

Special arrangements for subsidised welfare services and services of Social Welfare Department

In view of the latest local epidemic situation, the Government has announced that bureaux and departments can implement new special work arrangements having regard to their operational needs starting from tomorrow (January 25). A spokesperson from the Social Welfare Department (SWD) said today (January 24) that special arrangements for subsidised welfare services and services of the SWD will be implemented starting from tomorrow.

Details of the special arrangements from tomorrow onwards are as follows:

(1) All day care centres or units for the elderly, sheltered workshops, integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres, integrated vocational training centres, day activity centres and day care services attached to care and attention homes for severely disabled persons will remain open with scaled-down capacity (i.e. about 50 per cent attendance to sustain the rehabilitation and training needs of service users and to relieve the burden of carers).

(2) Apart from (a) and (j) which are provided as normal, the other services will be provided on a limited scale as stated below. Group activities may be conducted online, whereas mass programmes will be suspended. Services include:

- a. Residential care services;
- b. Integrated Family Service Centres (providing casework service);
- c. Integrated Services Centres (providing casework service);
- d. Short-term Food Assistance Service;
- e. Integrated Home Care Services (providing services including meals, escort, nursing, administration of medicine, assistance with personal hygiene and procurement of necessities);
- f. Enhanced Home and Community Care Services (providing services including meals, escort, nursing, administration of medicine, assistance with personal hygiene and procurement of necessities);
- g. Home Care Service for Persons with Severe Disabilities (providing services including escort, nursing, administration of medicine, assistance with personal hygiene and procurement of necessities);
- h. Integrated Support Service for Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities (providing services including escort, nursing, administration of medicine, assistance with personal hygiene and procurement of necessities);
- i. Visiting Medical Practitioner Service for Residential Care Homes;
- j. Hotline services;
- k. Specialised Co-parenting Support Centres; and
- l. Humanitarian Assistance for Non-refoulement Claimants.

Areas within the above service units designated for public use, such as resource corners and game corners, will temporarily be closed.

(3) Centre-based services subsidised by the SWD, such as district elderly community centres, neighbourhood elderly centres, social and recreational centres for persons with disabilities, district support centres for persons with disabilities, integrated children and youth services centres, children and youth centres, community centres, and integrated community centres for mental wellness, will only operate on a limited scale (such as provision of meal service through distributing meal boxes in some elderly centres and advising the elderly not to eat in groups inside the centres and provision of standardised care need assessment for elderly services) in order to reduce the risk of infection arising from the gathering of people. Group activities of the centres might be conducted online, whereas mass programmes and drop-in services will not be provided at this stage.

(4) Operators of pre-school rehabilitation services (including special child care centres) may arrange appropriate modes of individual training, such as centre-based training, e-learning and home training, for service users having regard to the epidemic situation, service users' circumstances and their parents' preference.

(5) The SWD-subsidised multi-disciplinary outreaching support teams for the elderly and professional outreaching teams for private residential care homes for persons with disabilities will maintain their services, including visits to residential care homes or the provision of training and support services through other modes.

(6) For other services not covered by (1) to (5) above, non-governmental organisations operating them may decide whether to continue to provide them under their respective Funding and Service Agreements having regard to their circumstances.

While the aforementioned arrangements will continue until further notice, the special service arrangements of aided child care centres will remain until February 7 as all kindergartens as well as primary and secondary schools will suspend face-to-face classes until February 7. Service operators should keep their service users informed of the latest arrangements and provide suitable personal protective equipment for their staff having regard to the relevant guidelines issued by the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health. They should step up measures to prevent communicable diseases, including keeping the premises hygienic and clean, requiring service users and staff to wear masks and to wash hands with alcohol-based hand rub, and enhancing measures on the screening of body temperature.

Regarding the SWD's own services, the SWD's service units providing direct public services for members of the public will maintain their provision of emergency services and essential services. Departmental hotline services will be in operation as normal. Other services such as those of Integrated Family Service Centres and Social Security Service Units will continue to be open to the public. The Integrated Family Service Centres will

provide casework service as well as group work service on a limited scale, with extended hours of service to be provided through telephone. For social security applications, relevant application forms are also provided next to the drop boxes of Social Security Field Units and can be downloaded from the SWD's website (www.swd.gov.hk). Completed forms can be returned to the relevant Social Security Field Units by post, fax or email or through drop boxes of the Social Security Field Units. After receiving the applications, the staff of the Social Security Field Units will contact applicants for processing their applications. For enquiries, please call the staff on duty during office hours.

Service users are advised to call the hotline number 2343 2255 for details of the service provision. To reduce the risk of infection arising from the gathering of people, service users are advised to contact the staff of service units by telephone in advance, so that interviews can be scheduled as appropriate. All visitors must wear masks, have their body temperature checked and maintain social distancing.

Meanwhile, the SWD has strengthened infection control at all service units. Staff will be reminded to take necessary infection control measures. The SWD also appealed to workers of the sector to get vaccinated as soon as possible in order to protect themselves as well as their family, colleagues and service users. They should also undergo testing at an appropriate juncture.