

Social Welfare

The government helps individuals and families in need. The scope and extent of Hong Kong's welfare services have evolved steadily over the years, with total recurrent government expenditure on social welfare increasing by about 92 per cent in the past decade.

The Labour and Welfare Bureau formulates social welfare policies and oversees their implementation by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Working Family Allowance Office of the Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency. The Social Welfare Advisory Committee, Elderly Commission, Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, Women's Commission and Commission on Children advise the government on welfare policies.

In 2017-18, the department's total recurrent expenditure was \$63.1 billion, of which \$42.5 billion, or 67.4 per cent, went towards financial assistance payments, \$15.1 billion (23.9 per cent) went into recurrent subventions to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), \$2 billion (3.2 per cent) was spent on other payments for welfare services, and the remaining \$3.5 billion (5.5 per cent) was for departmental expenditure.

Social Welfare Services

Services for Families

Family services help preserve and strengthen the family as a unit, improve relationships among family members, enable individuals to prevent and deal with personal and family problems, and assist families by providing suitable services to meet their own needs.

Services for families in need are provided at three levels. At the primary level, the department tries to prevent family problems through early identification, public education, publicity and empowerment. A departmental hotline, 2343 2255, provides service information, counselling and other forms of assistance.

At the secondary level, 65 integrated family service centres and two integrated services centres offer a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial family services.

At the tertiary level, 11 family and child protective services units render specialised services for cases of spouse or cohabitant battering, child abuse or child custody dispute.

Services for Children

Children and young people who are assessed to be in need of out-of-home care owing to family, behavioural or emotional problems have recourse to residential care, with 3,839 such places provided at the year end. The department also works with three NGOs accredited under the Adoption Ordinance to arrange local or overseas adoption for children whose parents have abandoned or are unable to maintain them.

The department provides day child care services to support parents who cannot take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons. Together with the Education Bureau, it subsidises some stand-alone child care centres and kindergarten-cum-child care centres to provide full-day child care. At the year end, about 7,500 places out of 35,500 available at child care centres were government-subsidised; the department was also funding another 446 Occasional Child Care Service places and 2,260 Extended Hours Service places at these centres. The Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, which provides at least 954 places for needy families to receive flexible child care services from volunteers, obtains the department's subsidies as well.

In 2018, the department completed a study on the long-term development of child care services. Recommendations by the consultant team included formulating a planning ratio for the provision of child care places, enhancing the manpower ratios for qualified child care workers serving in these centres and increasing child care subsidies.

Services for Young People

The department subsidises NGOs to provide young people aged between six and 24, including those at risk, with preventive, supportive and remedial services.

Facilities and services operated by the subsidised NGOs include 139 integrated children and youth services centres (ICYSCs), which provide centre-based, outreach and school social work services to address young people's developmental needs. Nineteen youth outreach teams serve high-risk youths and deal with juvenile gang issues. Eighteen designated ICYSCs offer outreach services at night to help youths who loiter at neighbourhood black spots get back on the right track. Cyber youth support teams provide professional social work intervention such as online and offline counselling, and form partnerships with other community stakeholders to foster cross-sectoral collaboration, to address the needs of at-risk and hidden youths. In 2018, government-subsidised NGOs provided 559 school social workers to 463 secondary schools to help students with academic, social and emotional problems.

Juvenile Delinquents

Five NGO-operated Community Support Service Scheme teams help young people who are subject to a Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme (PSDS). The Family Conference Scheme, run jointly by the SWD and the police, helps juveniles who have been cautioned under the PSDS for the second time or are in need of the services of three or more parties. Social workers,

police officers, and the teachers and parents of juveniles under the PSDS work together to decide what is best for them.

Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation

The department subvents 13 residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres and halfway houses, 11 counselling centres for psychotropic substance abusers and two centres for drug counselling. It also regulates the treatment and rehabilitation centres under the Drug Dependent Persons Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres (Licensing) Ordinance, and provides practical guidelines and professional advice on licensing requirements to safeguard the well-being of the drug-dependent residents.

District Support Scheme for Children and Youth Development

The department renders direct cash assistance via a District Support Scheme for Children and Youth Development to address the developmental needs of disadvantaged children and young people aged 24 or below at the district level.

Services for the Elderly

The government encourages elderly people to lead active and healthy lives, and offers community support to help them age in place. The department provides subsidised residential care for those who have long-term care needs but cannot receive adequate care at home.

Through the Opportunities for the Elderly Project, the department encourages elderly people to take part actively in community affairs and in building an age-friendly community. It subsidised 548 programmes with government grants totalling about \$13.4 million in the 2016-18 phase.

