

LCQ14: Elderly Dental Assistance Programme

Following is a question by the Hon Yung Hoi-yan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

The Elderly Dental Assistance Programme (the Programme), launched by the Community Care Fund in September 2012, provides free removable dentures and related dental services to low-income elderly persons who are users of home care service or home help service subvented by the Social Welfare Department. The eligibility for participating in the Programme was relaxed in September 2015, October 2016, July 2017 and February 2019 to cover elderly persons who were/are Old Age Living Allowance recipients aged 80 or above, aged 75 or above, aged 70 or above and aged 65 or above respectively. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the respective numbers of elderly persons eligible for participating in the Programme when it was first launched and upon each relaxation of the eligibility; the number of elderly persons participating in the Programme in the three months after each relaxation, and the percentage of such number in the total number of eligible elderly persons, as well as how such figures compare with the relevant figures for three months prior to that relaxation;
- (2) of the respective numbers of participating dental clinics and dentists in each year since the launch of the Programme, with a breakdown by District Council district;
- (3) of the largest, smallest and average numbers of elderly persons to whom the participating dentists provided dental services under the Programme, and the number of dentists who did not provide such services throughout the year (and the reasons for that), in each of the past three years; and
- (4) whether it has reviewed if the implementation of the Programme (including the numbers of participating elderly persons and dentists) has achieved the expected results; if it has reviewed and the outcome is that the expected results have not been achieved, of the measures put in place to (i) boost the participation rate of elderly persons, and (ii) avoid the situation that participating dentists do not provide the relevant services at all throughout a year?

Reply:

President,

- (1) The Community Care Fund launched the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme

(the Programme) in September 2012. The Programme was expanded by phases to cover elderly persons who are Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) recipients aged 80 or above, aged 75 or above, aged 70 or above and aged 65 or above respectively. The respective numbers of elderly persons eligible for participating in the Programme when it was first launched and upon each relaxation of the eligibility criteria, the number of elderly persons participating in the Programme in the subsequent three months after each relaxation and the percentage of such number in the total number of eligible elderly persons, as well as how such figures compare with the relevant figures in the preceding three months before that relaxation are tabulated below:

Programme phase	Launch of the Programme (since September 2012)	First phase expansion (since September 2015)	Second phase expansion (since October 2016)	Third phase expansion (since July 2017)	Fourth phase expansion (since February 2019)
No. of eligible elderly persons	34 662 (Note 1)	167 446 (Notes 1 and 2)	251 787 (Notes 1 and 2)	376 168 (Notes 1 and 2)	578 302 (Notes 1, 2 and 3)
Total no. of participating elderly persons three months after launch / relaxation (Note 4)	192	9 243 (7 646)	19 311 (5 101)	31 120 (6 999)	57 754 (6 959)
Their percentage in the total no. of eligible elderly persons	0.6%	5.5%	7.7%	8.3%	10.0%
Total no. of participating elderly persons three months before relaxation	Not applicable	1 514	12 909	21 767	46 932
Increase in participation rate (%) three months before and after relaxation	Not applicable	510%	50%	43%	23%

Note 1: It refers to the number of elderly persons using Integrated Home Care

Services (IHCS) or Enhanced Home and Community Care Services (EHCCS). The elderly persons are required to pay a fee for IHCS and EHCCS according to the fee scale based on their income levels (divided into three levels). The low-income elderly persons charged at level one or two are eligible for the application of the Programme. The Social Welfare Department does not keep a breakdown of the number of service users by month, income level and fee level. The figures provided are the total number of service users of all levels in a whole year.

Note 2: The figure is based on the number of eligible elderly persons receiving OALA in that financial year.

Note 3: The figure on service users of IHCS and EHCCS derives from the revised estimates of the annual total in 2018-19.

Note 4: The number of participating elderly persons within the three months after relaxation is provided in bracket.

(2) The respective numbers of participating dentists (including dentists serving private and non-government organisations (NGO) clinics) in each year since the launch of the Programme, with a breakdown by District Council (DC) district are tabulated below. The implementing agent of the Programme does not keep a breakdown of all participating dental clinics.

Total number of participating dentists (including dentists serving private and NGO dental clinics) in each year:

Financial Year	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 (as at end-September 2019)
Number of participating dentists (Note 5)	447	523	577	611	617

Note 5: The figure excludes some of the doubled-counted dentists serving private and NGO dental clinics concurrently.

