

LCQ22: Designated Hotline for Carer Support

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

Question:

The 24-hour Designated Hotline for Carer Support 182 183 (Carer Hotline) launched by the Government commenced operation in September last year. With a total of 30 phone lines, the Carer Hotline is answered by registered social workers to provide timely support for high-risk carers. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will review the manpower deployment of the Carer Hotline based on the outcome of the analysis on the number of cases handled by the Carer Hotline and the nature of assistance sought since September last year, such as increasing or decreasing the number of phone lines as necessary and adjusting the number of persons on duty for different time sessions; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) of the follow-up procedures upon receipt of requests for assistance by the Carer Hotline; as it is learnt that for cases in need of emergency support and outreaching visits that require follow-up services, service operators would usually refer the cases to the parties concerned within one day, whether it has reviewed if referrals for such cases can all be made within one day; if it has, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the measures in place to step up publicity about the Carer Hotline among older carers, so as to increase the utilisation rate of the Carer Hotline?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Kin-por is as follows:

(1) The Designated Hotline for Carer Support (Carer Hotline) has received 16 490 calls up to March 31, 2024. By nature of the calls received, about 38 per cent and 23 per cent sought emotional support and made enquiries about community support services respectively, whereas care issues and financial problems accounted for about 14 per cent and 7 per cent of the calls respectively. The rest of them were related to health and housing problems, requests for respite service, etc.

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) commissioned the Tung Wah Group of

Hospitals (the service operator) to operate the 24-hour Carer Hotline, with a total of 30 phone lines answered by over 100 professional social workers on shift duties. The Carer Hotline is able to cope with the current and potential additional service demand in the short term, and has been operating smoothly so far. Under the prevailing subvention system, the service operator may exercise flexibility in deploying resources and arranging suitable manpower for meeting the relevant requirements and service needs. The SWD will also closely monitor the operation of the Carer Hotline with the service operator and make timely service adjustments, such as increasing or reducing the number of phone lines as necessary, so as to provide carers with appropriate services.

(2) The social workers of the Carer Hotline will first seek to understand the callers' immediate conditions and needs upon receiving calls, and assess the welfare needs and risk factors of the cases. They will provide relevant information and recommend suitable support services according to the circumstances and make referrals with the consent of callers in case of need. If it is necessary to arrange emergency support and outreaching visits, the social workers of the Carer Hotline will usually reach the caller and provide services within one hour, and make referrals within one day if follow-up services are required. The social workers will also follow up after making referrals to ensure that services are provided to the cases in need. The service operator has continued to meet the above-mentioned requirements since the Carer Hotline was set up in September 2023.

(3) The Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and the SWD publicise and promote the Carer Hotline through various channels. These include organising publicity activities under the "Care the Carers Campaign"; promoting on the LWB's social media platform and public transport; conducting interviews with newspapers, radio, television and social media; displaying posters in social welfare service units, public housing estates, hospitals/clinics, etc; distributing leaflets and souvenirs, etc. The SWD has also introduced the Carer Hotline to service users of elderly and rehabilitation service units and their family members/carers through district platforms. In the social welfare service briefing sessions for the 18 District Councils (DCs), the SWD has introduced and encouraged the DC members and the District Services and Community Care Teams to assist in promoting the Carer Hotline. The Government will continue with the publicity and promotion work, so that needy elderly persons, persons with disabilities and their carers could receive necessary information and support.