

Chapter 11

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 107 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 2019-20, the SWD's total recurrent expenditure was \$78.4 billion, of which \$51.9 billion, or 66.2 per cent, went towards financial assistance payments, \$19.4 billion (24.7 per cent) went into recurrent subventions to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), \$2.9 billion (3.7 per cent) was spent on other payments for welfare services, and the remaining \$4.2 billion (5.4 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 needs.

Services for families in need are provided at three levels. At the primary level, the SWD tries to prevent family problems through early identification, public education, publicity and empowerment. A departmental hotline 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 provide specialised services for cases of domestic violence and child custody and guardianship disputes.

Services for Children

Residential child care services are available for children and young people who are in need of out-of-home care owing to family, behavioural or emotional problems, with 3,928 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.

Day child care services support parents who cannot take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons. The SWD subsidises some stand-alone child care centres and child care centres attached to kindergartens to provide full-day child care. At year end, about 7,800 places out of 35,000 available at child care centres were government-subsidised. The SWD was also funding another 449 Occasional Child Care Service places and 2,286 Extended Hours Service places at these centres. The department also subsidises the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, providing around 954 places for needy families to receive flexible day child care services from volunteers.

In 2020, the SWD formulated a population-based planning ratio for the provision of child care centre places and included this in the Hong Kong Planning Standards and Guidelines as a long-term goal to provide 100 subsidised child care centre places for children aged under three for every 25,000 population.

Services for Young People

The SWD 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, which provide centre-based, outreach and school social work services to address young people's developmental needs. Eighteen of these centres offer outreach services at night to help those who loiter at neighbourhood black spots get back on the right track, while 19 youth outreach teams serve youths at risk and deal with juvenile gang issues. 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 2020, 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 the 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 SWD 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 SWD provides 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.

Services for the Elderly

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

The SWD's Opportunities for the Elderly Project encourages elderly people to take part 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 1.3 million cardholders as at end-2020.

Community Care and Support

The community care and support services subsidised by the SWD help about 50,000 needy elderly persons. The department subsidises 92 home care service teams and 88 day care centres/units for the elderly to support elderly persons living at home. Separately, at 31 December there were 227 recognised providers of home and day care services under the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly.

Residential Care

There are around 72,000 residential care places in Hong Kong, of which around 31,000 are subsidised by the government, including around 2,000 occupied by Residential Care Service Voucher users. Recommendations by the SWD's Working Group on the Review of Ordinances and Codes of Practice for Residential Care Homes in May 2019 led the SWD in January 2020 to amend the Codes of Practice for Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) and for Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities). The government is now preparing to amend the Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance and the Residential Care Homes (Persons with Disabilities) Ordinance.

Services for Persons with Disabilities

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

Pre-school Children with Special Needs

At the year end, the SWD was providing 1,980 integrated programme places in kindergarten-cum-child care centres; 2,170 places in special child care centres (including 122 residential places); 3,771 places in early education and training centres; and 8,074 places for on-site pre-school rehabilitation services for children with special needs. Small group homes and integrated small group homes provided 128 places for children with mild intellectual disabilities not receiving adequate care from their families.

Children with special needs on the waiting list of SWD-subvented pre-school rehabilitation services may apply under a Training Subsidy Programme for subsidised training provided by NGOs. The programme provided about 3,000 training places in 2020.

In the 2020-21 school year, the SWD launched the Pilot Project on Tier 1 Support Services in Kindergartens/Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres. Six project teams provide training for children awaiting assessments by the Department of Health's Child Assessment Centres and for children assessed as having only mild developmental problems who are studying at about 80 kindergartens covered by the project. The teams also provide consultation services to the children's teachers and parents.

Day Training and Vocational Rehabilitation

In 2020, day activity centres had 5,808 day training places for persons with intellectual disabilities. The SWD also provided 1,633 supported employment places for persons with disabilities to work in open settings under assistance, 432 places in the 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. For those not yet ready for open employment, the SWD provided 5,399 places in sheltered workshops and 5,523 places in integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres. Integrated vocational training centres had another 453 places.

As at 31 December, the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project had allocated more than \$134 million to 35 NGOs for setting up 128 small businesses, providing 919 job opportunities for persons 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 persons with disabilities.

A Support Programme for Employees with Disabilities provides employers with up to \$40,000 per employee with disabilities to buy assistive devices and to modify the workplace for these employees.

Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities

In 2020, the SWD provided 13,920 subvented residential places to persons with disabilities who were unable to live independently in the community, or whose families could not offer them adequate care. Another 1,018 residential places were provided under the Bought Place Scheme for private residential care homes for persons with disabilities.

Community Support

The SWD supports persons with disabilities living in the community, including persons in mental health recovery, and their families and carers. There are district support centres for persons with disabilities, day and residential respite services for persons with disabilities, occasional child care for pre-schoolers with disabilities, parents/relatives resource centres, home care services for persons with severe disabilities, integrated support services for persons with severe physical disabilities, day care service for persons 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 persons with autism, social and recreational centres for the disabled, and rehabilitation services for people with visceral disabilities or chronic illnesses. A special needs trust office provides reliable and affordable trust services to parents with sufficient assets to meet the long-term daily needs of their children with special needs.

