

# Third-term Commission on Poverty convenes fourth meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the fourth meeting of the third-term Commission on Poverty (CoP) this afternoon (January 15).

At the meeting, the CoP noted the implementation progress of various assistance programmes and the financial position of the Community Care Fund (CCF) and endorsed the arrangement of renewal of a \$7 billion deposit of out the \$10 billion deposit with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority due in July 2019. In addition, the CoP endorsed a revision of the budget for an existing assistance programme and extension of two others. The CoP also approved the introduction of new drugs and a medical device for three Medical Assistance Programmes and their budget proposals as well as the recommendations to enhance the means test mechanism of the CCF Medical Assistance Programmes. Details are as follows:

## Amendment of the budget of an existing assistance programme

(1) According to the latest data from the Social Welfare Department, it is estimated that the sum of allowance payment already made and predicted to be made under the Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Recipients Living in Rented Private Housing will exceed the original estimate. The CoP endorsed an amended budget under which a further \$6.23 million will be provided to continue the implementation of the project. The amended total budget is \$125.53 million;

## Extension of existing assistance programmes

(2) The CoP endorsed the extension of cut-off date for new cases for the Cervical Cancer Vaccination Pilot Scheme by six months, from March 2019 to September 2019, to allow sufficient time for eligible young females (especially girls from Primary Six and up to the age of 18) to receive the vaccination. The CoP also endorsed an upward adjustment of the fixed vaccination service fee paid to the organisation responsible for vaccination starting from April 2019 from \$308 to \$320 per vaccination. No additional funding is required for the extended programme.

(3) The CoP agreed to extend the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme for three years to February 28, 2022. In addition, the target beneficiaries of the Programme will be expanded to cover all elderly persons receiving Old Age Living Allowance by lowering the age limit from 70 or above to 65 or above starting from February 2019. The CoP also agreed to introduce enhancement measures, including relaxing the number of visits for other free dental services from one time to two times for elderly persons for whom removable dentures are not appropriate and raising the maximum number of claim applications for X-ray films in each case from four films to six films for

each eligible dentist. The Programme will continue to provide free removable dentures and other related dental services to eligible elderly people. No additional funding is required for the above measures.

Agreement to approve the introduction of new drugs and a medical device and budgets under three Medical Assistance Programmes

(4) The CoP has approved to include seven specified self-financed cancer drugs (Ceritinib, Alectinib, Osimertinib, Palbociclib, Trastuzumab emtansine, Everolimus and Axitinib) under the First Phase Programme of Medical Assistance Programmes starting from mid-February 2019. It is expected that the introduction of the seven new drugs could benefit around 384 patients in the first 12 months after implementation. Currently, three self-financed cancer drugs (Gefitinib, Erlotinib and Afatinib) on the list of specified self-financed drugs will be covered by the scope of the Samaritan Fund after the effective date of including the abovementioned seven new drugs. The First Phase Programme covers a total of 22 self-financed cancer drugs for treatment of 14 types of cancers. The CoP has also passed the eighth budget of the First Phase Programme, which covered from April 2019 to March 2020 with a total funding of \$248.092 million.

(5) The CoP endorsed the budget for the second year of the programme of the Subsidy for Eligible Patients to Purchase Ultra-expensive Drugs (Including Those for Treating Uncommon Disorders) from April 2019 to March 2020, with a total provision of 143.736 million; and

(6) The CoP endorsed the addition of Impella, a percutaneous ventricular assistance device for high-risk percutaneous coronary intervention procedures, under the programme of the Subsidy for Eligible Patients of Hospital Authority to Purchase Specified Implantable Medical Devices for Interventional Procedures. Applications will be accepted from mid-February 2019. With a total subsidy of around \$5.01 million, the initiative is expected to benefit about 25 patients in the first 12 months upon implementation. The CoP also endorsed the budget for the second year of the programme from April 2019, to March 2020, with a total provision of \$22.177 million; and

Enhancement measures for the financial assessment mechanism of CCF Medical Assistance Programmes

(7) The CoP agreed to revise the mean test mechanism of the medical assistance programmes in determining whether a patient is a dependent member of a household or not. Under the refined definition of "household", if the applicant is a non-dependent patient who is married, the family members will only comprise the spouse and dependent children under the same roof. The CoP endorsed the calculation of the annual disposable financial resources for drug subsidy applications, under which 50 per cent of patients' disposable capital is discounted after deducting the deductible allowance. The enhancement measures will relieve the financial burden of patients' families arising from expenditure on medical treatment and avoid potential friction caused by requiring family members to disclose their assets.

Members were also briefed on the implementation and effectiveness of the "Be a Government Official for a Day" programme debuted last year and its work plan for 2019. They noted that 34 senior secondary students selected for participating in the programme were matched to shadow three Secretaries and 13 Bureau Directors of the Government and all of the participating students and officials showed a positive response.

The programme offered an invaluable opportunity for officials to exchange views direct with young people so that they could enhance mutual understanding. This fully tied in with a key policy theme of the current-term Government – connecting with young people. In view of the enthusiastic response and positive feedback, Mr Cheung said that the Government will continue to implement the programme this year with an extended scale to cover more senior officials. The Chief Executive, Under Secretaries, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments will also participate in the programme to enable more students to join. The 2019 programme will be implemented in two phases. The first phase of the programme will be held during the Easter holidays, and recruitment will commence in January. The second phase of the programme will be held during the summer holidays.

In addition, members noted that the annual Commission on Poverty Summit chaired by the Chief Executive will be held between March or April 2019. They provided comments on the theme, programme and overall arrangements of the Summit. Some members also expressed views on elderly Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme.