

LCQ14: Public dental services

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (November 28):

Question:

Among the dental clinics under the Department of Health (DH), 11 of them provide free emergency dental treatment (general public dental session) to the public. It is learnt that as there are limited consultation quotas for the service and its scope does not include denture-fixing and tooth-filling, the dental services needed by members of the public are mainly provided by dental clinics operated by the private sector and non-governmental organisations. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the (i) consultation quota and (ii) attendance (with a breakdown by age group) of the general public dental session provided by each of the 11 aforesaid clinics in each of the past three years;

(2) whether it has plans to improve the general public dental session service, including :

(i) increasing the service quotas,

(ii) adding service quotas for the elderly,

(iii) providing additional dental clinics so that there will be at least one clinic in each District Council district, and

(iv) providing dental services apart from emergency treatment;

if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as the Government indicated in October last year that it would review the oral health goals for 2025 which had been set some years ago, of the progress of the work; whether it will set oral health goals for the elderly; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(4) whether it will, by making reference to the School Dental Care Service currently offered by DH, provide basic and preventive dental treatment for the elderly; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) as some elderly persons have relayed that the annual voucher amount of \$2,000 per person offered under the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme is insufficient to cover their expenses on using various types of private healthcare services (including services provided by medical practitioners, Chinese medicine practitioners, dentists and allied health professionals), whether the Government will launch a separate voucher scheme on dental care for the elderly; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(1) The consultation quota and attendance of each general public dental session provided by each dental clinic in each of the past three years are as follows:

Dental clinic with general public sessions	Service session	Max. no. of discs allocated per session	No. of attendances		
			2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Kowloon City Dental Clinic	Monday (AM)	84	5 177	5 329	5 234
	Thursday (AM)	42			
Kwun Tong Dental Clinic	Wednesday (AM)	84	4 028	4 295	3 990
Kennedy Town Community Complex Dental Clinic	Monday (AM)	84	5 905	6 903	6 599
	Friday (AM)	84			
Fanling Health Centre Dental Clinic	Tuesday (AM)	50	2 218	2 356	2 262
Mona Fong Dental Clinic	Thursday (PM)	42	1 952	1 909	1 898
Tai Po Wong Siu Ching Dental Clinic	Thursday (AM)	42	1 978	2 026	2 011
Tsuen Wan Dental Clinic	Tuesday (AM)	84	7 193	7 567	7 808
	Friday (AM)	84			
Yan Oi Dental Clinic	Wednesday (AM)	42	2 071	2 152	2 015
Yuen Long Jockey Club Dental Clinic	Tuesday (AM)	42	3 769	3 999	3 851
	Friday (AM)	42			
Tai O Dental Clinic	2nd Thursday (AM) of each month	32	97	95	90
Cheung Chau Dental Clinic	1st Friday (AM) of each month	32	192	152	199

The distribution of attendance for the general public dental session service by age group in each of the past three years is as follows:

	Distribution of attendances of general public sessions by age group (%)
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Age group	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18 (up to January 31, 2018)*
0-18	2.1%	1.8%	1.9%
19-42	14.2%	14.4%	15.1%
43-60	27.5%	27.7%	26.2%
61 or above	56.2%	56.1%	56.8%

*Data for the whole year of 2017-18 is not available yet.

(2) and (4) The Government's policy on dental services seeks to improve oral health through promotion and education, thereby raising public awareness of oral health, and facilitating the development of proper oral health habits of the public.

In addition to the above, the Government provides free emergency dental treatments to the public through designated sessions (i.e. general public sessions) in 11 government dental clinics (GDCs) of the Department of Health (DH). The services include treatment of acute dental diseases, prescription for pain relief, treatment of oral abscess and teeth extraction. Professional advice is also given by dentists to patients with regard to their individual needs. The dental clinics under DH are mainly for the Government to fulfill the terms of employment for provision of dental benefits to civil servants/pensioners and their dependents under the contracts of employment with civil servants. Hence, their dental services are essentially for the above clients. Currently, the government dental clinics are at full service capacity, that is, reaching almost 100 per cent occupancy of all appointment time slots. It is not possible for DH to allocate more slots for general public sessions on top of the existing schedule.

Moreover, providing comprehensive dental services for the public requires substantial amount of financial resources. Therefore, besides publicity, education (including the School Dental Care Service) and promotion on oral health, the Government shall allocate resources to provide emergency dental services to the public and prioritise resources for persons with special dental care needs, in particular elderly with financial difficulties. In recent years, the Government has implemented a series of initiatives to particularly take care of those persons in need of special dental treatment. Among them, the Government has provided low-income elders with special needs with dental care support, including the Outreach Dental Care Program and Community Care Fund Elderly Dental Assistance Programme. Besides, the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme also allows elderly persons using the Voucher to receive private dental services.

To help those who have financial difficulties, the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme currently provides a dental grant for its recipients who are aged 60 or above, disabled or medically certified to be ill-health to cover the actual expenses of the dental treatments items.

Eligible persons can approach the 67 dental clinics designated by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for dental examination and cost estimation. They may then choose to obtain the relevant dental treatments from any registered/ non-SWD designated dentists in Hong Kong or those SWD designated dental clinics.

(3) The Department of Health is now preparing to set up a working-level committee with a view to inviting academics and experts of dental public health specialty as well as representative from the relevant sectors to form an expert group. The expert group will, taking into account the report of the Oral Health Survey 2011 and the local situation, review and formulate appropriate goals on oral health for the population of Hong Kong.

(5) At present, the Elderly Health Care Voucher (EHV) Scheme (the Scheme) subsidises eligible elders aged 65 or above with an annual voucher amount of \$2,000 to use different private primary care services, including dental services. To provide elders with greater flexibility, the accumulation limit of EHVs was raised to \$5,000 in June this year. As of end October this year, around 1 030 dentists have registered to join the Scheme and will accept EHVs from eligible elders at around 1 890 practice locations in 18 districts in Hong Kong.