Senior Citizen Cards allow their holders to enjoy concessions, discounts and priority service provided by public and private organisations and government departments. There were 1.22 million cardholders as at end-2018.

Community Care and Support

Various schemes under the department lend help to about 45,000 frail elderly people. Subsidies are granted to 136 service teams, comprising integrated home care services teams, enhanced home and community care services teams, support teams for the elderly and a home help team; and to 76 day care centres and units for the elderly to support those living at home. The second phase of the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Vouchers for the Elderly, serving all 18 districts, offers 6,000 vouchers allowing eligible elderly people to choose the services that suit their individual needs.

The department also subvents 211 elderly centres and a holiday centre for the elderly. Its six-year Improvement Programme of Elderly Centres, launched in 2012 through the Lotteries Fund, enhances the physical settings and facilities of 237 elderly centres. As at end-2018, about \$884 million had been approved under the Lotteries Fund for 229 elderly centres. Upgrading works on 167 of the centres had been completed and these had reopened for service with a new look.

Funded by the Community Care Fund, the department rolled out a pair of three-year pilot schemes for the elderly. The Pilot Scheme on Home Care and Support for Elderly Persons with Mild Impairment, launched in December 2017, is expected to serve a quota of about 4,000 low-income elderly people. The Pilot Scheme on Support for Elderly Persons Discharged from Public Hospitals after Treatment, launched in February 2018, aims to provide at least 3,200 elderly people with transitional residential care and/or community care and support to help them age in place in a familiar community and thereby prevent their premature long-term admission to residential care homes for the elderly (RCHes).

Residential Care

The department regulates RCHes under the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance. It also provides practice guidelines and staff training on the proper care of elderly residents. At the year end, RCHes had about 27,000 subsidised residential care places. A working group set up by the department was reviewing the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance, the Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Ordinance and related codes of practice.

A three-year Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly, launched in 2017, offers a total of 3,000 vouchers in batches to eligible elderly people to give them an additional choice while incentivising RCHes to enhance their services.

Carers of Elderly from Low-income Families

A Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of the Elderly Persons from Low Income Families, managed under the Community Care Fund, provides up to 6,000 eligible carers with a living allowance to supplement their expenses so elderly people with long-term care needs may, with their carers' help, receive proper care and remain living in the community. Phase three was launched in October.

Dementia Community Support Scheme

A two-year pilot Dementia Community Support Scheme, launched jointly by the Food and Health Bureau, the SWD and the Hospital Authority in 2017, provides support services for elderly people with mild or moderate dementia and their carers based on a medical-social collaboration model. The pilot scheme will be regularised in February 2019 and expanded to all 41 district elderly community centres and seven Hospital Authority clusters in the territory. After regularisation, it is expected to support over 2,000 elderly people each year.

Services for Persons with Disabilities

Rehabilitation services are provided by government departments and NGOs to meet the different needs of people with disabilities, develop their capabilities and help them integrate into society.

Children with Special Needs

At the year end, there were 1,980 integrated programme places in kindergarten-cum-child care centres; 1,888 places in special child care centres, including 110 residential places; 3,454 places in early education and training centres; and 5,187 places under on-site pre-school rehabilitation services regularised in October for children with special needs. Small group homes provided

64 places for mildly mentally handicapped children who could not receive adequate care from their families.

Children with special needs who are on the waiting list of SWD-subsented pre-school rehabilitation services may apply for the Training Subsidy Programme to acquire self-financing training provided by NGOs while awaiting the subsented services. The means test is waived for eligible children on the special child care centre waiting list who are applying for a subsidy. The programme provided 2,947 training places in 2018.

Adults with Disabilities

In 2018, day activity centres offered 5,305 day training places for people with intellectual disabilities. The department provided 1,633 supported employment places for people with disabilities to work in open settings with assistance, 432 places under an On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities, and 311 places for young people with disabilities or early signs of mental illness under the Sunnyway – On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities. There were 5,386 places available in sheltered workshops and 4,737 places in integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres for those not yet ready to compete for open employment. Integrated vocational training centres offered another 453 places.

As at the year end, more than \$115 million had been allocated to 28 NGOs under an Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project, enabling them to set up 117 small businesses providing 855 job opportunities for people with disabilities. In tandem, the Marketing Consultancy Office (Rehabilitation) helps NGOs set up those small businesses and promotes products and services provided by people with disabilities under the brand, 'Let Them Shine'.

A Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities gives employers a one-off subsidy of up to \$20,000 per employee with disabilities to pay for assistive devices and workplace modifications to facilitate the employment and work efficiency of those employees. The programme also offers a maximum grant of \$40,000 for a single assistive device that costs more than \$20,000 and its essential accessories.

