

Ombudsman probes provision of post-death public services by Government (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (December 19) announced the launch of a direct investigation to examine the provision of post-death public services by the Government.

In early 2022, not a few people died with COVID-19 when the disease rampaged through Hong Kong. The resulted pressure threatened to overwhelm the operations of public mortuaries and the mortuaries in public hospitals, and demand for cremation services was once pressing. The situation had added worries to the bereaved when handling the post-death arrangements of the deceased.

Government statistics show a continuing ageing trend in Hong Kong's population (note). The demand for public services relating to post-death arrangements (including death registration, mortuary services and burial services) is expected to keep growing and people will be more concerned about the arrangements for these services and the dissemination of related information. Against this background, The Ombudsman has decided to launch a direct investigation to examine the provision of public services relating to post-death arrangements (including death registration, mortuary services and burial services) and the dissemination of related information. At the present stage, the investigation will cover the Department of Health, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, the Hospital Authority and the Immigration Department. The scope is subject to adjustments depending on the investigation findings along the way.

Ms Chiu said, "With an ageing population in Hong Kong, the demand for public services relating to post-death arrangements will continue to increase. Besides, more and more people will wish to take the initiative to make burial arrangements for themselves and their next of kin in advance. Having gone through the trials of the pandemic, the government departments and public organisations which provide public services relating to post-death arrangements have accumulated certain experience in handling sudden surges in service demand. If they can consolidate their experience to further refine and enhance the services and the dissemination of related information, more relevant and timely services and support can be provided to the bereaved. In this light, I have decided to launch a direct investigation to probe the public services provided by the Government relating to post-death arrangements, as well as the adequacy and effectiveness of the dissemination of related information. Recommendations will be made where due."

The Ombudsman welcomes views from members of the public on this topic.

Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by January 19, 2024:

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Note: According to the "Hong Kong Monthly Digest of Statistics" published by the Census and Statistics Department in October 2023, the proportion of elderly persons aged 65 and above is projected to increase from 1.45 million (or 20.5 percent of the total population) in 2021 to 1.9 million (or 26 per cent) in 2026, then almost double to 2.74 million (or 36 per cent) in 2046.

