

## LCQ18: Eligibility criteria for Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Holden Chow and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

Currently, applicants for the Old Age Allowance (OAA) under the Guangdong Scheme and the Fujian Scheme (the Schemes) must reach the age of 70 or above and must have resided in Hong Kong continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application (the requirement of continuous residence in Hong Kong). However, some members of the public have relayed that they had moved to Guangdong Province before they turned 70, and are still ineligible to receive the OAA even though they now reach the age of 70 because they fail to meet the requirement of residing in Hong Kong continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application, and are even required to return to Hong Kong and reside for one year in order to meet the eligibility criteria. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of applications for OAA under the Schemes received, approved and rejected by the Government in each of the past five years; among the approved applications, the number of cases for which the authorities exercised discretionary power and granted OAA (set out in a table);

(2) of the criteria for exercising discretionary power for the cases mentioned in (1), and whether the criteria include special circumstances of the persons concerned (such as chronic disease patients receiving treatment in Guangdong Province); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will consider making special arrangements for people who are currently aged 70 but have previously moved to Guangdong or Fujian, so that as long as they meet all other requirements except the requirement of continuous residence in Hong Kong, the Government will, by discretion, grant the OAA to them?

Reply:

President,

The Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme (including the Old Age Allowance (OAA), Old Age Living Allowance (OALA), Disability Allowance, Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme) is a non-contributory social security scheme. Applicants must have resided in Hong Kong continuously for at least

one year immediately before the date of application, while enjoying a limit of 90 days of absence from Hong Kong within that year. This one-year continuous residence (OYCR) requirement ensures that applicants have close connections with Hong Kong, and that persons who have lived outside Hong Kong for a long time cannot immediately benefit from non-contributory cash allowances upon their return to Hong Kong, thereby concentrating resources on supporting persons in need and the elderly.

I reply to the three parts of the question raised by the Member as follows:

(1) and (2) In the past five financial years (2019-20 to 2023-24), the numbers of OAA applications received, approved and rejected by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) are tabulated below:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Applications received (Note)	35 652	37 059	35 173	40 263	40 825
Applications approved	32 646	38 360	36 173	39 984	41 139
Applications rejected	2 127	577	241	334	523

Note: The processing of some of the applications may be completed in the subsequent financial year.

Where an applicant has been absent from Hong Kong in the one year immediately before the date of application for receiving medical treatments outside Hong Kong due to illnesses or for taking up paid work outside Hong Kong, the SWD may consider exercising discretion to disregard the absences exceeding the 90-day limit subject to sufficient reasons and documentary proofs.

In the past five financial years (2019-20 to 2023-24), the numbers of cases in which the absences of the OAA applicants were disregarded for the aforementioned reasons are tabulated below:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Receiving medical treatments outside Hong Kong due to illnesses	7	0	0	0	3
Taking up paid work outside Hong Kong	39	1	0	0	17

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in tandem with an enhancement

measure of the SSA Scheme, the SWD implemented a special arrangement from January 2020 to August 2023 to disregard the absences from Hong Kong of applicants and beneficiaries of the various social security schemes (including the SSA Scheme). The SWD does not maintain a record of the number of OAA applications that benefited from the relevant special arrangement.

(3) As mentioned above, the OYCR requirement ensures that SSA applicants have close connections with Hong Kong, with a view to reasonably allocating finite public resources. Since September 2023, the Government has suitably relaxed the absence limit of the OYCR requirement from 56 days to 90 days, increasing it by more than half. This can practically accommodate the applicants' need for leaving Hong Kong temporarily before the application (such as visits to family and travel outside Hong Kong). The Government currently has no plan to further relax the OYCR requirement. With an ageing population, the number of beneficiaries and the expenditure of the SSA Scheme will continue to rise. The Government should take into account the long-term financial sustainability when considering various enhancement measures.