

Measures to render further support to financial needy individuals and families to be implemented

The Government today (May 24) announced that a series of measures would be implemented to render further support to financial needy individuals and families.

The 2021-22 Budget announced that a one-off extra allowance, equal to half of one month of the standard rate of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance payments, Old Age Allowance, Old Age Living Allowance or Disability Allowance, would be provided to eligible recipients of these social security payments. Similar arrangements will apply to recipients of Working Family Allowance (WFA) and the Work Incentive Transport Subsidy (WITS). The above recipients will receive the extra allowance starting from today (see details in the annex).

A Government spokesman said that recipients who were eligible for social security payments on April 28, 2021 (the date the Legislative Council approved the Appropriation Bill 2021), and those whose WFA/WITS applications were made in the period from October 1, 2020, to April 28, 2021, and eventually approved, would be eligible for the one-off extra allowance. It is estimated that about 1.51 million social security recipients, 70 000 WFA households and 20 000 WITS recipients would benefit from the arrangements, involving a total of over \$2.5 billion. The payment will be credited to the designated Hong Kong bank accounts of the eligible households/recipients without the need to make an application.

In addition, the Government will relax the eligibility criteria for the WFA Scheme and the Short-term Food Assistance Service Projects (STFASPs) starting from next month, for a period of one year.

Regarding the WFA Scheme, the working hour requirements for non-single-parent households will be reduced for the claim months from June 2021 to May 2022, viz substantially reducing that for Basic Allowance from 144 to 72 hours per month and reducing that for Medium Allowance from 168 to 132 hours per month, so that more low-income households will be eligible for WFA despite a decrease in their working hours, and some existing beneficiary households may receive a higher allowance. Taking an eligible four-person household with two children as an example, if its aggregate monthly working hours reach 72, it may receive a maximum of \$3,800 in WFA per month.

As for the STFASPs, the asset limits will also be relaxed from June 1, 2021, to May 31, 2022, by pitching them to those of the WFA Scheme. For example, the asset limit of a four-person household will be relaxed from \$264,000 to \$548,000, while that of a one-person household will be relaxed from \$99,000 to \$266,000.

For enquiries on social security and the STFASPs, please call the Social Welfare Department's hotline (2343 2255) or visit its website (www.swd.gov.hk). As for enquiries on the WFA and WITS Schemes, please call the hotline (2558 3000) of the Working Family Allowance Office of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency or visit its website (www.wfsfaa.gov.hk/wfao).