

LCQ3: Measures to facilitate elderly persons to retire in Mainland

Following is a question by the Hon Kingsley Wong and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

The Guangdong (GD) Scheme and the Fujian (FJ) Scheme under the Social Security Allowance Scheme allow eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who have moved to reside in these two provinces to receive the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) or the Old Age Allowance (OAA). On the other hand, it has been reported that according to a survey conducted by an organisation, nearly 400 000 Hong Kong residents are of Hainan origin, and among them, about 85 000 are elderly persons aged above 65, and due to the beautiful environment, good air quality and low cost of living in the Hainan Province, many Hainanese who responded to the survey have expressed their intention to settle in their home province after retirement. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will study introducing a "Hainan Scheme" to allow eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who have moved to reside in the province to receive OALA or OAA so as to meet their keen demand; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) in addition to the portable Social Security Allowance and a series of schemes relating to residential care services and healthcare, of other policy initiatives put in place by the authorities to facilitate elderly persons to settle in the Mainland after retirement, in order to provide them with an additional option for quality ageing; and

(3) of the current respective numbers of beneficiaries of the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme; what new measures are in place to step up publicity on the two schemes?

Reply:

President,

The Government currently implements a number of measures to facilitate Hong Kong elderly persons' retirement on the Mainland and provide them with more choices. Amongst them, portable cash assistance initiatives include the Guangdong (GD) Scheme, the Fujian (FJ) Scheme and the Portable Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (PCSSA) Scheme. Under the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme, eligible Hong Kong elderly persons who choose to retire in GD and FJ can receive the Old Age Allowance (OAA) or the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) without returning to Hong Kong every year. As at March 2024, there

were 25 011 and 2 447 elderly persons benefiting from the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme respectively.

Portable cash assistance only covers eligible elderly persons retiring in GD and FJ because there are relatively more Hong Kong residents residing in these two provinces, and the two provinces are uniquely and closely connected with Hong Kong on social, economic and transport fronts, etc. According to the data of the Census and Statistics Department and the National Bureau of Statistics, most Hong Kong elderly persons or residents residing on the Mainland stay in GD and FJ, accounting for about 80 per cent of the total number of such persons.

At present, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has appointed agents to assist in the implementation of the portable cash assistance initiatives and provide a range of services, including submitting applications for elderly persons who cannot return to Hong Kong, conducting case reviews, providing enquiry and declaration services to recipients, assisting the SWD in recovering overpaid allowances from recipients and investigating suspected fraud cases, etc. Our country has a vast area, and Hong Kong elderly persons residing in other provinces or municipalities on the Mainland are relatively small in number and scattered. If the scope of the portable cash assistance initiatives is to be expanded to more Mainland provinces and municipalities, we need to carefully consider the administrative expenses involved in appointing agents to provide relevant services in these areas and the associated cost-effectiveness.

Furthermore, we must point out that the portable cash assistance initiatives involve relaxing the requirement of recipients' residence in Hong Kong while they receive relevant cash assistance. The financial implications must be carefully considered when implementing the relevant initiatives.

When the Government considers expanding the cash assistance initiatives, it must take into account long-term fiscal sustainability and prudently use public funds to support Hong Kong elderly persons. We will carefully listen to the community's views on the portable cash assistance initiatives, with a view to striking a balance between addressing the demands of Hong Kong residents and making appropriate use of limited welfare resources. The Government currently has no plan to expand the scope of the portable cash assistance initiatives to Hainan Province.

The Member is concerned about whether the Government has other policy measures to facilitate elderly persons' retirement on the Mainland. In order to strengthen support for elderly persons retiring in GD and FJ, the Housing Bureau provides flexibility to elderly persons who need to surrender their public rental housing (PRH) units or delete their names from the tenancies upon receiving portable cash assistance. Considering that Hong Kong elderly persons may encounter adaptation issues after moving to the Mainland, the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) currently allow elderly persons to keep their PRH units for no more than three months, with the grace period starting from the date of the elderly persons' departure from Hong Kong.

If the recipients voluntarily surrender their PRH units, the HA and the HKHS will issue a Letter of Assurance to the recipients upon their request while recovering the PRH units, provided that there is no breach of the Tenancy Agreement. In the event of their return to Hong Kong for good and redemption of the Letter of Assurance, the recipients will be allocated a refurbished PRH unit by the HA or the HKHS if they meet the eligibility criteria for PRH application and the conditions as laid down in the Letter of Assurance, subject to availability of resources.

If the recipients delete their names from the PRH tenancies while their family members still live in the PRH units, they can apply to the HA for a Letter of Reinstatement. In the event of their return to Hong Kong for good and redemption of the Letter of Reinstatement from the HA, subject to the prevailing housing policies, the recipients may apply for reinstatement of their names in the tenancies as authorised family members, provided that the tenancies of the units are still valid. The HKHS also puts in place similar arrangements for its PRH units.

The SWD has set up thematic websites about the GD Scheme and the FJ Scheme to provide online application forms and information such as eligibility criteria, application procedures and frequently asked questions. The Government's Cross-boundary Public Services thematic website also provides relevant services and information to facilitate Hong Kong residents' submission of applications on the Mainland. From time to time, the SWD promotes the two schemes through various channels, including promotional videos on television and cross-boundary coaches, newspaper advertisements, putting up posters and distributing promotional flyers and application forms, etc. Furthermore, the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Guangdong of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government and the SWD's agents on the Mainland would assist in promotion through their websites, physical networks and WeChat official accounts, etc.