

LCQ16: 992 emergency SMS service

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Ka-piu and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (July 12):

Question:

According to the information of the Census and Statistics Department, there were 47 900 persons with hearing difficulty in Hong Kong in 2020. However, in the same year, only 1 884 persons with hearing or speech impairments in Hong Kong were registered users of the 992 emergency SMS service (992), accounting for less than 4 per cent of the number of persons with hearing difficulty. There are views pointing out that the overly complicated procedures for using 992 and the lack of extensive publicity for the service are the main reasons for the low number of registered users and utilisation rate of the service. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will add an instant video communication function to 992, so as to enable persons with hearing impairment to immediately seek police assistance in sign language through video in case of emergency, and at the same time help the Police know immediately the environment and situation the assistance seekers are in; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it will develop a new application for 992 for use by persons with hearing impairment, as well as simplify the procedures of 992 for seeking assistance and provide additional functions in the application, including providing different options of emergency situations, positioning, flashlight and alarm functions, so as to increase the speed of response of the Police and enhance the quality of rescue; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as a survey has found that many persons with hearing impairment are unaware of the existence of 992, whether the Government will step up publicity (e.g. regularly holding publicity and exchange sessions in the community, schools and welfare organisations, etc), so as to enhance the awareness of the service among people in need and raise society's attention to the hearing impaired communities; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) given that 992 cannot be used in places without telecommunications network coverage, whether the Government has measures in place to ensure that persons who have registered to use 992 are able to seek immediate assistance from the Police in case of contingencies in such places; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Police attach great importance to the special needs of persons with hearing or speech impairment for emergency assistance and have endeavoured to improve services to them in this regard. In October 2004, the Police launched the 992 Emergency Short Message Service (SMS) Hotline, which is specially designed for persons with hearing or speech impairment to seek assistance. In case of emergencies, such as serious illness, traffic accidents, crimes, fires, etc, and when there is no one in the neighbourhood who could call 999 on behalf of the person concerned, the person concerned can use his/her mobile phone or fixed line telephone at home to send an SMS to the Police to seek assistance. Since the launch of the 992 Reporting System in 2004, more than 1 937 hearing-impaired or speech-impaired persons have registered to use the system, and more than 440 emergency text messages have been received cumulatively. The registration or use of the 992 service is free of charge. Meanwhile, the Police are in the process of developing and optimising various digital technology solutions to cater for the needs of different groups of people, including the hearing, visually and speech impaired.

In consultation with the Police, the reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Police are working at full speed to update the Fourth Generation of Command and Control Communications System to launch the new generation Emergency Telephone System, including a platform that allows the public to send text, photo and video messages related to the reported crimes to the Police. This platform is also applicable to the 992 Reporting System to assist the hearing or speech-impaired persons to report cases. However, as it takes time to update the system and it is expected that the system can only be rolled out in one to two years' time, the Police are in parallel actively studying the introduction of short-term enhancement proposals, including the setting up of a communication platform to serve as a platform for reporting crimes, etc, so as to provide the abovementioned persons in need with better service.

(3) The Police are committed to implementing the promotion and publicity of the 992 Reporting Service and have been enhancing the relevant measures. For example, a new measure was introduced in March 2019 to extend the application for the service, so that apart from registering with the designated organisations, persons in need may also apply for the 992 service, update their particulars or cancel their registrations at the 42 Police Reporting Offices. In addition, the Police have been maintaining close communication and exchanging views with the Sub-committee on Access under the Labour and Welfare Bureau, groups of persons with hearing impairment and the Equal Opportunities Commission. In view of the community's concern over the promotion of the 992 service, the Government will launch a new round of publicity with a view to enhancing the awareness and utilisation of the service among persons with hearing or speech impairment.

(4) Comprehensive network coverage is crucial to the 992 and 999 emergency

hotlines. The Police have been working closely with relevant government departments and major telecommunications companies to actively expand the coverage of the data network and promote the development of 5G technology to enhance the quality and speed of communications, so as to ensure that the public can use the 992 and 999 emergency hotlines at any location. To further enhance the network coverage, the Police are helping to expedite the installation of additional mobile phone base stations in remote and rural areas to ensure that members of the public can obtain the emergency services they need in a timely manner.