

LCQ15: Financial assistance for patients with permanent stomata

Following is a question by the Professor Hon Joseph Lee and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (April 3):

Question:

It is learnt that when the colon, rectum, ileum or urinary bladder of a patient is functionally damaged due to lesions or accidents, doctors may carry out surgical operations to create an opening on the patient's abdomen for waste discharge, known as "stoma". Stomata are classified into colostomy, ileostomy and urostomy. Owing to incapacity as a result of their physical conditions, most stoma patients cannot afford the expenses incurred for purchasing stoma bags, which are used for collecting waste, and other medical consumables. In 2017, the Community Care Fund rolled out a three-year Pilot Scheme on Providing Special Subsidy for Persons with Permanent Stoma from Low-income Families for Purchasing Medical Consumables (the Pilot Scheme), under which eligible persons with permanent stomata are provided with subsidies at the rates of full grant (i.e. \$1,000 per month), three-quarters grant or half grant, with a view to relieving their financial burden. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications under the Pilot Scheme received and approved by the authorities last year, with a breakdown of the approved applications by type of stoma and rate of subsidy;

(2) as it is necessary for patients with permanent stomata to use the relevant medical consumables, whether the authorities will consider providing full-grant subsidies across the board for all eligible patients; and

(3) whether the authorities will entrust the responsibility of conducting medical assessments for applications for Disability Allowances lodged by stoma patients to those specialists who are more familiar with the medical conditions and disability conditions of such patients, such as gastroenterologists or urologists; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) As at end February 2019, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) received 621 applications for the "Pilot Scheme on Providing Special Subsidy for Persons with Permanent Stoma from Low-income Families for Purchasing Medical

Consumables" (the Pilot Scheme), of which 474 applicants were assessed to be eligible for the subsidies and the disbursement amount was about 5.35 million. A breakdown of the beneficiaries by the type of subsidies approved is as follows:

Grant of Subsidy	Number of beneficiaries
Full grant of the subsidy (\$1,000 per month)	439
Three-quarters grant of the subsidy (\$750 per month)	23
Half grant of the subsidy (\$500 per month)	12

SWD does not have information on the breakdown of the beneficiaries by stoma types.

(2) The Pilot Scheme will end in August 2020. SWD will review the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme, with a view to recommending whether the Pilot Scheme should be incorporated into regular assistance programmes and if so, the implementation arrangement in future, including the level of subsidy and eligibility criteria.

(3) The Disability Allowance (DA) under the Social Security Allowance Scheme is a non-contributory cash allowance with no means-test requirement. SWD provides the allowance to eligible persons with a view to assisting Hong Kong residents with severe disabilities to meet their special needs arising from the disabling condition. The applicants have to be certified as severely disabled and the disabling condition has to persist for at least six months. The medical assessment under the DA is conducted by doctors from the Department of Health or the Hospital Authority. The main duties of the relevant doctors are to provide clinical diagnosis for patients and to assess the physical or mental status and functions of the patients so as to provide appropriate treatment and to follow up on their medical conditions. Under the existing arrangements, the medical assessments for DA applications are conducted during normal medical consultation sessions according to the medical assessment criteria for the DA, and most medical assessments are carried out by the doctors in charge (including those from the general or specialist stream). SWD will vet the applications according to the medical assessment results and other application criteria.