

LCQ15: Improving mental health of members of public

Following is a question by Professor the Hon Priscilla Leung and a written reply by the Acting Secretary for Health, Dr Libby Lee, in the Legislative Council today (February 21):

Question:

According to the Hong Kong Mental Health Index Survey 2022 released by the Research Working Group of the "Mental Health Month 2022" Organising Committee, the mental health index for Hong Kong people has failed to reach the passing level for five consecutive years, with an average score of 47.64 in 2022, which is below the passing score of 52. In addition, the survey found that 15.3 per cent and 12.1 per cent of the respondents suffered from symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders respectively. There are views that these figures reflect that Hong Kong society is facing a serious public mental health crisis. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has formulated and implemented comprehensive and effective mental health policies, and provided timely and appropriate support and services for members of the public in need, so as to prevent and reduce the occurrence of mental health problems; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has enhanced and improved education and publicity on mental health, so as to raise mental health awareness and literacy among members of the public, as well as to eliminate discrimination and stigma against patients with mental illnesses; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) whether it has increased and improved the manpower and resources for mental health services, so as to meet the ever-increasing demands and expectations among members of the public, as well as to ensure the quality and accessibility of mental health services; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it has regularly and systematically gathered and analysed information on the mental health status of members of the public and set indicators for such data, so as to monitor and evaluate mental health trends and problems among members of the public, and to adjust and improve mental health-related policies and measures in the light of the actual circumstances; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The reply to the question raised by Professor the Hon Priscilla Leung is as follows:

(1) and (3) The Government attaches great importance to the mental health of the public, and comprehensive mental health involves various aspects including medical care. Therefore, the Government adopts an integrated approach to promote mental health, providing services that include prevention, early identification, as well as timely intervention, treatment and rehabilitation services for persons in need. Apart from promotion of self-care, primary healthcare and community support, the Government provides specialist and institutionalised services, and also multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral services to persons with mental health needs through co-ordination and co-operation among the Health Bureau (HHB), the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB), the Education Bureau (EDB), the Department of Health (DH), the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Hospital Authority (HA), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders in the community.

The Government published the Mental Health Review Report (Review Report) in 2017, putting forward a total of 40 recommendations on enhancing the overall mental health services covering 20 different areas, including promotion and education, research and studies, service capacity building and support services for persons of different age groups. To monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the Review Report, the Government set up the Advisory Committee on Mental Health (ACMH) in December 2017, comprising members from the healthcare, social service and education sectors, as well as lay persons with concerns over mental health, to advise the Government on mental health policies and assist the Government in formulating policies, strategies and measures to enhance the mental health services on all fronts.

To meet the ever changing mental health needs of society, government bureaux and departments have all along been monitoring the implementation of the recommendations of the Review Report on the collaborative platform of the ACMH with various stakeholders, patient groups, professionals, academics and relevant institutions, etc, and have been allocating resources to further strengthen mental health services, such as the following key initiatives launched in recent years:

(i) The HA has enhanced manpower and optimised the ratio of case manager under the Case Management Programme to patients with severe mental illness to no higher than 1:40;

(ii) the HHB launched the "18111 – Mental Health Support Hotline" to provide one-stop, round-the-clock support for people with mental health needs, rendering immediate mental health support and referral services;

(iii) the HHB set up a service centre to provide emotional support and counselling services for ethnic minorities. Supported by a multi-professional team comprising social workers, counsellors and support staff conversant in ethnic minority languages, the service centre provides mental health support and counselling services to ethnic minorities and refers cases to other service platforms for additional support and/or treatment if needed;

(iv) the SWD will enhance the services of the Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness in 2024, including strengthening early identification of persons with mental health needs and early intervention, and scale up the training of social workers in community mental health service units to raise their capacity in handling complicated cases;

(v) the Government earmarked \$300 million under the Beat Drugs Fund to implement the Mental Health Initiatives Funding Scheme to provide better support to the needy in the community and raise public awareness of mental health;

