

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 106 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 2018-19, the department's total recurrent expenditure was \$76.7 billion, of which \$53.9 billion, or 70.2 per cent, went towards financial assistance payments, \$16.7 billion (21.8 per cent) went into recurrent subventions to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), \$2.3 billion (3 per cent) was spent on other payments for welfare services, and the remaining \$3.8 billion (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 3,919 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 7,300 places out of 35,000 available at child care centres were government-subsidised; the department was also funding another 449 Occasional Child Care Service places and 2,286 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.

To improve the quality of child care services, in 2019 the department enhanced manpower ratios for qualified child care workers serving in these centres and increased subsidies for child care centres, making reference to the recommendations of a consultancy study on the long-term development of child care services.

Services for Young People

The department subsidises NGOs to provide young people aged between six and 24, including those at risk, with preventive, developmental, 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 youths at risk 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. Five 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 2019, government-subsidised NGOs provided 926 school social workers for 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), arrested youths and their peers with delinquent behaviour. 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 for Children and Youth

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 is subsidising 608 programmes with government grants totalling \$16.53 million in the 2018-20 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 1.29 million cardholders as at end-2019.

Community Care and Support

Various schemes under the department lend help to about 48,000 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 79 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 Voucher for the Elderly, serving all 18 districts, offers 7,000 vouchers allowing eligible elderly people to choose the services that suit their individual needs.

The department also subvents 211 elderly centres. The Improvement Programme of Elderly Centres, launched in 2012 through the Lotteries Fund, enhances the physical settings and facilities of 237 elderly centres. By the year end, 192 centres had completed the upgrading works and reopened for service with a new look.

Funded by the Community Care Fund, the department is conducting two pilot schemes. The Pilot Scheme on Home Care and Support for Elderly Persons with Mild Impairment 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 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 and implements various measures to enhance their service quality. At the year end, RCHes had about 28,000 subsidised residential care places. During the year, a working group completed reviewing the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance, the Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Ordinance and related codes of practice, and submitted a report with 19 recommendations to the Labour and Welfare Bureau to consider.

The Pilot Scheme on Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly 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.

Multidisciplinary Outreach Support

In February, the department rolled out a four-year Pilot Scheme on Multidisciplinary Outreaching Support Teams for the Elderly. Comprising social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech therapists, the teams provide outreach support services to address the social and rehabilitation needs of about 45,000 residents of private RCHes.

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.

Dementia Community Support

The Dementia Community Support Scheme is implemented jointly by the Food and Health Bureau, the SWD and the Hospital Authority to provide support to more than 2,000 elderly people with mild or moderate dementia and their carers each year based on a medical-social collaboration model. It was regularised in February and expanded in May to include all 41 district elderly community centres and seven Hospital Authority clusters.

Services for People with Disabilities

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

Children with Special Needs

At the year end, the SWD was providing 1,980 integrated programme places in kindergarten-child care centres; 2,020 places in special child care centres, including 122 residential places; 3,708 places in early education and training centres; and 7,074 places for on-site pre-school rehabilitation services for children with special needs. Small group homes for mildly mentally handicapped children and integrated small group homes provided 128 places for mildly mentally handicapped children not receiving adequate care from their families.

Children with special needs on the waiting list of SWD-subsented pre-school rehabilitation services may apply for a subsidy under a Training Subsidy Programme to acquire self-financing training provided by NGOs. The programme provided 2,947 training places in 2019.

Day Training and Vocational Rehabilitation

In 2019, day activity centres had 5,646 day training places for people with intellectual disabilities. The department also provided 1,633 supported employment places for people with disabilities to work in open settings under assistance, 432 places in 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 a Sunnyway – On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities. For people with disabilities not yet ready for open employment, the department provided 5,399 places in sheltered workshops and 5,288 places in integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres. Integrated vocational training centres had another 453 places.

As at the year end, an Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project had allocated more than \$127 million to 36 NGOs to set up 124 small businesses providing 897 job opportunities for people with disabilities. A Marketing Consultancy Office (Rehabilitation) helps NGOs set up such small businesses and manages the brand 'Let Them Shine' to promote products and services provided by people with disabilities.

A Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities offers employers a one-off subsidy of up to \$20,000 to buy assistive devices for each employee with disabilities and modify the workplace so as to facilitate the employment and improve the work efficiency of people with disabilities. The programme also subsidises up to \$40,000 for the purchase of one single assistive device costing more than \$20,000 and its essential accessories.

Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities

The department regulates Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities (RCHDs) under the Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Ordinance and implements measures to enhance their service quality. In 2019, it provided 13,388 subvented residential service places to people with disabilities who were unable to live independently in the community, or whose families could not offer them adequate care. Another 860 residential places were provided under the Bought Place Scheme (BPS) for private RCHDs. The department also provided 828 places at care-and-attention homes for the aged blind, as well as 1,534 halfway house places and 1,587 long-stay care home places for ex-mentally ill people.

Community Support

The department offers community support to people with disabilities living in the community, including ex-mentally ill people, and their families and carers. There are district support centres for people with disabilities, 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 for people with severe disabilities, integrated support for people with severe physical disabilities, day care for people with severe 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. A special needs trust office set up in December 2018 provides reliable and affordable trust services to parents of children with special needs.

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 3,189 offenders through the probation service and arranged for 2,323 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. 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 764 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 stationed in public hospitals and some specialist clinics provide support to patients and their families with welfare needs, to facilitate their recovery and reintegration into society. SWD medical social workers dealt with about 204,450 cases in 2019.

