

Opening remarks by SLW at Gerontech and Innovation Expo cum Summit (English only)

Following is the opening remarks by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, at the Keynote & Plenary Session of the Gerontech and Innovation Expo cum Summit this morning (November 20):

Bernard (Chairperson of Hong Kong Council of Social Service, Mr Bernard Chan), Dr David Lindeman (Director Health of Centre for Information Technology Research in the Interest of Society of University of California, Berkeley and Director of Centre for Technology and Aging of the United States), Dr Lam Ching-choi (Chairman of Elderly Commission), distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning everyone. May I begin by saying how pleased I am here today to kick off the Gerontech and Innovation Expo cum Summit 2019, and have the opportunity to share with you my views on the importance of gerontechnology.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my warmest welcome to our overseas speakers and guests who have made time and efforts to come all the way to Hong Kong, amid our very challenging conditions.

As some of you may know, thanks to our world-class healthcare system and the healthy lifestyles of our citizens, Hong Kong's average life expectancy is the longest worldwide. According to a Hong Kong population projection made in 2017, by 2041, the number of people aged over 85 will hit more than half a million, tripling the number in 2016.

The major challenges of a rapidly ageing society include the increasing demand for long-term care services and decreasing labour supply. Our labour supply is projected to start decreasing by the year 2023 which is just around the corner.

To meet these challenges, gerontechnology is one key element. To a great extent, innovative gerontechnology products can effectively relieve considerable pressure from our care personnel and increase efficiency. This can in turn enhance the quality of service and the quality of life of our senior citizens. Gerontechnology products can also help our senior citizens to age at their own home in their familiar communities.

To encourage and facilitate our elderly service units to utilise more technology products, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has established the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care (I&T Fund) in 2018. The \$1 billion Fund serves a dual purpose – on one hand to promote more extensive utilisation of gerontechnology, and on the other to provide subsidies to service units for their procurement of technology products.

The response has been very encouraging. For the first tranche of I&T Fund, applications were received from more than 210 service units for the acquisition of some 870 devices worth \$37 million. For the second tranche, the Fund received applications from 650 service units, covering more than 2 300 products. It is estimated that the bulk of the \$1 billion Fund could be progressively disbursed within five years.

Given its importance, we believe that more marketing and promotions for gerontechnology should be conducted among service providers to introduce them to innovative and state-of-the-art products. For this purpose, the Government commissioned the Hong Kong Council of Social Service to organise the Gerontech Expo cum Summit. Already for the third year running, this year's event will be exhibiting the latest technological products, and at the same time providing a platform for relevant stakeholders to engage in dialogues and explore areas of collaboration. Furthermore, ageing population is a common phenomenon across the developed regions of the world. Though this summit is organised by and in Hong Kong, I do hope this effort will add to the collaborations among partners around the world.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our speakers today. They have brought with them invaluable insights and global experience which they will generously share with us. I have no doubt that the wisdom and knowledge of today's participants will inspire us a long way as we seek to formulate better elderly care policies and make Hong Kong a better place to live in.

Thank you very much!