

LCQ5: Supporting high-risk elderly persons

Following is a question by the Hon Tang Ka-piu and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (October 23):

Question:

It has been reported that elderly-related tragedies have happened in Hong Kong one after another this year, resulting in a rise in the community's concerns over families of elderly doubletons featuring "the elderly taking care of the elderly" as well as families of elderly singletons featuring the "hidden elderly". On the other hand, the Labour and Welfare Bureau has indicated that the Government will study the establishment of a databank on high-risk cases, and it is learnt that some labour unions have repeatedly proposed the establishment of a register of high-risk elderly persons. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has devised a timetable for the establishment of a register of high-risk elderly persons; if so, of the details, including the time for establishing the register and the interval between each update; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) whether it has grasped the situation among the elderly in respect of the installation of indoor emergency alarm systems (EAS) at homes, and whether it has plans to install EAS for high-risk elderly persons free of charge; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) as it is learnt that about 80 per cent of the elderly in Hong Kong have applied for various social security schemes and that health condition assessments would also be conducted for the elderly under the Government's Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly Services, whether the Government has consolidated the data of elderly applicants for various schemes in order to identify the families of elderly doubletons and elderly singletons as well as conduct standardised assessments for such families with a view to establishing a register of high-risk elderly persons for high-risk families; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

I reply to the Member's question as follows:

(1) and (3) There is no unified definition of "high-risk" elderly persons. Health conditions, living arrangements, changes in family support, etc, will affect risks faced by elderly persons. Relevant risks may also change over

time. The Government approaches and identifies elderly persons in need through different means, with a view to providing timely assistance to them.

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) piloted the District Services and Community Care Teams – Scheme on Supporting Elderly and Carers in Tsuen Wan and Southern District in March this year. The SWD assisted in training the Care Teams of these two districts to proactively reach out to and identify households of singleton/doubleton elderly persons, carers of elderly persons and persons with disabilities in need. In the past six months, the Care Teams visited about 4 700 families and referred over 730 elderly cases to social welfare organisations for follow up. The 2024 Policy Address announced that the Government would extend the scheme to all 18 districts across the territory next year.

The SWD commissioned the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals in September 2023 to launch the 24-hour Designated Hotline for Carer Support, providing instant consultation and emotional support, outreaching/emergency support, service referrals, etc. The hotline has received over 50 000 calls so far, and referred about 850 cases to relevant community support service units for service matching as appropriate, of which about 270 elderly cases were referred to elderly service units or respite service. In addition, the hotline provided crisis handling for 56 cases through outreaching.

A total of 214 District Elderly Community Centres (DECCs) and Neighbourhood Elderly Centres (elderly centres) throughout the territory provide a wide range of support services to elderly persons at the district level. Support Teams for the Elderly (STEs) are set up in all DECCs to identify elderly persons with potential service needs through outreaching and networking, and provide suitable assistance to them. Elderly centres have about 280 000 members in total, including 47 000 elderly persons receiving services from STEs and 8 000 elderly persons receiving casework service.

Upon identifying elderly persons with potential service needs, social welfare units will arrange for them to undergo Standardised Care Need Assessment for Elderly Services according to their conditions. Frail elderly persons assessed as having long-term care needs can join the Central Waiting List for Subsidised Long Term Care Services. They may also apply for Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly and receive subsidised community care services without queuing; elderly persons with lower impairment level can apply for subsidised Home Support Services. In addition, social welfare service units will assist elderly persons with financial needs applying for suitable cash assistance.

The Government will continue to make good use of different channels to early identify elderly persons with potential service needs and provide timely and effective support.

(2) The Government has put in place different measures to subsidise elderly persons in need to install emergency alarm system (EAS). The SWD provides a special grant to eligible elderly Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients for installing and using indoor or mobile EAS. Currently, about

26 000 elderly persons are receiving such a grant. The Hong Kong Housing Authority and the Hong Kong Housing Society provide subsidies to eligible elderly households in their housing estates to install and use EAS, benefiting about 26 900 elderly persons in total. Care Teams will also refer elderly persons, persons with disabilities and their carers in need to the relevant service provider for installing and using EAS.