

LCQ3: Measures that support carers

Following is a question by the Hon Stanley Li and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

Question:

It has been reported that at the end of January this year, two tragedies of committing suicide occurred in Hong Kong involving carers who were suspected to have been unable to bear the pressure of taking care of their family members on a long-term basis. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) given that the 24-hour Designated Hotline for Carer Support 182 183, operated by a charitable organisation commissioned by the Social Welfare Department, commenced operation in September last year, of the average number of cases currently handled by the hotline per day; whether the service operator has categorised the requests for assistance; if so, of the categories concerned;

(2) as the 2023 Policy Address has announced that about 140 residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) participating in the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme and about 190 service units participating in the Community Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly will provide day respite services for care-receiving individuals when there are vacant residential care places or service places, of the average numbers of RCHEs and service units which provided respite service places per month since the introduction of the measure, and the number of care-receiving individuals who received respite care services as a result; and

(3) given that the Census and Statistics Department conducted a survey from 2019 to 2020 on persons with disabilities and chronic diseases and collected information on their carers, whether the Government will consider conducting the relevant survey again shortly, so as to assist society in grasping the number of carers and their living profile; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Carers play an important role in building a caring and inclusive society by assisting elderly persons to age in place and persons with disabilities to live in the community. Carers are often physically and mentally exhausted in coping with their daily lives while shouldering caring responsibilities. The Government understands the carers' situation and cares about their needs. Therefore, various support measures are in place for carers of elderly persons and persons with disabilities, including financial assistance, care

skills training, counselling and emotional support, etc. At the same time, personal care, home cleaning, rehabilitation training and respite services are also provided to the elderly and persons with disabilities so as to relieve the pressure of carers.

In the 2022 and 2023 Policy Addresses, the Government announced and is progressively implementing a series of measures to support carers of elderly persons and persons with disabilities through a multi-pronged approach. My consolidated reply to the Hon Stanley Li's question is as follows:

(1) The Government launched the 24-hour Designated Hotline for Carer Support (Carer Hotline) 182 183 in September 2023, providing instant consultation and counselling, outreaching, emergency support, service referrals, etc; assisting carers to connect with respite service; as well as providing transport subsidy for needy service users to receive respite service. More information on the nature of calls received by the Carer Hotline as at February 29, 2024, is set out at Annex. In fact, up to the middle of this month, the Carer Hotline has received over 14 600 calls, with an average of over 80 calls per day. Among the calls received, about 35 per cent and 24 per cent were related to seeking emotional counselling and enquiries about community support services respectively, while caring problems and financial problems accounted for about 15 per cent and seven per cent respectively. The rest included health and housing problems as well as requests for respite services. Moreover, there have been 17 cases where the Carer Hotline provided crisis intervention through outreaching service, so as to address the immediate needs of carers/families and thereby relieving their pressure.

(2) Since December 2023, the Social Welfare Department has been requesting 135 private residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) under the Enhanced Bought Place Scheme to utilise designated residential respite places subsidised by the Government to provide day respite services for elderly persons in need. The abovementioned private RCHEs are situated in various districts across the territory, including densely populated developed areas with more elderly residents. Elderly persons can access Government-subsidised day respite services in the vicinity, and their carers can take short breaks or attend to personal matters. Needy elderly persons can directly receive subsidised day respite services without the need of case referrals or passing a means test. The new measure was introduced in December last year, and about 20 elderly persons have been served in the three months till February this year. We believe that more needy elderly persons and their carers can benefit when residents know RCHEs nearby are providing subsidised day respite services.

To further support carers, the Government will continue to expand the network of day respite services for the elderly. From the fourth quarter this year, we will invite 175 service providers participating in the Community Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly to provide subsidised day respite services for the elderly in need.

At the same time, 57 subvented Day Care Centres/Units for the Elderly continue to provide 268 designated day respite service places. On average, there were around 120 attendances per day last year. Taking into account the

above two new measures utilising the service capacity of private/self-financing service units, the number of service points of subsidised day respite services for the elderly will expand to 367 to cover all districts in Hong Kong.

(3) Following the release of the results in 2021 on persons with disabilities and chronic diseases and their carers in the "Special Topics Report No. 63 – Persons with disabilities and chronic diseases", the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released in 2023 the "2021 Population Census – Thematic Report: Older Persons", which provided statistical results on elderly persons aged 60 and above who had long-term care needs and their carers, and thereby providing useful data for the Government's formulation of relevant policies.

We have been in contact with the C&SD regarding the plan to continue to collect information on people in need of long-term care and their carers in the 2026 Population Census, and will expand the application of relevant questions in the 2026 Population Census to cover all persons aged 15 and above who require long-term care for their daily living, regardless of the reasons (such as disability or old age) for their need of care. In other words, the next survey will be larger in scale and cover a wider population. The sample size will be about six times of the survey in 2020, covering around 300 000 households. More comprehensive, detailed and reliable data will therefore be provided.

The Government is actively implementing the three-year Care the Carers Campaign in collaboration with non-governmental organisations and district organisations, to promote carer support, encourage mutual help in the community and create a carer-friendly environment. We will continue to publicise and promote the Care the Carers Campaign, the Information Gateway for Carers and the Carer Hotline through various channels, with a view to providing immediate and targeted assistance to needy carers.

In 2024-25, we will continue to render full support to carers through measures, such as, continuous expansion of the respite service network and promotion of territory-wide publicity campaigns; enhancing peer support services and preparing to set up four additional Parents/Relatives Resource Centres for carers of those in mental recovery; injecting an additional \$1 billion into the Innovative and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care; and setting up 21 designated teams to support special school leavers and their carers. We will also continue to work closely with our partners in different sectors to continuously enhance the support for carers.