

Third-term Commission on Poverty convenes fifth meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the fifth meeting of the third-term Commission on Poverty (CoP) this afternoon (April 9).

At the meeting, members noted the implementation progress of various assistance programmes and the financial position of the Community Care Fund (CCF). The CoP endorsed the follow-up arrangements for an existing CCF assistance programme, the extension of two programmes and the introduction of new drugs and expansion of coverage for a medical device for three Medical Assistance Programmes as well as their revised budget proposals. Details are as follows:

Follow-up arrangements for an existing assistance programme

(1) The CoP endorsed the follow-up arrangements for the purchase of new devices by students receiving half grant from the School Textbook Assistance Scheme (half grant students) upon changing schools under the Provision of Subsidy to Needy Primary and Secondary Students for Purchasing Mobile Computer Devices to Facilitate the Practice of e-Learning Programme. Under normal circumstances, the maximum subsidy provided to half grant student beneficiaries only covers half of the cost of the device. Their parents would have to pay for the cost difference. The CoP agreed that if a student changes to a school where a different device is used and needs to apply for an extra subsidy to acquire a new device, the CCF should pay for the full cost of the new device not exceeding the subsidy limit in order to allow the student to continue e-learning effectively. It is estimated that about 1 000 half grant students would benefit. The approved total disbursement for the Programme should be sufficient to cover related expenses and no additional funding is required for the above arrangement;

Extension of two existing assistance programmes

(2) The CoP endorsed the extension of the Providing hostel subsidy for needy undergraduate students programme for two more years covering the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years to continue supporting financially needy undergraduate students to meet hostel expenses. The extension is expected to benefit around 11 000 person-times. The CoP also endorsed an additional funding provision of \$68.4 million and the revised total provision is \$263.1 million.

(3) The CoP agreed to the extension of increasing the academic expenses grant under the Financial Assistance Scheme for Post-secondary Students Programme for two more years covering the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years to continue providing an additional academic expenses grant for financially needy students pursuing full-time locally accredited self-financing post-secondary programmes. The extension is estimated to benefit around 29 000

person-times. The CoP also endorsed an additional funding provision of \$56.92 million and the revised total provision is \$233.87 million;

Agreement to approve the introduction of new drugs and expansion of coverage for a medical device for three Medical Assistance Programmes as well as their revised budget proposals

(4) The CoP approved to include a specified self-financed cancer drug (Ribociclib) under the First Phase Programme of Medical Assistance Programmes (First Phase Programme) starting from the third quarter of 2019. In addition, the Hospital Authority (HA) will also introduce a new indication for an existing drug, enzalutamide, under the First Phase Programme. It is expected that the introduction of the new drug and the new indication could benefit around 140 patients in the first 12 months after implementation. In addition, the HA will also reposition pemetrexed, a specified self-financed cancer drug currently supported by the First Phase Programme, to the Special Drugs of the HA Drug Formulary with effect from April 13, 2019. In view of the addition of a new drug, the inclusion of a new indication for an existing drug and the implementation of the enhancement measures for the means test mechanism, the CoP also endorsed the revised budget for the eighth year of the First Phase Programme (from April 2019 to March 2020) with an additional funding provision of \$105.627 million. The revised total provision is \$353.719 million.

(5) The CoP endorsed to include a new drug (Tafamidis) for treating Tansthyretin Familial Amyloid Polyneuropathy under the coverage of the Subsidy for Eligible Patients to Purchase Ultra-expensive Drugs (Including Those for Treating Uncommon Disorders) Programme starting from the third quarter of 2019. The drug is indicated for the treatment of transthyretin amyloidosis in adult patients with stage 1 symptomatic polyneuropathy to delay peripheral neurologic impairment. It is expected that the introduction of the new drug could benefit around six patients in the first 12 months after implementation. In view of the addition of a new drug, the CoP also endorsed the revised budget for the second year of the programme (from April 2019 to March 2020) with additional funding of \$7.62 million. The revised total provision is \$151.356 million; and

(6) The CoP endorsed to extend the coverage of the existing medical device Transcatheter Aortic Valve Implantation under the Subsidy for Eligible Patients of HA to Purchase Specified Implantable Medical Devices for Interventional Procedures Programme to cover "Valve in Valve", which is indicated for patients with severe bioprosthetic aortic valves malfunction and after detailed heart team assessment, considered to be inoperable or having high surgical risks, and start receiving applications from the third quarter of 2019. The extension is expected to benefit about 10 patients in the first 12 months upon implementation. In view of the extended coverage and the implementation of the enhancement measures for the means test mechanism, the CoP also endorsed the revised budget for the second year of the programme (from April 2019 to March 2020) with additional funding of \$10.067 million. The revised total provision is \$32.244 million.

In addition, members also noted the final report of the evaluation study on the CCF's Dementia Community Support Scheme conducted by the Sau Po Centre on Ageing of the University of Hong Kong which was commissioned by the Food and Health Bureau. In view of the positive impact of the Scheme, the Government has incorporated the Scheme into its regular assistance programmes since February 2019 and will extend the services to all 41 District Elderly Community Centres in the territory in May 2019. The Government will make reference to the recommendations of the final evaluation report and continue to monitor the actual operations through the Task Force of the Scheme with a view to further refining the services.

At the meeting, the Hong Kong Jockey Club briefed members on the KeySteps@JC project. KeySteps@JC is a five-year project supported by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust. It aims to build an integrated model involving medical, education and welfare sectors as well as to provide critical support for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to build stronger foundations. Members gave views on KeySteps@JC's scope, project model and expected outcome. They also noted the plan of putting in place a cross-disciplinary one-stop web portal and child databank before the end of the five-year project, where big data and evidence-based research can be used to contribute to future policy formulation.

At the meeting, CoP also took note of the update on work progress of the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund (SIE Fund). Members noted that the SIE Fund is making preparations for its major work in 2019, including engaging a new batch of intermediaries for the three priority areas of work (innovative programmes, capacity building and research), establishing a "gerontechnology platform" and promoting pilot development of the "Pay-for-Success" model in Hong Kong.

In addition, the Office of the Government Economist also briefed members on an analysis on youth poverty in 2017 under the poverty line framework which focused on the poverty situation of young people aged between 18 and 29 years old. After recurrent cash policy intervention, some 86 000 young people were in poor households in 2017 (accounting for less than 10 per cent of the overall poor population). The respective poverty rate was 8.8 per cent, much lower than the 14.7 per cent of the overall population. The presentation of the analysis has been uploaded to the CoP's dedicated website (www.povertyrelief.gov.hk).