

Policy Address to bring out full potential of the community

The Chief Executive, Mr John Lee, in the Policy Address today (October 25) set out a range of measures to promote a caring, inclusive, healthy and high-quality society.

Initiatives announced in the Policy Address focused on enhancing education and healthcare as well as creating a childbearing environment and supporting the disadvantaged in society.

International Hub for Post-Secondary Education

Young people are Hong Kong's future. The Government will capitalise on Hong Kong's strength in education to help young people to develop and shape their future, and build Hong Kong into an international hub for post-secondary education.

To achieve this goal, the Government outlined a number of initiatives, including:

- doubling the admission quota of non-local students at Government-funded post-secondary institutions to 40 per cent, starting from the 2024/25 academic year;
- injecting \$1 billion into the Government Scholarship Fund to attract more outstanding local and non-local students to pursue studies in Hong Kong;
- providing about 13 500 additional hostel places by 2027 to cater to student needs; and
- taking forward the development of post-secondary education in the Northern Metropolis to develop the Northern Metropolis University Town. There, post-secondary institutions will be encouraged to strengthen co-operation with renowned Mainland and overseas institutions, and share resources and enhance collaboration with the industry sector.

The Government will press ahead with the establishment of universities of applied sciences (UASs). Working with the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications, it will prescribe the standards to be qualified as UASs to raise the status of vocational and professional education and training to attain qualifications at university degree level. This will provide an alternative path to success for young people who aspire to pursue a career in the technical professions.

Health and medical innovation hub

Leveraging on the city's healthcare strengths, the Government set out

plans for a health and medical innovation hub to enhance services and attract more local, Mainland and overseas pharmaceutical and medical device enterprises to conduct research and development (R&D) and clinical trials in Hong Kong.

A preparatory office will be set up next year to study the potential restructuring and strengthening of the current regulatory and approval regimes for medicine, medical devices and medical technology. The office will also put forward proposals and steps for the establishment of the Hong Kong Centre for Medical Products Regulation (CMPR) as a step towards the transition to the "primary evaluation" approach in approving applications for registration of pharmaceutical products, and explore the upgrading of the CMPR as a standalone statutory body in the long run. This will help accelerate the launching of new drugs and medical devices to the market, and foster the development of R&D and testing of medical products and related industries.

The Government will establish the Greater Bay Area (GBA) International Clinical Trial Institute in the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone next year to provide a one-stop clinical trial support platform for medical research institutions.

A new "1+" mechanism will also be set up by the end of the year to expedite the approval of new drugs and promote R&D on drug and clinical trials in Hong Kong.

To promote the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong, the Government will launch the Digitalised Chinese Medicines Information Platform in early 2024 for Chinese medicine identification and educational purposes. A Chinese Medicine Development Blueprint will also be published in 2025.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government will enhance local capacity to combat communicable diseases through surveillance, early warning, prevention and control, as well as international co-operation in scientific research in areas such as vaccines. The Hong Kong Jockey Club will provide funding of \$3 billion to support related efforts.

Youth Development

To nurture the next generation with affection for our country and our city, a global perspective and positive thinking, the Government would continue to implement and enhance some 160 measures set out in the Youth Development Blueprint published last year, and organise the Youth Development Summit in mid-2024 as the opening and highlight of the next Youth Festival.

In addition to carrying forward various Mainland and overseas youth exchange and internship programmes, the Government will establish the Alliance of Hong Kong Youth Innovation and Entrepreneurial Bases in the GBA before year's end.

Promote fertility

Noting Hong Kong's persistently low birth rate, the Policy Address unveiled a range of initiatives to promote fertility and create a childbearing environment. The initiatives include:

- providing a one-off Newborn Baby Bonus of \$20,000. This measure will last for three years;
- raising the deduction ceiling of home loan interest or domestic rent for eligible taxpayers from the current \$100,000 to \$120,000, starting from the year of assessment 2024/25;
- introducing the "Families with Newborns Flat Selection Priority Scheme" to raise the chances for families with newborns to purchase subsidised sale flats (SSFs), and reserving an additional 10 per cent of SSFs for this purpose from 2024; and
- introducing the "Families with Newborns Allocation Priority Scheme", under which family applicants with newborns will wait one year less in their queue time for public rental housing flats.

The Policy Address also set out a range of measures to support prospective parents who require assisted reproductive technology in conceiving a child, including increasing the public service quota of assisted reproductive services for in-vitro fertilisation and providing tax deduction for assisted reproductive services.

Childbearing support for working families will be strengthened in the following areas:

- increase the Child Care Centre Parent Subsidy from a maximum of \$600 to \$1,000 per month starting from April 2024;
- the number of service places under the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project will be doubled to about 2 000 starting from the fourth quarter of 2024;
- increase the number of service places under the After School Care Programme for Pre-primary Children from about 670 to nearly 1 200 over the next three years starting from 2024; and
- increase the number of Aided Standalone Child Care Centre service places by about 900 over the next three years starting from 2024.

Caring and Inclusive Community

The Government announced the expansion of various elderly care services. These include extending the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong to cover specific residential care homes for the elderly who wish to retire in the Mainland cities of the GBA, and extending the coverage of the Residential Care Service Voucher Scheme for the Elderly to include nursing home places.

An additional \$1 billion will also be injected into the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care to enhance

the subsidies for eligible elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure, rent and trial technology products.

Additional support will be on hand for carers through mobilising Care Teams. They will help identify and refer carers for the elderly and persons with disabilities in need of respite and assistance.

To support special school leavers and their carers, designated teams will be set up to proactively contact them and provide training on caring and interaction skills, arrange post-school care plans and line them up with community support services.

Ethnic minorities are also in line for support in education, employment, welfare and healthcare.

The Government will set up two additional support service centres in 2024, taking the total number to 10. Each of these centres will be invited to set up a Ethnic Minority Care Team to reach out to ethnic minority households on their needs. The Government will continue to support non-Chinese speaking students to learn Chinese.

Government departments will step up recruitment and outreaching efforts to invite applications from ethnic minorities.