(vi) the HHB will launch a pilot scheme in three District Health Centres in 2024 in collaboration with community organisations to provide mental health assessments for those in need, and to provide early follow-up and referral for high-risk cases;

(vii) in terms of children's and adolescents' mental health, the HHB launched the Pilot Scheme on New Service Protocol for Child and Adolescent with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Comorbidity, providing multi-disciplinary assessment, treatment and support services for children and adolescents with or suspected of having attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and comorbidity;

(viii) the Government implemented the Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism through cross-departmental collaboration of the EDB, the HHB and the SWD to provide students with higher suicidal risk with support as early as possible, and has launched new measures to enhance the support for schools to identify students with higher suicidal risk early, such as organising training courses and workshops for schools to introduce related practical skills, counselling techniques and intervention strategies; and

(ix) in terms of elderly mental health, the SWD, in collaboration with the HA, launched the Dementia Community Support Scheme under a medical-social collaboration model to provide community support services to elderly persons aged 60 or above with mild or moderate dementia and their carers through District Elderly Community Centres.

(2) The Government spares no effort in mental health promotion and public education towards persons of different age groups. The ACMH launched the "Shall We Talk" mental health promotion and public education initiative in July 2020 to step up public engagement in promoting mental well-being; to enhance public awareness of mental health with a view to encouraging help-seeking and early intervention; and to reduce stigma towards people with mental health needs. The initiative includes (i) launching a one-stop mental health thematic website (shallwetalk.hk) to provide one-stop information and resources on mental health to the public and broadcasting videos on social media platforms, featuring the sharing of personal experiences and feelings by various stakeholders (including artists and key opinion leaders) to encourage the public to recognise mental health issues; (ii) broadcasting promotional videos on the television, the radio and other media; and (iii) organising tours in different districts and tertiary institutions to promote

mental health messages.

Moreover, the LWB organises the Mental Health Month annually in collaboration with various government departments, public organisations and NGOs providing community mental health support services to promote the messages of mental wellness and encourage the public's acceptance of persons in mental recovery. The SWD also sets up the Mobile Van for Publicity Service on Mental Wellness to promote public awareness of mental wellness and develop positive help-seeking attitudes/behaviours.

Furthermore, the Student Health Service of the DH delivers health promotion activities to Secondary 1 to 3 students through the Adolescent Health Programme, including basic life skills training, stress management, interpersonal skills and problem-solving skills, to enhance their psychosocial health and ability to cope with challenges during their growth. The EDB will also launch the "Mental Health Literacy" resource kit for senior primary and lower secondary levels in the 2023/24 school year and prepare the launch of resource kit for lower primary and senior secondary levels, so as to cultivate students' mental health literacy from a young age, proactively enhance students' awareness of mental health and assist schools in promoting mental health.

(4) The DH conducts regular territory-wide population health survey, which includes the collection of data on self-reported and doctor-diagnosed mental health issues from respondents. The Student Health Service of the DH also covers mental health-related assessments. Through clinical examinations and questionnaire screenings, individual students are assessed/referred based on aspects such as their psychosocial behaviours, and relevant data are taken into account in adjusting the health messages and service arrangements for students. These surveys are conducted on a regular basis and are effective in providing information for continuous assessment of the mental health status of the public.

Furthermore, on the recommendation of the ACMH, the Government commissioned the University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct three mental health surveys in 2019, covering children and adolescents aged 6 to 17, youth aged 15 to 24, and elderly people aged 60 or above to collect data on the mental health status of the Hong Kong population. The three surveys were completed in 2023 and the survey findings have been released. In collaboration with the relevant government bureaux and departments, the HHB will proactively follow up on the survey reports and the recommendations made by the ACMH, and fully utilise the data obtained from the surveys to formulate comprehensive and targeted policies and support measures, with a view to enhancing the mental health of different age groups in society. The Government will consult the ACMH in a timely manner to consider the need and methodology for conducting longitudinal surveys in the future.