In 2018, the department provided 12,784 subsented residential service places to offer residential care for people with disabilities who were unable to live independently in the community, or whose families could not care for them adequately. Another 600 residential places were provided under a Bought Place Scheme (BPS) for private residential care homes for persons with disabilities (RCHDs). Care-and-attention homes for the aged blind had 828 places, while halfway houses and long-stay care homes had 1,509 and 1,587 places respectively for discharged mental patients.

Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities

The department regulates RCHDs under the Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Ordinance and helps improve their services by providing practice guidelines and staff training. Complementary measures such as a financial assistance scheme and the BPS encourage private RCHDs to upgrade their service standards. The ordinance and related codes of practice are under review.

Professional and Community Support

Clinical psychologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists render support services to people with disabilities in rehabilitation day centres and hostels. The department provides speech therapy to children attending pre-school rehabilitation centres.

Community support is available to people with disabilities living in the community, including ex-mentally ill people and their families and carers. There are district support centres and day and residential respite services for people with disabilities, occasional child care for preschoolers with disabilities, resource centres for parents and other relatives, home care and day care for people with severe disabilities, integrated support for those with severe physical disabilities, a transitional care and support centre for tetraplegic patients, community rehabilitation day centres, integrated community centres for mental wellness, support centres for people with autism, and rehabilitation for people with visceral disability or chronic illness. Social and recreational centres for the disabled encourage people with disabilities to join community leisure activities.

Services for Offenders

The department helps offenders reintegrate into the community and become law-abiding citizens through community-based and residential services. Probation officers assess and report to the courts the offenders' suitability for probation orders and/or community service orders, and supervise those under the orders. They also prepare reports on long-term prisoners and petitioners being considered for early release.

During the year, the department helped 3,071 offenders through the probation service and arranged for 2,466 offenders placed on community service orders to perform unpaid community work under supervision.

There is also an Enhanced Probation Service that adopts a more focused, structured and intensive approach to help convicted young drug offenders aged below 21. The Tuen Mun Children and Juvenile Home, with 388 places, offers educational, vocational and character training for juvenile offenders and for children and young people with behavioural and family problems.

The SWD and the Correctional Services Department run a Young Offender Assessment Panel jointly, providing the courts with professional views on sentencing options for offenders aged 14 to 25, and a Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Scheme, which helped 883 discharged prisoners rehabilitate and reintegrate into the community during the year. The SWD also funds an NGO to offer hostel and support services to former offenders.

Medical Social Services

Medical social workers are stationed in public hospitals and some specialist clinics to assist patients and their families with welfare needs, helping them recover and reintegrate into society. SWD medical social workers dealt with about 199,890 cases in 2018.

Clinical Psychological Services

During the year, 55 clinical psychologists from the department and NGOs provided 2,866 psychological assessments and 23,014 treatment sessions for 2,601 people.

Social Welfare Financial Assistance

Working Family Allowance Scheme

The Working Family Allowance (WFA) Scheme, administered by the Working Family Allowance Office, aims to relieve the financial burden of low-income working households, especially those with children, to encourage self-reliance and ease inter-generational poverty.

On 1 April, the government rolled out enhancements after a policy review of the Low-income Working Family Allowance (LIFA) Scheme and renamed it the Working Family Allowance Scheme. The enhancements included increasing the allowance and extending it to one-person households, and relaxing the income limits and working hour requirements. During the year, more than 66,500 applications under both schemes were approved out of about 86,000 received, granting allowances totalling around \$895 million to more than 45,900 households and more than 155,800 individuals, covering about 64,800 children and youths.

Social Security

The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme form the mainstay of Hong Kong's social security system, supplemented by three accident compensation schemes: the Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation Scheme, Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Scheme and Emergency Relief Fund. These schemes are administered by 41 social security field units and two centralised offices.

The department's Special Investigation Section prevents and combats fraud and abuse of social security payment, to preserve the integrity of the social security system and ensure the proper use of public funds. It receives reports from the public via the hotline 2332 0101. In 2018, 99 abusers were jailed, bound over, ordered to perform community service, fined, or given warnings.

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance

The non-contributory CSSA scheme renders cash assistance to people in financial hardship to meet their basic needs. It is means-tested and applicants must satisfy a residence requirement. As at end-2018, there were 226,437 CSSA cases involving 323,023 beneficiaries. Total expenditure was about \$22.8 billion in 2018, an increase of 5 per cent over the previous year.

