

# LCQ18: Providing financial support for disabled persons

Following is a question by the Hon Lam So-wai and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (June 7):

Question:

The Community Care Fund launched the programme of Special Care Subsidy for the Severely Disabled (Special Subsidy) in 2011 to provide severely disabled persons who are living in the community and are not receiving the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) with a special care subsidy to assist them in purchasing care goods and services, or for other purposes related to nursing care. However, some disabled persons have relayed that the costs of buying, repairing and maintaining medical equipment or rehabilitation products are expensive, posing a heavy financial burden on low-income physically handicapped persons (PHPs), bedridden persons with severe intellectual disabilities and persons with hearing impairment who are not receiving CSSA. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views pointing out that in terms of the original intention of the programme and the actual situation, the Special Subsidy has failed to meet the needs of the disabled persons for rehabilitation products, especially when most disabled persons in Hong Kong do not receive CSSA, whether the Government will, by drawing reference from the practice of the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme, allow all eligible physically handicapped applicants to receive the same subsidy amount; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as it is learnt that PHPs aged 60 to under 65 are not only unable to apply for the Special Subsidy, but also not eligible to apply for the Old Age Living Allowance, resulting in a "window period" occurred in the welfare policy concerned, whether the Government will optimise the CSSA Scheme, so as to plug the loophole; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as a survey conducted by an organisation has found that more than 80 per cent of disabled persons consider that their expenses on rehabilitation products have an impact on their families, but since the means test for applying for government subsidies are mostly conducted on a family basis, quite a number of applicants are worried that they and their families will be affected and consider that the assessment arrangement concerned undermines the self-esteem of disabled persons and lowers their self-worth, and at the same time, there are also views that assessments conducted on an individual basis can prevent family relationships from becoming an obstacle to the application for subsidies, whether the Government will allow disabled persons living with family members to apply for CSSA independently and only conduct

assessments on the personal income and assets of applicants; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

(1) The Community Care Fund launched the Special Care Subsidy for the Severely Disabled in September 2011, which aimed to provide persons with severe disabilities living in the community and not receiving Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) with a subsidy for purchasing care goods and services, or for other purposes related to nursing care. The Government will regularise the Special Care Subsidy in October 2023 with the eligibility criteria unchanged, while the monthly full grant will be raised from \$2,000 to \$2,500 to strengthen support to persons with severe disabilities in need.

To support persons with severe physical disabilities who need constant attention and care, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has launched the Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities (ISS) since November 2014. The ISS provides cash subsidy, including the Special Subsidy for Renting Respiratory Support Medical Equipment (RSME) and the Special Subsidy for Purchasing Medical Consumables Related to RSME, on an actual reimbursement basis to eligible RSME dependents. Apart from assisting low-income persons with disabilities not on CSSA to meet expenses of medical equipment or rehabilitation consumables, the ISS also provides assessments by physiotherapists and occupational therapists to ensure the rehabilitation consumables suit the needs of service users.

Besides, the rehabilitation service units and medical social workers under the SWD have all along been co-operating with medical professionals to provide persons with disabilities and their families with emotional counselling, referrals to required services and community resources, and assisting persons with disabilities in need to apply for financial assistance, including charitable trust funds administered by the SWD or set up by other organisations, in order to procure/repair wheelchairs and meet expenses on related rehabilitation consumables. All of the above existing services/subsidies support persons with severe disabilities not on CSSA.

(2) and (3) The Government implements a non-contributory social security system to provide suitable assistance for people with different needs. The system comprises the CSSA Scheme and the Social Security Allowance Scheme (including Old Age Living Allowance, Old Age Allowance, Disability Allowance (DA), Guangdong Scheme and Fujian Scheme).

The DA is non-means-tested and has no age restrictions. It aims to help persons assessed to have severe disabilities meet their special needs arising from disability. Recipients are provided with the Normal or Higher DA (at \$2,005 and \$4,010 per month respectively) according to their severity of disability.

Persons with disabilities in financial hardship may consider applying for the CSSA Scheme. The CSSA Scheme aims to provide a safety net of last

resort for those who cannot support themselves financially due to old age, ill-health, disability, single parenthood, unemployment, low-earnings or other reasons to help them meet their basic needs. The CSSA Scheme has no age restrictions and provides recipients with disabilities with relatively higher standard rates ranging from \$3,820 to \$7,400 per month depending on age, family conditions and severity of disability. CSSA recipients with disabilities are also provided with a number of supplements and special grants to cater for their special needs, e.g. grant to cover costs of medical, rehabilitation, surgical appliances and hygienic items.

While applications for the CSSA Scheme are made on a household basis in accordance with the principle that members of the same family should support each other, the SWD may consider allowing a person to apply for the CSSA Scheme independently in view of special circumstances of the case. Where a person indicates the need to apply for the CSSA Scheme independently due to problems among family members (e.g. poor relationship), the SWD will refer the case to social service units for assistance. If the situation does not improve with the assistance of social workers, the SWD may consider allowing the applicant in need to apply for the CSSA Scheme independently on a discretionary basis in view of special circumstances of the case.