 79, 80 to 89, 90 to 99, and 100 or above);
- (4) of the respective current numbers of elderly singletons receiving various government cash benefits (including Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, Old Age Living Allowance, Old Age Allowance and Disability Allowance, etc.);
- (5) whether the Housing Department, the SWD (including the SWD-subsidised elderly centres) and the Hospital Authority will consolidate the information on elderly singletons and establish an information sharing platform on elderly singleton households to improve the co-ordination among the relevant departments, thereby ensuring that every elderly singleton in need can receive welfare support; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (6) whether it will collaborate with the relevant departments to make use of gerontechnology to install home safety monitoring systems for elderly singletons, such as monitoring systems for bed exit and fall detection, so as to ensure that elderly singletons can receive timely rescue and assistance in case of home accidents, thereby preventing recurrence of incidents of failure to rescue which occurred frequently in recent years; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Housing Bureau and the Health Bureau, I provide a consolidated reply as follows:

(1) The age distribution of singleton elderly households aged 60 or above living in public rental housing units of the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) as at end-March 2023 is as follows:

Age group	Number of singleton elderly households
60 to 69	55 229
70 to 79	40 888
80 to 89	19 879
90 to 99	5 645
100 or above	148
Total	121 789

(2) and (5) 213 District Elderly Community Centres (DECCs) and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres (altogether elderly centres) across the territory provide multiple support services to the elderly at the community level, including counselling, referral, assistance in making applications for long-term care services, emotional support and carer training. One of the tasks of the elderly centres is to reach out to and identify hidden or singleton elderly persons with potential needs through outreach services, in order to assist them to build a social life. The DECCs have set up support teams for the elderly (STEs). Not only do the STEs visit and assist the elderly with their personal needs, but they also develop volunteer programmes for the elderly to encourage them to participate in social affairs and serve the elderly in need, and to expand their social networks to give full play to the spirit of active ageing. In addition, the elderly centres establish a database of their service targets to gather and analyse information about the elderly in need in the districts for follow-up. As at end-March 2023, there were about 287 000 registered members in the elderly centres. Among them, the number of hidden and needy elderly cases being followed up was about 9 000.

At present, there are over 120 000 singleton elderly households living in public rental housing units under the HA. The Housing Department (HD) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) have established an inter-departmental referral mechanism to handle special cases related to housing assistance for public rental housing tenants, and set up liaison groups at headquarters and district levels to hold regular meetings to review and improve the cooperation arrangements for housing assistance cases. Depending on the needs of the singleton elderly tenants, the HD may approve their relatives or domestic helpers to live temporarily in the units to facilitate care for the elderly tenants. If the elderly tenants have other needs, the HD will also refer the cases to the relevant government departments and/or agencies with their consent to assist them in receiving appropriate support services.

In 2021-22, the total number of inpatient discharges and deaths in the Hospital Authority was about 1 025 000. The Hospital Authority does not maintain separate data on hospital admissions and discharges of singleton elderly persons.

(3) As at end-March 2023, the numbers of frail elderly persons who received "home-based" Enhanced Home and Community Care Services/Integrated Home Care Services (Frail Cases) and "centre-based" day care centre services were about 13 000 and 5 000 respectively, and there were about 7 000 frail elderly persons using the Community Care Service Vouchers. According to the information gathered through the Standardised Care Need Assessment for Elderly Services, there were about 4 000 singleton elderly persons receiving the above-mentioned services with a breakdown by age group as follows:

Age group	Enhanced Home and Community Care Services/Integrated Home Care Services (Frail Cases)	Day Care Centres/Units for the Elderly	Community Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly	Total
60 to 69	211	31	130	372
70 to 79	653	88	277	1 018
80 to 89	1 241	184	496	1 921
90 to 99	618	77	182	877
100 or above	12	2	5	19
Total	2 735	382	1 090	4 207

(4) As at end-March 2023, there were about 55 000 singleton Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients aged 65 or above who were not living at residential care homes.

The Social Security Allowance Scheme comprises the Old Age Living Allowance, the Old Age Allowance and the Disability Allowance, etc. Recipients are generally not required to declare whether they are living with family members. Accordingly, the SWD does not maintain the number of singleton elderly recipients.

(6) The HA and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) provide subsidies to eligible elderly households living in public rental housing estates under their management for the installation and use of an emergency call system to enable singleton elderly persons to seek assistance promptly in case of emergency. The SWD also provides a similar allowance to elderly recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance.

The HA and the HKHS are committed to promoting ageing in place and have implemented various support programmes in their public rental housing estates or elderly housing projects for such purpose.

Considering that elderly tenants may need to modify the facilities in their units to cope with their daily living activities, the HA may, upon application, carry out free adaptation or modification works in their public rental housing units, including installation of ramps at the entrance of the units, widening of bathroom doorways, conversion of bathtubs into shower cubicles, addition of handrails in bathrooms, etc., where practicable.

Since 2012, the HKHS has also started to provide support services for the elderly in rental housing estates to cater for their housing, physical and mental health, and social needs, including free home assessments and retrofitting works for elderly residents in need.

In addition, the HKHS' Senior Citizen Residences (SEN) Scheme provides middle-income seniors aged 60 or above with age-friendly units, integrated one-stop healthcare services and recreation facilities, residential care homes for the elderly, etc. The HKHS has thus far launched three SEN projects, namely Jolly Place, Cheerful Court and Blissful Place, providing a total of 888 units. The units under the SEN Scheme are designed with various gerontechnology and safety features, such as the "integrated care link system", non-slippery floor tiles and handrails, individual emergency alarm, non-flame cooking equipment, etc.