The Portable CSSA Scheme allows elderly people who have obtained CSSA continuously for at least a year to continue receiving it in Guangdong or Fujian province if they retire there.

Employment Assistance

An Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance under the department helps unemployed able-bodied CSSA recipients aged 15 to 59 and single parents and child carers on CSSA with their youngest child aged 12 to 14 to find employment and become self-reliant. Up till end-2018, 96,324 CSSA recipients had taken part in the programme.

Social Security Allowance

The non-contributory SSA Scheme comprises Old Age Allowance (OAA); Disability Allowance (DA), consisting of Normal DA and Higher DA; Old Age Living Allowance (OALA), consisting of Normal OALA and Higher OALA; the Guangdong Scheme and the Fujian Scheme.

The OAA and DA provide non-means-tested cash allowances to elderly people aged 70 or above and people with severe disabilities respectively. The OALA supplements the living expenses of elderly people aged 65 or above who have financial needs. The Guangdong and Fujian schemes provide monthly OAA to elderly people aged 65 or above who choose to live in Guangdong or Fujian respectively. In this connection, the Fujian Scheme and the Higher OALA were launched on 1 April and 1 June respectively. In October, the government announced extending the OALA to both provinces, to be implemented in early 2020 at the earliest.

The scheme recorded 946,406 SSA recipients as at end-2018. Total expenditure was about \$37.2 billion during the year, a 60.4 per cent increase over 2017.

Relief Measure

In June, the government provided two additional months' standard-rate payment to CSSA recipients and two additional months' allowance to recipients of SSA, LIFA/WFA and the Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme. Arising from the implementation of the Caring and Sharing Scheme, CSSA and SSA recipients also received a one-off top-up payment of less than \$4,000, the maximum amount disbursed under the scheme, to make up the difference. Separately, students on CSSA also received a one-off grant of \$2,000.

Accident Compensation

The non-means-tested Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation Scheme offers financial help to those injured, or to their dependants in the case of death, as a result of a crime of violence or by a law enforcement officer using a weapon in the execution of his duty. It paid out \$5.89 million in 2018.

The non-means-tested Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Scheme provides financial assistance to people injured in road traffic accidents or to their dependants in the case of death, regardless of who is responsible for the accident. It paid out \$262.5 million during the year.

Emergency Relief

Meals or cash in lieu of meals and other necessities are given to victims of natural or other disasters. Grants from the Emergency Relief Fund are paid to eligible victims, or in the case of death to their dependants. Emergency relief was given to 1,208 victims of 28 disasters in 2018.

Social Security Appeal Board

The board considers appeals against the department's decisions on CSSA, SSA and Traffic Accident Victims Assistance. It ruled on 333 appeals in 2018.

Funding

Subventions and Service Monitoring

Through the Lump Sum Grant Subvention System, 164 NGOs were receiving recurrent subventions as at end-2018 to provide social welfare services according to government policies. NGOs may also seek grants from the Lotteries Fund to meet their non-recurrent commitments.

The department monitors the output, outcome and service quality of subvented service units through the Service Performance Monitoring System, including reviewing regular self-assessment reports submitted by NGOs and conducting review and surprise visits. The Lump Sum Grant Independent Complaints Handling Committee handles related complaints that cannot be resolved satisfactorily at the NGO level.

From time to time, the government reviews and introduces measures to optimise the grant arrangements. A task force, set up under the SWD in 2017, is looking into enhancing the system. It comprises Legislative Council members; representatives from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and NGO management, staff and service users; Lump Sum Grant-related committees; independent individuals; the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the SWD. The scope of the review was established in June. The review is expected to be completed by mid-2020.

Social Welfare Development Fund

The fund supports all subvented NGOs to carry out training and professional development programmes, business system upgrading projects and service delivery enhancement studies. In 2018, about \$97 million was approved for 74 NGOs to implement such projects.

Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged

The fund promotes cross-sectoral collaboration in social welfare projects by providing grants that match donations made by businesses. A portion of the fund is dedicated to providing matching grants to implement more after-school learning and support programmes for primary and secondary students from grassroots families. In 2018, about \$79 million was allocated for 75 welfare NGOs and schools to implement 111 welfare projects.

Community Investment and Inclusion Fund

The fund finances diversified social capital development projects, promotes trust and reciprocity among the public and various sectors, and builds cross-sectoral collaborative platforms and mutual help networks for a caring Hong Kong. In 2018, it allocated \$68.71 million to 25 new projects. Ongoing projects recorded about 106,000 participants, including about 19,000 volunteers, and about 1,250 collaboration partners. Together, they have built about 170 mutual support networks.

