

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

In view of the recent severe epidemic situation, the welfare service units have been experiencing acute manpower problems. A spokesman for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) said today (February 25) that, to relieve the pressure of the sector, various special arrangements will be implemented for subsidised welfare services and services of the SWD starting from February 28, so that subsidised organisations can redeploy the manpower released from service adjustments to support its essential service units, such as residential care service.

The special service arrangements are as follows:

(1) All aided child care centres, day care centres or units for the elderly, sheltered workshops, integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres, integrated vocational training centres, day activity centres, district support centres for persons with disabilities, community rehabilitation day centres and day care services attached to care and attention homes for persons with severe disabilities will suspend their service delivery. These centres or service units will, however, remain open depending on the situation to serve those in special need; individual service users who have a need for these services may contact the centres or service units concerned in advance. The SWD-subsidised multi-disciplinary outreach support teams for the elderly and the professional outreach teams for private residential care homes for persons with disabilities will suspend their services.

(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, parents/relatives resource centres, support centres for persons with autism, 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 provision of standardised care needs 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) will suspend their centre-based training, and arrange telephone consultations, e-learning, video-training and/or other measures to support parents/carers to have training for children at home continuously.

(5) For other services not covered by (1) to (4) 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.

The aforementioned arrangements will continue until further notice. 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 handrub, 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 but services will be provided on a limited scale. The Integrated Family Service Centres will provide casework service as well as group work service on a limited scale, with the extended hours of service suspended. For social security applications, relevant application forms are also provided next to the drop boxes of the 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 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.