

Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care releases interim report

The Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care, which was established in accordance with "The Chief Executive's 2022 Policy Address", released an interim report today (December 29). Having studied areas including local existing dental services and supporting arrangements, primary dental services and manpower resources of dental professionals, the Working Group recommended the Government to work in line with the strategies set out in the Primary Healthcare Blueprint and aim at preventing oral diseases and enhancing the oral health of the community on the premise of improving oral health of all citizens. Concurring with the directions recommended by the Working Group, the Government will work towards the enhancement of dental services by adopting strategies to provide primary services to the general public and targeted services to underprivileged groups in a bid to help citizens enhance their overall oral health through retention of natural teeth.

The Working Group reviewed earlier various existing public or subsidised dental services, including those for preschool children, primary school children, elderly and persons with financial difficulties or intellectual disabilities, as well as the free emergency dental treatment for the public (commonly known as General Public Sessions). The Working Group was of the view that a series of factors should be taken into account when developing dental services. Such factors include the notion that prevention is better than cure, the importance of primary dental services, ageing population, financial sustainability and manpower resources of dental professionals. At this stage, the Working Group recommended the Government to enhance the manpower supply of dental professionals, make better use of the service capacity of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the private sector, and optimise the arrangements for emergency dental services. In addition, primary dental services suitable for different age groups should be developed, while targeted dental services should be provided as appropriate to the three underprivileged groups, namely persons with financial difficulties, persons with disabilities or special needs and the high-risk groups.

The interim report is available on the following website:
www.healthbureau.gov.hk/download/press_and_publications/otherinfo/231200_dental/e_interim_report.pdf.

With reference to the preliminary recommendations made by the Working Group earlier, the Chief Executive also announced the following measures in the 2023 Policy Address:

- (1) To launch the Primary Dental Co-care Pilot Scheme for Adolescents in 2025 as an interface with the School Dental Care Service for primary school students by providing partial subsidies for private dental check-up services for adolescents aged between 13 and 17 to promote their life-long habit of regular dental check-up for prevention of dental diseases;
- (2) to collaborate with NGOs to enhance the emergency dental services

targeting the underprivileged groups with financial difficulties in 2025, to expand service capacity, service points and service scope to promote early identification and management of dental diseases;

(3) to strengthen the special care dental services currently provided by the Department of Health to persons with disabilities or special needs in the third quarter of next year (2024);

(4) to enhance the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme under the Community Care Fund in the third quarter of next year;

(5) to introduce the amendment bill to the Dentists Registration Ordinance into the Legislative Council by mid-2024 to provide new pathways for admitting qualified non-locally trained dentists to practise in specified institutions and modernise the regulatory framework for dentists and ancillary dental workers; and

(6) to gradually increase training places for ancillary dental workers and provide tuition sponsorship starting this academic year.

The Chairman of the Working Group and the Permanent Secretary for Health, Mr Thomas Chan, said, "I would like to thank the members of the Working Group for their hard work and contribution throughout this year. I hope that they will continue the discussion on relevant topics and submit a complete report before the end of their tenure to present the Government with more recommendations on realising the policy directions and developing dental services."

The [Working Group](#) was established on December 30, 2022, to review the dental care services provided or subsidised by the Government in terms of policy objectives, service scopes and service delivery models, and also make recommendations to the Government. The Working Group comprises 13 non-official members from various healthcare professions and organisations as well as five ex-officio members for a two-year tenure lasting until December 31, 2024. The Working Group has convened three meetings this year.