

LCQ4: Mental health services

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (March 27):

Question:

The Mental Health Review Report, which was released in April 2017, put forward recommendations for the enhancement of the overall mental health services in Hong Kong. In December of the same year, the Government established the Advisory Committee on Mental Health to advise the Government on mental health policies. Regarding the mental health services, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it will establish a Mental Health Commission for implementing mental health-related policies and measures, including carrying out the relevant education work in primary and secondary schools; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has worked out a roadmap and milestones for the development of mental health services, say, the number of persons having distressing or disabling psychiatric difficulties accounting for not more than 5 per cent of the population of Hong Kong in 2030; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) whether it will allocate additional resources to improve the public mental health services, including providing evening specialist outpatient services, increasing the number of inpatient beds, recruiting more healthcare workers, providing additional halfway houses, providing permanent premises for various Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness, as well as strengthening the support for the family members and carers of patients with mental illness; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the mental health of the public, and has all along adopted an integrated approach in the promotion of mental health through a service delivery model that covers prevention, early identification, and timely intervention, treatment and rehabilitation for persons with mental health needs. The Government seeks to provide comprehensive, multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral services to persons with mental health needs through collaboration and cooperation among the Food and Health Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB), the Education Bureau (EDB), the Social Welfare Department (SWD), the Department of Health, the Hospital Authority (HA), non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders.

My reply, prepared in consultation with the EDB and the LWB, to the various parts of the Hon Chan Han-pan's question is as follows:

(1) and (2) The Government established the Advisory Committee on Mental Health (the Advisory Committee) in December 2017 to provide advice on mental health policies, including the adoption of a more integrated and comprehensive approach to tackle multi-faceted mental health issues in Hong Kong. It assists the Government in developing policies, strategies and measures to enhance mental health services in Hong Kong. It also follows up on and monitors the implementation of the recommendations of the Mental Health Review Report (the Review Report) promulgated in 2017. Chaired by Mr Wong Yan-lung, SC, the Advisory Committee comprises members from various sectors with a wealth of expertise and experience, including professionals from the healthcare, social service and education sectors; representatives from patient and carer advocacy groups; and lay persons with interest in mental health.

Since its establishment, the Advisory Committee has discussed various issues in detail, including ways to enhance mental health services for children and adolescents; an on-going mental health promotion, education and destigmatisation initiative; and mental health prevalence surveys. The Advisory Committee has also actively followed up on the implementation of the 40 recommendations of the Review Report with the relevant bureaux/departments, and provided views on the future direction for some of the recommendations including those concerning the Dementia Community Support Scheme and Student Mental Health Support Scheme.

In order to gather more comprehensive information on the mental health status of the Hong Kong population, the Government has also, based on the Advisory Committee's recommendations, commissioned two universities to conduct three territory-wide mental prevalence surveys covering children, adolescents and the elderly.

In primary and secondary education, learning contents related to mental health have been incorporated in the curricula of primary and secondary education for students to explore issues on healthy lifestyles, tackling stress and frustration, showing respect for people of different backgrounds, as well as the problems and needs faced by persons with mental health needs. It also aims to develop students' positive values and attitude to respect, accept and support persons with mental health needs.

(3) Like other developed areas, mental health is regarded as an important issue in Hong Kong. Over the past few years, the Government has been increasing its resource allocation on mental health so that more comprehensive services could be provided to persons with mental health needs.

On the healthcare front, the HA's expenditure on mental health services has increased from some \$3.8 billion in 2013-14 to near \$5.1 billion in the revised estimate for 2018-19, an increase of over 32 per cent, for enhancing manpower and services and for increasing 40 hospital beds in the Kowloon

Psychiatric Observation Unit, etc. In 2019-20, the Government will continue to allocate more manpower and resources in respect of mental health, including an addition of five doctors and enhance child and adolescent psychiatric services.

Making reference to the recent overseas trend of using the community resources to handle mental health cases, the Government has recently allocated more resources to mental health services in the community. Apart from improving the ratio of case managers to patients with severe mental illness under the HA's Case Management Programme from the current 1:50 to 1:40, the Government also plans to increase the number of service places for halfway houses from the current 1 509 to 1 594 in the short run and also the number of parents/relatives resource centres from the existing six to 19 in a progressive way to step up support for parents and relatives/carers of persons with disabilities, including those with mental health needs. In addition, of the existing 24 Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness (ICCMWs), 22 have either obtained permanent accommodation or reserved suitable places in development/redevelopment projects as permanent accommodation. The SWD has initially earmarked places as permanent accommodation for the remaining two ICCMWs to strengthen community support for persons with mental health needs and their carers.

Relevant bureaux/departments of the Government will continue to review mental health services under their policy purviews, and will allocate additional resources as required, with a view to providing more appropriate services for those with mental health needs.