Clinical Psychological Services

During the year, 56 clinical psychologists from the department and NGOs provided 2,942 psychological assessments and 22,442 treatment sessions for 2,827 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.

During the year, over 78,600 applications were approved out of more than 102,100 received, granting allowances exceeding \$1,039 million to over 52,400 households and about 176,100 individuals, covering more than 72,300 children and youths. Pursuant to improvement measures introduced under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, all WFA payment rates will be increased as announced in the 2019 Policy Address.

Social Security

The 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 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. During the year, 77 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-2019, there were 220,175 CSSA cases involving 311,339 beneficiaries. Total expenditure in 2019 was about \$21.8 billion, a decrease of 5 per cent over the previous year.

In the 2019 Policy Address, a host of pro-employment and related measures were announced to improve the CSSA Scheme, such as raising the ceiling for disregarded earnings and increasing the rent allowance.

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.

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 eligible elderly people who choose to live in Guangdong or Fujian respectively. Starting from 1 January 2020, eligible elderly people may also receive the OALA while living in the two provinces.

The SSA Scheme recorded 1,000,517 recipients as at end-2019. Total expenditure was about \$34 billion during the year, a 9 per cent decrease over 2018.

Relief Measures

In accordance with the 2019-20 Budget, the government provided one additional month's standard-rate payment to CSSA recipients and one additional month's allowance to recipients of SSA, WFA and the Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme (I-Wits). Separately, students on CSSA received a one-off grant of \$2,500.

On 15 August, the Financial Secretary also announced a series of measures to support enterprises, safeguard jobs and relieve people's burden. The measures included granting one additional month's standard-rate payment to CSSA recipients and one additional month's allowance to recipients of SSA, WFA and I-Wits.

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 \$5.77 million in 2019.

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 \$289.5 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 51 victims of six disasters in 2019.

Social Security Appeal Board

The board considers appeals against the department's decisions on CSSA, SSA and Traffic Accident Victims Assistance. It ruled on 353 appeals in 2019.

Funding

Subventions and Service Monitoring

Through the Lump Sum Grant (LSG) Subvention System, 164 NGOs were receiving recurrent subventions as at end-2019 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 by reviewing the NGOs' regular self-assessment reports and conducting review and surprise

visits. The Lump Sum Grant Independent Complaints Handling Committee handles LSG-related complaints that cannot be resolved satisfactorily at the NGO level.

From time to time, the government reviews and introduces measures to optimise the LSG grant arrangements. A task force set up under the SWD 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; LSG-related committees; independent individuals; the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the SWD. The review is expected to be completed by 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. By end-2019, grants totalling about \$950 million had been approved for 161 NGOs.

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 2019, about \$62 million was allocated for 101 welfare NGOs and schools to implement 135 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 to achieve a caring Hong Kong. In 2019, it allocated \$141.8 million to 44 new projects. Ongoing projects recorded about 103,000 participants, including about 18,500 volunteers, and about 1,480 collaboration partners. Together, they have built about 190 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-2019, the fund had 25 assistance programmes operating under its auspices, with a commitment of around \$6.8 billion benefiting about 430,000 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. Thirteen 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 2019, there were 54 ongoing NGO-run projects and 48 school-based projects, of which 21 projects involving more than 1,400 new participants were launched.

Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care

The \$1 billion fund, launched by the department in December 2018, subsidises elderly and rehabilitation service units to try out, procure or rent technology products, so as to improve the quality of life of service users and reduce the burden on care staff and carers. In 2019, grants totalling some \$37 million were approved for more than 210 service units to procure or rent over 870 technology products.

Arts Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities

In March, the department launched this fund to subsidise eligible organisations in organising arts activities and training programmes that would enhance the arts knowledge of people with disabilities, foster their interest in the arts, develop their potential and help those with good potential strive for excellence and develop personal careers. Grants totalling some \$25 million were approved among the first batch of applications for 21 organisations to implement 30 arts projects.

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 2019, the committee advised the government on social welfare initiatives announced in the Policy Address and on suggestions about 2020-21 welfare priorities offered by the social welfare sector and other advisory bodies.

Commission on Children

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. In 2019, the commission agreed to implement a series of important tasks, including the commissioning of a consultancy study about developing a central databank on children, the establishment of a Funding Scheme for Children's Well-being and Development, and the formulation of publicity strategies and promotional plans.

Elderly Commission

The Elderly Commission advises the government on policy and services for the elderly. Its recommendations, set out in the Elderly Services Programme Plan, are being implemented by the government. In the 2018-19 school year, about 160 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 bureaus formulate government policies.

The commission's Gender Mainstreaming Checklist is an analytical tool to help the government incorporate the perspectives and needs of both genders 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, the commission seeks to raise awareness and understanding of gender issues among people from various sectors through Gender Focal Point networks, so as to enhance gender sensitivity in their daily work. The Labour and Welfare Bureau and the commission organised a roving exhibition from February to July to introduce gender mainstreaming and its promotion work.

Rehabilitation Advisory Committee

The Rehabilitation Advisory Committee is the principal advisory body to the government on the well-being of people with disabilities and 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 in Hong Kong. It also collaborates with District Councils and the business and welfare sectors to promote understanding of the work abilities of people with disabilities as well as the employment support provided by government departments and rehabilitation organisations.

The committee coordinates public education programmes on rehabilitation. During the year, 34 programmes were organised by the government and NGOs to promote the spirit of the 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 3,880 organisations and more than 1.33 million individuals had registered under the department's Volunteer Movement.

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