

LCQ14: Enhancing the support for carers

Following is a question by the Hon Elizabeth Quat and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (February 23):

Question:

It is learnt that some persons with disabilities and elderly persons have lost self-care abilities and require intensive care from their family members. However, the gravity of the problem of population ageing in Hong Kong has given rise to the situations of "the elderly taking care of the elderly" and "the disabled taking care of the disabled". There have even been incidents of family tragedies resulting from carers overloaded with stress. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current total number of public service centres and service centres operated by non-governmental organisations in Hong Kong which provide services such as nursing care training and emotional support for carers (set out in a table); whether it has assessed if such services can meet the demand;

(2) given that many social welfare service providers have been suspending or providing only limited services amid the epidemic, many carers who lack nursing knowledge have to take constant care of their family members and are thus subject to heavy financial burden and mental pressure, whether the Government will expeditiously provide them with special support and referral services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) of the progress made by the consultants commissioned by the authorities in conducting the "Consultancy study on needs and support required of carers of elderly persons and of persons with disabilities in Hong Kong"; whether it will make public the outcome of the study and submit the relevant report to this Council for discussion;

(4) as there are comments pointing out that quite a number of carers are unable to benefit from the "Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low-income Families" and the "Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities" introduced by the Government under the Community Care Fund because of the schemes' limited places offered, high application thresholds imposed and insufficient amounts of allowance disbursed, whether the Government will enhance the schemes and introduce a flat-rate or reimbursement-based transport subsidy, so as to alleviate carers' financial pressure; and

(5) whether it will consider afresh setting up a comprehensive carer support system whereby care service agreements based on carers' needs are formulated

by the Government, relevant service organisations and carers, so that carers can receive professional support and monthly subsidies, enjoy rest days, etc., as a recognition of their devotion and contribution?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Elizabeth Quat is as follows:

(1) The Social Welfare Department (SWD) provides "centre-based" subsidies for service units to provide community support services to carers of frail elderly persons and persons with disabilities. Examples of the services include caring skills training, emotional support and counselling, lending of rehabilitation aids and assisting carers to set up mutual-support groups to foster experience sharing and mutual support. The numbers of these centres are as follows:

Service Target	Services	Number of Centres
Elderly persons and their carers	District Elderly Community Centre	41
	Neighbourhood Elderly Centre	171
Persons with disabilities and their carers	District Support Centre for Persons with Disabilities (DSC)	16
	Parents / Relatives Resource Centre	19
	Social and Recreational Centre for the Disabled	16
	Support Centre for Persons with Autism	5

As at the end of September 2021, there were around 218 600 members and around 40 400 users receiving services from the centres providing services to elderly persons and their carers, and to persons with disabilities and their carers respectively. The SWD will review the needs of service users from time to time with a view to providing them with appropriate services.

(2) Having balanced their users' needs and the risk of spreading epidemic in the community, the above service centres will make suitable adjustments. Specifically, for avoiding increased risks of infection arising from gatherings of service users, the centres will maintain part of their services in light of the epidemic situation, e.g. switching to online means of conducting activities. These centres will also make phone calls to comfort service users, understand their conditions and welfare needs, and provide counselling and refer them to appropriate services as needed.

In addition, Day Care Centres / Units for the Elderly, the DSCs and Community Rehabilitation Day Centres will continue to provide some day care

services (e.g. nursing care, rehabilitation and personal care services) to frail elderly persons and persons with severe disabilities. Home care services for elderly persons and persons with disabilities, including escort, nursing care, administration of medicine and personal hygiene services, will also continue.

(3), (4) and (5) The Government has commissioned a consultant to conduct a study on support for carers to comprehensively look into the needs and support required by carers of frail elderly persons and persons with disabilities. The study will also explore how government resources deployed could be consolidated (including the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low-income Families and the Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities), with a view to providing support for carers of frail elderly persons and persons with disabilities more effectively.

The consultant is now consolidating and analysing the data and views collected. Upon completion of the study, we will brief stakeholders (including the relevant Panel of the Legislative Council) on the recommendations of the study in due course.