

Policy Address aims to enhance people's livelihoods says CE

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, has today (October 16) in her Policy Address outlined various initiatives to improve the livelihoods of people, including proposals to enhance welfare support, boost healthcare and provide further assistance to students.

Mrs Lam said the Government would build on the 152 new livelihood-related initiatives announced in her previous two Policy Addresses which had seen recurrent spending on welfare and healthcare increase by 29 per cent, with the 2019-20 estimates amounting to \$164.9 billion.

"To enable more effective and efficient use of public resources, I have advocated cross-sector and cross-profession collaboration as well as public-private partnership, adhering to the principles of pro-child, pro-family, pro-work, respecting the choices of beneficiaries and embracing public health," Mrs Lam said.

On the pro-child principle, the Chief Executive said "macro policies on education, healthcare and welfare" as well as address needs of children from different backgrounds and their families have to be put in place.

The Government proposed increasing the number of places under the On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services by 1 000 in each of the next three school years, to support children with special needs. This would bring the total number of places under the scheme to 10 000 by the 2022/23 school year. A pilot scheme will also be introduced early next year, under which children with signs of special needs will be given early intervention services.

The after school care programme will be enhanced by a series of measures, including adding 2 500 full fee-waiving places and extra subsidy for children with special education needs. These initiatives are expected to benefit more than 5 700 students and their families.

About 900 000 students are expected to benefit from the Chief Executive's proposal to regularise a one-off student grant of \$2,500 for secondary day students, primary students and kindergarten students, starting from the 2020/21 school year.

To further support working families with lower incomes, Mrs Lam proposed raising all payment rates of the Working Family Allowance (WFA). Household allowances would be increased by between 16.7 per cent and 25 per cent, and the Child Allowance would rise by 40 per cent.

"Taking a four-person household with two eligible children as an example, the maximum level of allowance under the WFA Scheme will increase by over 30 per cent from the existing \$3,200 per month to \$4,200 per month," Mrs Lam said.

The Government also plans to modify more than 170 public play spaces to provide children with a more stimulating and fun play environment.

To ease enormous pressure on Hong Kong's public healthcare system, the Government would continue to shift the emphasis from a treatment-oriented mindset to a prevention-focused one for provision of healthcare services.

Mrs Lam said the Government would expedite the setting up of District Health Centres (DHCs) in all 18 districts to provide effective health promotion and consultation as well as chronic disease care services. Following the commencement of operation of the first DHC in Kwai Tsing, DHCs in six more districts and "DHC Express" in the remaining 11 districts will be established within the term of the current government.

"We will also strengthen our support for drug treatment of patients with uncommon disorders and cancers through the Samaritan Fund and the Community Care Fund," Mrs Lam said.

For workers injured while at work, Mrs Lam proposed introducing a three-year pilot programme for the construction industry to facilitate early recovery and return to work. Under the programme, eligible employees would receive private treatment and rehabilitation services.

With Hong Kong's economy facing severe headwinds, Mrs Lam announced a series of measures to ease the financial burden on commuters. These include:

- * enhancing the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme by increasing the subsidy rate from one-fourth to one-third of the monthly public transport expenses in excess of \$400 and raising the subsidy cap from \$300 to \$400 per month;

- * upon commissioning of the Tuen Mun – Chek Lap Kok Link Subsea Tunnel and the Tseung Kwan O – Lam Tin Tunnel, waiving the tolls of the Lantau Link, the Tseung Kwan O Tunnel and the two new tunnels; and

- * subsidising 14 outlying island ferry routes to reduce the pressure on fare increases.

The Chief Executive added that the Government plans to fully replace the fleets of 11 ferry routes and introduce greener vessels within about a decade starting from 2021.