

LCQ20: Compensation for pneumoconiosis and mesothelioma

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (May 29):

Question:

Regarding the compensation for pneumoconiosis and mesothelioma, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as there are views that mesothelioma patients are faced with high medical expenses and heavy financial burden, and they are in dire need of support and attention from society, whether the Government will suggest the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board (the Board) to introduce clearer support policies and take measures, such as setting up a dedicated fund and support scheme for mesothelioma and implementing more targeted initiatives, so as to support mesothelioma patients and their families;

(2) given that many mesothelioma patients have relayed that their current drug expenses are very high, and it is learnt that some patients who purchase Self-financed Items have used up their subsidy of \$630,000 from the Brewin Trust Fund, whether the Government has plans to help such patients reduce their drug expenses, including but not limited to the payment of their relevant drug expenses by the Board; and

(3) given that many mesothelioma patients have relayed that they currently have to undergo regular examinations, including positron emission tomography, computer tomography scan and genetic test every three to six months, but as the Hospital Authority is unable to arrange the examinations for them in a timely manner, they need to instead undergo these expensive examinations at private healthcare institutions at their own expense, whether the Government has plans to introduce measures to relieve the financial burden of such patients, including but not limited to the payment of their relevant examination expenses by the Board?

Reply:

President,

In accordance with the Pneumoconiosis and Mesothelioma (Compensation) Ordinance (PMCO), the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board (PCFB) administers the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund (the Fund), which provides compensation for eligible pneumoconiosis and mesothelioma persons or their family members as well as disburses expenses as specified in PMCO, etc.

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

(1) The Fund provides compensation for persons who are determined by the Pneumoconiosis Medical Board as suffering from pneumoconiosis and/or mesothelioma resulting in incapacity or death and their family members. The compensation includes compensation for incapacity; compensation for pain, suffering and loss of amenities; medical expenses; expenses for medical appliances; and compensation for care and attention. In addition, the Fund conducts and finances educational and publicity activities relating to pneumoconiosis and mesothelioma, research programmes on prevention of pneumoconiosis and mesothelioma, programmes for rehabilitation tailored to the conditions of these persons, etc.

(2) and (3) PMCO provides that pneumoconiosis and/or mesothelioma persons are entitled to medical expenses in respect of medical treatment as is reasonably necessary in connection with the diseases concerned, subject to the maximum daily rates. According to the established mechanism, the maximum rates are linked to public healthcare service fees and charges. The Government adjusts the levels of compensation under the related employees' compensation ordinances once every two years. The Government has commenced a new round of review, and plans to consult the Labour Advisory Board on the results and recommendations of the review in the fourth quarter of this year and then report to the Legislative Council Panel on Manpower.

Apart from payment of medical expenses pursuant to PMCO, the Brewin Trust Fund subsidises mesothelioma persons with financial needs to purchase self-financed drugs listed in the Hospital Authority Drug Formulary for treatment of mesothelioma. Starting from July 1, 2024, the scope of subsidy will be expanded to cover the costs of specified medical tests and the subsidy ceiling will be adjusted upwards from the prevailing level of \$630,000 to \$970,000.

The Government will continue to review the compensation under PMCO and the work of PCFB in a timely manner, striving to cater for the needs of mesothelioma persons.