

LCQ21: Gambling counselling and prevention of gambling addiction

Following is a question by the Hon Lillian Kwok and a written reply by the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs, Miss Alice Mak, in the Legislative Council today (December 4):

Question:

In Hong Kong, there are a number of counselling, treatment and other support services provided for people with gambling disorders and those affected by them. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the monthly number of user-times of various gambling counselling hotlines and gambling counselling centres in the past five years and, among them, the respective ratios of first-time and repeated service users;

(2) whether the Government has explored introducing a wider range of gambling counselling services or programmes; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) of the average expenditure on civic education about anti-gambling and publicity about gambling counselling in each of the past five years, and the percentage of the part spent on anti-gambling publicity in schools;

(4) whether the Government will assess the effectiveness of the work mentioned in (3); if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(5) of the names of gambling counselling organizations subsidised by the Government in the past five years and the amounts of subsidies, as well as the support services provided by such organisations?

Reply:

President,

It is the Government's policy not to encourage gambling. To address problems caused by gambling, the Government adopts a multi-pronged strategy, including regulation over gambling activities through legislation, stringent law enforcement against illegal gambling, public education on the harms of gambling addiction, and provision of counselling and support services to people in need. On public education and provision of counselling and support services front, the Government set up the Ping Wo Fund (the Fund) in 2003 to fund preventive and remedial measures to address the gambling-related problems. The Government also established the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee to give advice to the Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs on the use and application of the Fund.

The Government's reply to Hon Lilian Kwok's question is as follows:

(1) The Fund has been funding four counselling and treatment centres (counselling centres), namely Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Even Centre, Caritas Addicted Gamblers Counselling Centre, Zion Social Service Yuk Lai Hin Counselling Centre and Sunshine Lutheran Centre of the Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service, to provide telephone counselling, face-to-face counselling and other professional treatment services for people with gambling disorders as well as their family members and friends. The four counselling centres also assist in the operation of the gambling counselling hotline (1834 633) and answer enquiries from those in need and the members of the public through their instant messaging applications and social media platforms.

The monthly figures on the enquiries received by the four counselling centres through channels such as the hotline, as well as the number of clients who received services provided by the counselling centres in the past five years are at Annex. We do not maintain the breakdown of the frequency of the individuals using the hotline and counselling services.

(2) Apart from financing the operation of the above-mentioned four counselling centres, the Fund is engaging a non-governmental organisation to establish and operate an online counselling platform having regard to the trend that people having gambling-related problems tend to make enquiry and seek assistance through online means. The platform will utilise a chatbot service to offer preliminary anti-gambling advice to individuals seeking help and encourage them to have further telephone or face-to-face counselling services.

(3) and (4) On public education and publicity front, in order to promote the no-gambling messages to members of the public, in particular the youth, the Fund has been funding non-governmental organisations and schools to organise anti-gambling public education activities under the Ping Wo Fund Sponsorship Scheme (Sponsorship Scheme) and the Ping Wo Fund School Project Grants (School Project Grants) since 2009 and 2010 respectively. The Fund has also publicised the harms of gambling at school and community levels and the ways to prevent and alleviate gambling-related problems through the public education activities organised by the four counselling centres, as well as a publicity truck programme. In addition, the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau (HYAB) and the Fund have been launching territory-wide anti-gambling publicity and public education campaigns during mega football events (such as FIFA World Cup and UEFA European Football Championship) to raise public awareness (including the students) of the gambling-related problems.

The Fund also continues to enhance the publicity efforts made via traditional media as well as online and social media platforms, including advertising on public transport and online platforms. These efforts aim to promote the gambling counselling hotline (183 4633) and the related anti-gambling messages and encourage individuals to promptly seek assistance.

The Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee and its secretariat conduct regular

reviews of the effectiveness of relevant measures, which include evaluating the outcomes of the sponsored activities when processing the reimbursement claims from the funded organisations, and exchanging views with stakeholders to enhance the overall effectiveness.

The funding support to public education and other publicity measures (including those provided to schools) by the Fund to prevent and alleviate gambling-related problems in the past five years are as follows:

Year	Funding support	
	Public Education [^] (including Sponsorship Scheme and School Project Grants)	Other publicity measures (including publicity truck programme)
2019	About \$4.0 million	About \$8.5 million*
2020	About \$3.9 million	About \$1.9 million
2021	About \$4.9 million	About \$1.3 million
2022	About \$4.8 million	About \$6.6 million*
2023	About \$5.3 million	About \$8.0 million*

[^]Not all projects under the Sponsorship Scheme involve publicity at schools. Hence, we do not maintain the breakdown of the funding support provided for promoting the anti-gambling messages at schools.

*Including the funding support provided for the territory-wide anti-gambling publicity and public education campaigns during the mega football events.

(5) As mentioned in the first part of the reply, the Fund has been funding four counselling centres to provide telephone counselling, face-to-face counselling and other professional treatment services for people with gambling disorders, as well as their family members and friends. The centres also offer preventive public education on gambling-related problems to the community and schools, as well as professional training for the industry or interested organisations to enhance understanding about the behaviour and risk factors of gamblers with gambling disorder. Furthermore, the centres will render advice to the Fund to facilitate the development of the best practices for the screening of and remedial services and treatments for gamblers with gambling disorder.

The total funding support provided to the four counselling centres in the past five years is tabulated below:

Year	Total funding support
2019	About \$22.5 million
2020	About \$23.5 million
2021	About \$24.2 million
2022	About \$24.2 million

2023	About \$24.6 million
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The HYAB will continue to closely collaborate with the Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee, observe the prevalence of gambling activities among Hong Kong people, maintain communication with relevant departments and optimise efforts to prevent and alleviate problems relating to gambling.