

Transcript of remarks by SFH at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, after attending the World No Tobacco Day award presentation ceremony today (May 30):

Reporter: Professor Chan, are you worried that lawmakers are dragging their feet in scrutinising the cigarette bill because they are dealing with the extradition law?

Secretary for Food and Health: The Bills Committee (Bills Committee on Smoking (Public Health) (Amendment) Bill 2019)'s work on e-cigarettes is ongoing. We notice that it is a bit sluggish in the progress. We hope that the work of the Bills Committee will continue so that the bill can be scrutinised as soon as possible in the Legislative Council.

Reporter: (About the Government's work in the next five to 10 years on smoking.)

Secretary for Food and Health: In terms of tobacco control, first of all, throughout the past 30 years, the Government has been working very hard on tobacco control through a multi-pronged approach – legislation, taxation, public education as well as provision of smoking cessation services. The World No Tobacco Day award given to the Department of Health today recognises the hard work of the department and the Government in tobacco control work in the past 30 years.

We are facing a lot of challenges such as a number of smoking alternative products coming out on the market specially targeting our young people. This would not only harm the health of our young people and our citizens in Hong Kong but it would also bring up the smoking prevalence in Hong Kong. In the '80s, the smoking prevalence in Hong Kong was about 23 per cent. Through the past 30 years of hard work, it has gone down to 10 per cent. We are aiming at getting it down to a single digit as soon as possible. In terms of our action plan of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), we have set the target of our smoking prevalence to 7.8 per cent by 2025.

In the coming years, we will be adopting a multi-pronged approach. We will also work closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) to understand the world trend. In fact, during the latest WHO World Health Assembly, I met with Dr Douglas Bettcher, who is in charge of the NCD strategy in the WHO. Not only we exchanged views on the work on tobacco control, he also recognised the work of tobacco control in Hong Kong and would like us to share our work experience with other countries and places that have a higher smoking prevalence.

There are a few directions in the coming years. First of all, we are now currently scrutinising the legislation on the banning of e-cigarettes. We

need to work on the alternative smoking products that have an opportunity to raise our smoking prevalence. Secondly, we also want to protect the general public who are not smokers in terms of prevention of second-hand smoke. So we would expand the no-smoking areas at bus stops. We are working towards that. We have already done the work on public transport interchanges. There are many bus stops in Hong Kong and therefore we need to continue to work on those (bus stops) as well. The third area is about our young people. On one hand, we have to prevent young people from taking up conventional smoking products as well as new smoking products. On the other hand, we have to strengthen the work, not only on education to younger generation but also help them to quit smoking.

Finally, I think strengthening the smoking cessation services is also another area that we should put more resources in. It is important if we want to lower down our smoking prevalence. There are two directions: one is to prevent people from taking up smoking, and the second is to help people quit smoking. Smoking cessation is another area we need to put more emphasis and resources not only for people quitting conventional cigarettes but also new or alternative smoking products. Together with our partners, academia, non-governmental organisations and also our allies in education, the Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health as well as all the supporters in Hong Kong and our general public, we will push ahead with our smoking cessation services and tobacco control.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)