

Third-term Commission on Poverty convenes seventh meeting

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the seventh meeting of the third-term Commission on Poverty (CoP) this afternoon (October 29). The meeting discussed the Community Care Fund (CCF) programmes. Members also noted the briefing by relevant bureaux on the new initiatives on improving people's livelihood announced in the 2019 Policy Address.

Members noted the implementation progress of various assistance programmes and the financial position of the CCF. The CoP endorsed launching three new assistance programmes, extending one existing programme, introducing new drugs and new or relaxation of indication of a medical assistance programme, as well as streamlining the approval process for the medical assistance programmes. Details of the resolutions are as follows:

New assistance programmes –

The CoP agreed to:

(1) launch the Subsidy to Design, Purchase and Construct Modular Housing to facilitate the implementation of the Modular Social Housing Scheme at the junction of Sung Wong Toi Road and To Kwa Wan Road by the Lok Sin Tong Benevolent Society Kowloon to provide transitional housing. With a total funding of \$60.56 million, it is expected to provide about 110 units and benefit around 300 persons;

(2) launch the Subsidy to Design, Purchase and Construct Modular Housing to facilitate the implementation of the Modular Social Housing Scheme at Ying Wa Street by the Society for Community Organization to provide transitional housing. With a total funding of \$77.06 million, it is expected to provide about 140 units and benefit around 400 persons;

(3) launch the One-off Living Subsidy for Low-income Households Not Living in Public Housing and Not Receiving CSSA programme (the 2020 Programme) to provide a one-off living subsidy to those "N-have nots" who cannot benefit from the short-term relief measures announced by the Government in August 2019. With a total funding of \$1,118.18 million, the 2020 Programme is expected to benefit about 105 500 households (about 272 000 persons). The subsidy amount is \$4,500 for one-person households, \$9,000 for two-person households, \$12,500 for three-person households, \$14,500 for four-person households and \$15,500 for five-or-more-person households. The Programme is expected to be launched and receive applications in July 2020. The CoP also noted that the CCF Secretariat is formulating the detailed proposal on the extra round of disbursement announced in the 2019 Policy Address;

Extension of the Subsidy for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Recipients Living in Rented Private Housing

(4) The CoP endorsed extending the Subsidy for CSSA Recipients Living in Rented Private Housing for six months till end-April 2020. The extension will continue to provide CSSA recipients living in rented private housing and paying a rent which exceeded the applicable maximum rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme with a one-off subsidy to relieve their financial burden as a result of periodic increases in rent. In anticipation of the extra amount of subsidy and administrative fees required due to the extension, the CoP also endorsed an additional funding provision of \$36.85 million, making the revised total provision \$162.38 million; and

Introduction of new drugs and new or relaxation of indication of existing drugs under the First Phase Programme of Medical Assistance Programmes (First Phase programme)

(5) The CoP approved to include the specified self-financed cancer drugs Dabrafenib and Trametinib for the treatment of skin cancer under the First Phase programme starting from the first quarter of 2020. In addition, the CoP noted that the Hospital Authority will introduce new or relaxed indication for four existing drugs (Abiraterone, Palbociclib, Ribociclib and Osimertinib) under the First Phase programme. It is expected that the introduction of the new drugs and the new or relaxed indication of drugs could benefit around 290 patients in the first 12 months after implementation. The introduction of the new drugs and the new or relaxed indication could be covered by the approved budget and no additional funding is required.

Streamlining approval process of medical assistance programmes

(6) The CoP agreed to streamline the existing approval process of new drugs/medical devices to the three CCF medical assistance programmes (the First Phase Programme of Medical Assistance Programmes, the Subsidy for Eligible Patients to Purchase Ultra-expensive Drugs [Including Those For Treating Uncommon Disorders] and the Subsidy for Eligible Patients of Hospital Authority to Purchase Specified Implantable Medical Devices for Interventional Procedures). With a view to providing more timely support for the needy patients, the Chairman of the CCF Task Force will be delegated with the authority to approve new drugs/medical devices. The streamlined approval process is expected to shorten the total lead time for the introduction of new drugs/medical devices by a few months.

Relevant bureaux briefed members on the various new initiatives on improving people's livelihood announced in the 2019 Policy Address. More than 50 initiatives were introduced, covering the areas of social welfare, education, healthcare and youth development.