Number of participating dentists (breakdown by DC district) in each year (Note 6):

Financial Year (Note 7)	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 (as at end-September 2019)
Central and Western	47	64	75	80	77
Wan Chai	38	49	54	56	49
Eastern	46	55	63	62	68
Southern	11	11	11	11	11

Yau Tsim Mong	98	124	135	158	163
Sham Shui Po	35	43	49	57	66
Kowloon City	25	31	38	37	44
Wong Tai Sin	28	37	40	50	51
Kwun Tong	39	49	56	64	67
Tsuen Wan	25	31	37	41	33
Tuen Mun	24	37	43	39	40
Yuen Long	27	40	48	45	52
North	16	18	16	20	20
Tai Po	18	22	22	25	25
Sai Kung	20	30	31	33	34
Sha Tin	42	53	62	63	62
Kwai Tsing	24	30	37	48	53
Islands	4	7	8	9	7

Note 6: Some of the participating dentists providing services under the Programme in different DC districts are counted individually.

Note 7: The implementing agent of the Programme only keeps the number of participating dentists and the breakdown starting from 2015-16.

(3) The largest, smallest and average numbers of elderly persons to whom the participating dentists provided dental services under the Programme in each of the past three years are tabulated below –

Financial Year	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
The largest number of cases handled by a dentist	237	486	370
The smallest number of cases handled by a dentist (Note 8)	0	0	0
The average number of cases handled by a dentist	19	28	27

Note 8: Some Community Care Dentists were not chosen by elderly persons to provide service. Some Community Care Dentists also left the Programme after joining it.

The implementing agent of the Programme does not keep the number of dentists who did not provide such service. Under the arrangement of the Programme, the eligible elderly persons are allowed to choose dentists under the Programme out of their own volition, while the participation of dentists is on a voluntary basis. The duration of the dentists' participation will also affect the number of cases processed.

(4) The Government and the implementing agent will review the implementation of the Programme on a regular basis (including the number of participating

elderly persons and dentists). The Programme was expanded in February 2019 to cover elderly persons who are OALA recipients aged 65 or above. The number of participating elderly persons was about 66 200 as at end-September 2019. Based on the figure that around 580 000 elderly persons are currently eligible for the Programme, the actual participation rate is about 11 per cent. As more eligible elderly persons will apply for the Programme, it is anticipated that the overall number of participants will continue to increase.

On the other hand, there are many factors affecting the participation of the Programme, including:

- some elderly persons do not see the need to wear removable dentures (Note 9) (e.g. having good oral health, or having no intention to wear removable dentures even with missing teeth);
- some elderly persons do not submit application due to personal reasons (e.g. being physically unfit for receiving dental services); and
- some elderly persons tend to avoid seeking medical consultation or feel bothered by the treatment process, and refuse to apply.

As at end-September 2019, a total of 617 dentists joined the Programme, accounting for one-third of local registered dentists working in private sector (Note 10). This number is 2.5 times of those dentists participated at the launch of the Programme in 2012.

The Government and the implementing agent will continue to strive to invite more eligible elderly persons and dentists to participate in the Programme through various activities and channels. For example, the implementing agent will arrange dentists to introduce the Programme and share the information on removable dentures to the public through television and radio programmes, and strengthen the promotion with over 190 service units (mostly elderly centers and community centers operated by NGOs) in order to encourage elderly persons' participation. Meanwhile, the implementing agent will continue their efforts to release the latest information of the Programme through the Hong Kong Dental Association's Newsletter, organise monthly briefing sessions for interested dentists to learn more about the operational processes and key points of the Programme, meet with dental professions by engaging in the Hong Kong International Dental Expo and Symposium to further promote the Programme as well as introducing how the Programme can benefit the daily living of elderly persons. The implementing agent will also endeavour to encourage the participating dentists to provide services for more eligible elderly persons.

Note 9: According to the Department of Health's Oral Health Survey conducted in 2011, while about 25 per cent of the elderly persons living in the community (i.e. non-institutionalised elderly persons) had the need to replace missing teeth, only 7 per cent of them perceived the need.

Note 10: There are about 1 700 registered dentists working in private sector.