

LCQ14: Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Kwok-kin and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (January 8):

Question:

Under the Guangdong Scheme (GD Scheme) and the Fujian Scheme (FJ Scheme) implemented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who have moved to reside in the Guangdong (GD) and Fujian (FJ) Provinces may receive a monthly Old Age Allowance (OAA) without being required to return to Hong Kong each year. The Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) has been extended to the two schemes from January 1 this year, and applications have been accepted since November 1 last year. SWD has appointed an implementation agent to assist in processing the OALA applications from those elderly persons who are currently receiving OAA under the two schemes but are unable to return to Hong Kong to complete the application procedure. Some of such elderly persons have indicated that as they have not yet received the review forms issued by the implementation agent, they are worried that they may not be able to start receiving OALA as scheduled. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the numbers of elderly persons, as estimated by the Government, who were eligible to apply for (i) Normal OALA and (ii) Higher OALA respectively under the two schemes at the time when it announced the extension of OALA to GD Scheme and FJ Scheme in October 2018;
- (2) of the number of eligible elderly persons who have applied for OALA under the two schemes since November last year, and the percentage of such number in the total number of Hong Kong elderly persons who have moved to reside in GD and FJ Provinces;
- (3) whether it knows (i) the respective numbers of review forms issued and collected by the implementation agent, as well as (ii) the number of cases in which the review forms have been lost in the mailing process that the implementation agent is aware of, since November last year;
- (4) of the to-date numbers of elderly persons who have, through the implementation agent, (i) applied for OALA and (ii) been granted OALA respectively; and
- (5) of the support currently provided by the implementation agent for those elderly persons who (i) have not received the review forms and (ii) have encountered problems in completing the review forms, and whether the agent has taken the initiative to contact those elderly persons who have not returned their review forms to follow up such cases; in respect of those

elderly persons who, due to failure to receive the review forms in time or documentation errors/omissions, have been unable to start receiving OALA from January 1 this year, whether SWD will undertake, when approving their OALA applications in future, to exercise discretion to set the commencement date for receiving OALA retrospectively at January 1 this year, so as to ease the mind of the elderly persons?

Reply:

President,

Starting from January 1, 2020, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) implements the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) under the Guangdong (GD) Scheme and Fujian (FJ) Scheme, in addition to the Old Age Allowance (OAA). Normal OALA (currently at \$2,675 per month) or Higher OALA (currently at \$3,585 per month) will be provided to eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who have chosen to reside in GD or FJ, without requiring them to return to Hong Kong each year. SWD has appointed an implementation agent to assist with the operations of the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme, which include assisting new applicants who are unable to travel to Hong Kong for the application procedures owing to their health conditions, conducting interviews and case reviews, handling enquiries, etc.

In the past few months, SWD has been implementing various arrangements to facilitate eligible elderly persons to make timely applications, namely "Application through case review", "Application by postal submission" and "New application". "Application through case review" is for persons aged 65 to 69 who were receiving the then means-tested OAA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme, as well as some of the persons aged 70 or above who were receiving the non-means-tested OAA under the Schemes. Under this arrangement, the implementation agent verified whether these persons are eligible for OALA through the case reviews under the established mechanism. "Application by postal submission" is for those remaining persons aged 70 or above who were receiving the non-means-tested OAA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme (i.e. recipients who were not included in the "Application through case review" arrangement). In October 2019, SWD issued notification letters enclosing the application form to these elderly persons to invite them to apply for OALA. "New application" is for other elderly persons (i.e. elderly persons who were not already receiving OAA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme). These elderly persons may obtain the application form through different channels (e.g. the thematic websites of the two Schemes, Social Security Field Units (SSFUs), service centers of the implementation agent located in the two Provinces, etc.) and make applications starting from November 2019.

My reply to Hon Wong Kwok-kin's question is as follows:

(1) Whether eligible elderly persons would apply for OALA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme depends on their individual considerations and circumstances. It is difficult for the Government to provide an accurate assessment.

(2) As at December 31, 2019, SWD has received about 10 600 applications for

OALA under the GD Scheme and FJ Scheme through the various application arrangements mentioned above. SWD will closely monitor the situation, including the number of applications for OALA and OAA under the two Schemes as well as the number of applications for the above allowances in Hong Kong.

According to the "Statistics on Hong Kong residents usually staying in Guangdong" published by the Census and Statistics Department in October 2019, it was estimated that there were about 84 400 Hong Kong elderly persons aged 65 or above usually residing in GD in end-2018. The Government does not maintain recent figures of Hong Kong elderly persons aged 65 or above residing in FJ.

(3) and (4) As mentioned above, SWD issued notification letters enclosing the application form to relevant elderly persons under the "Application by postal submission" arrangement. The Department issued about 9 900 notification letters. SWD does not maintain the number of notification letters that were lost during the mailing process.

As at December 31, 2019, among the about 10 600 applications mentioned in Part (2) above, about 4 500 applications were made under the "Application by postal submission" arrangement, of which 2 100 applications have been approved.

(5) Whether eligible elderly persons would apply for OALA is a matter of individual preference, and would also depend on economic and other circumstances. SWD would not take the initiative to follow up with cases in which the application forms were not returned under the "Application by postal submission" arrangement. Elderly persons who could not receive the notification letter or need help in completing the application form may contact the SSFUs or the implementation agent. The relevant staff would provide appropriate assistance.

Upon receiving the applications, SWD will suitably follow-up with those involving omissions in declarations or incomplete information. In case of special circumstances resulting in the late receipt of applications from elderly persons, SWD may consider exercising discretion and process the applications with the date on which they should have been received having regard to individual circumstances and reasonable cause.