Community Care Fund

The Community Care Fund helps people with financial difficulties, especially those who fall outside the social safety net or who are within the safety net but still have special circumstances that are not covered. As at end-2018, the fund had 26 assistance programmes operating under its auspices, with a commitment of around \$6 billion benefiting about 340,000 cases. These included pilot programmes introduced to help the government identify measures that could be considered for incorporation into its regular assistance and service programmes. Twelve

such programmes have been incorporated into the government's regular assistance programmes since the fund was set up in 2011.

Child Development Fund

This fund provides children from disadvantaged backgrounds with personal development opportunities. Through the fund's projects, operated by either NGOs or schools, participants draw up and implement their own development plans under guidance, learn to accumulate savings and cultivate intangible assets, such as a positive attitude, personal resilience and social networks, thus helping their long-term development. In 2018, there were 81 ongoing NGO-run projects and 44 school-based projects, of which 27 projects operated by NGOs and 10 school-based projects, involving more than 2,700 new participants, were launched in the year.

Advisory Bodies

Social Welfare Advisory Committee

The Social Welfare Advisory Committee reviews social welfare services and advises the government on all matters of social welfare policy. In 2018, the committee offered advice to the government on social welfare initiatives announced in the Policy Address and on suggestions about welfare priorities in 2019-20, made by the social welfare sector and other advisory bodies.

Commission on Children

Established on 1 June, the Commission on Children is a high-level advisory committee that provides an overall steer on children's issues and sets policy directions, strategies and priorities for the early benefit of children. Its vision is to ensure Hong Kong is a place where all children's rights and interests and their well-being are respected and safeguarded, where their voices are heard and where all children enjoy healthy and happy growth and optimal development so as to achieve their fullest potential.

In 2018, the commission discussed a number of priority issues, such as playtime and outdoor play areas for young children, education for children of ethnic minorities, the regularisation and possible enhancement of the Pilot Scheme on On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Service, and a consultancy study on the long-term development of child care services.

Elderly Commission

The Elderly Commission advises the government on policy and services for the elderly. Its recommendations as set out in the Elderly Services Programme Plan are being implemented progressively by the government. In the 2017-18 school year, about 140 elder academies in primary and secondary schools and post-secondary institutions were operating under the Elder Academy Scheme conducted jointly by the commission and the government.

Women's Commission

The Women's Commission aims to enable women in Hong Kong to fully realise their due status, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life through an enabling environment, the empowerment of women and public education. It advises the government on policies and initiatives of concern to women to ensure their perspectives are taken into account when policy bureaux formulate government policies.

The commission's Gender Mainstreaming Checklist is an analytical tool to help the government incorporate gender needs and perspectives systematically into policy formulation and programme development. All bureaus and departments are required to refer to the checklist and apply gender mainstreaming when formulating major policies and initiatives. The government also provides training to civil servants on gender issues.

To promote gender mainstreaming to various sectors, the commission runs a network of focal points that serve as contacts in their organisations to raise awareness of gender issues and encourage the use of the checklist at work. The network covers 74 bureaus and departments, 120 NGOs, the 18 District Councils and 168 listed companies.

The commission's Funding Scheme for Women's Development supports women's groups and NGOs to organise activities.

Rehabilitation Advisory Committee

The Rehabilitation Advisory Committee is the principal advisory body to the government on the well-being of people with disabilities and on rehabilitation policies and services.

The committee helps the government promote and monitor the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It also works with District Councils and the business and welfare sectors to promote the working capabilities of people with disabilities and the employment support services provided by government departments and rehabilitation organisations.

The committee coordinates public education programmes on rehabilitation. In 2018, 57 programmes were organised by the government and NGOs to promote the spirit of the UN convention and cross-sectoral collaboration in building an equal and inclusive society. The committee also promoted World Mental Health Day and International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Steering Committee on Promotion of Volunteer Service

This steering committee promotes sustained volunteering and encourages volunteers to integrate the core values and spirit of voluntary work into their daily lives. By the year end, over 3,280 organisations and more than 1.3 million individuals had registered for voluntary service at the SWD's Volunteer Movement website.

Websites

Child Development Fund: www.cdf.gov.hk
Community Care Fund: www.communitycarefund.hk
Community Investment and Inclusion Fund: www.ciif.gov.hk
Elderly Commission: www.elderlycommission.gov.hk
Labour and Welfare Bureau: www.lwb.gov.hk
Social Welfare Department: www.swd.gov.hk
Volunteer Movement: www.volunteering-hk.org
Women's Commission: www.women.gov.hk
Working Family Allowance Scheme: www.wfa.gov.hk