Persons with Disabilities and Rehabilitation Programme Plan

In July, the government released the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee's Persons with Disabilities and Rehabilitation Programme Plan. It sets out the strategic directions and recommendations to address the service needs of persons with disabilities. The government accepts in principle the plan's strategic directions and will implement the recommendations.

Services for Offenders

The SWD 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.

In 2020, the SWD helped 2,845 offenders through the probation service and arranged for 2,071 offenders placed on community service orders to perform unpaid community work under supervision.

The Enhanced Probation Service 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 796 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 193,180 cases in 2020.

Clinical Psychological Services

During the year, 56 clinical psychologists from the SWD and NGOs provided 2,338 psychological assessments and 19,046 treatment sessions for 2,717 people, while eight clinical psychologists of the Central Psychological Support Service (Pre-school Service) made 691 consultation visits to pre-school rehabilitation centres and six clinical psychologists of the Central Psychological Support Service (Adult) made 423 consultation visits to adult rehabilitation centres.

Social Welfare Financial Assistance

Working Family Allowance Scheme

The Working Family Allowance Scheme aims to relieve the financial burden of low-income working households, especially those with children, to encourage self-reliance and ease inter-generational poverty. In 2020, about 96,500 out of about 130,800 applications were approved, granting allowances exceeding \$1.28 billion to over 65,400 households (or over 217,600 individuals), and covering about 86,900 children and youths. Payment rates under the scheme were increased from July.

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 42 social security field units and two centralised offices.

The SWD prevents and combats fraud and abuse of social security payment to preserve the system's integrity and ensure the proper use of public funds. The department receives reports from the public via its hotline. In 2020, 49 abusers were jailed, bound over, ordered to perform community service, fined or given warnings.

Comprehensive Social Security Assistance

The non-contributory CSSA Scheme gives 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 31 December, there were 224,895 CSSA cases involving 319,200 beneficiaries. Total expenditure in 2020 was about \$23.4 billion, an increase of 8 per cent from the previous year.

In 2020, the government improved the CSSA Scheme by enhancing its employment support services, increasing the maximum rent allowance and extending the community living

supplement. To help those unemployed and their families facing financial difficulties because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government temporarily doubled the asset limits under the CSSA Scheme for able-bodied persons for one year from 1 June.

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. From 1 January, eligible elderly people may also receive the OALA while living in the two provinces.

The SSA Scheme recorded 1,036,221 recipients as at 31 December. Total expenditure was about \$39.8 billion in 2020, a 17 per cent increase from 2019.

Relief Measures

In accordance with the 2020-21 Budget, the government provided one additional month's standard-rate payment to CSSA recipients and one additional month's allowance to recipients of SSA and the Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme.

To support low-income households during the COVID-19 pandemic, a special allowance was given under the Anti-epidemic Fund to eligible recipients of Working Family Allowance and student financial assistance, benefitting about 200,000 households, involving \$900 million.

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 \$7.67 million in 2020.

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 \$374.1 million in 2020.

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 86 victims of eight disasters in 2020.

Social Security Appeal Board

The board considers appeals against the SWD's decisions on CSSA, SSA and Traffic Accident Victims Assistance. It ruled on 128 appeals in 2020.

Funding

Subventions and Service Monitoring

The Lump Sum Grant (LSG) Subvention System provided recurrent subventions to 164 NGOs as at end-2020 to provide social welfare services. NGOs may also seek grants from the Lotteries Fund to meet their non-recurrent commitments.

The SWD 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.

An SWD task force is looking into optimising the LSG system. It comprises Legislative Council members; representatives from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and NGO management, staff and service users; members of LSG-related committees; independent individuals; and representatives from the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the SWD.

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-2020, grants totalling about \$1 billion 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 2020, about \$77 million was allocated for 120 welfare NGOs and schools to implement 140 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 2020, it allocated about \$83.13 million to 25 new projects. Ongoing projects recorded about 96,800 participants, including about 16,900 volunteers, and about 1,520 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-2020, the fund had 31 assistance programmes operating under

its auspices, with a commitment of around \$15.5 billion benefiting about 720,000 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. Fifteen 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 2020, there were 81 ongoing NGO-run projects and 41 school-based projects, of which 33 projects involving more than 3,100 new participants were launched.

Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care

This \$1 billion fund subsidises eligible elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure or rent and try out technology products to improve users' quality of life and reduce the burden and pressure on care staff and carers. By the end of 2020, grants totalling over \$200 million had been approved for about 970 elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure and rent over 4,200 technology products.

Arts Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities

This fund subsidises eligible organisations to organise arts activities and training programmes to enhance the arts knowledge of persons with disabilities, foster their interest in the arts and develop their potential. By the end of 2020, grants totalling some \$36 million had been approved for 36 organisations to implement 59 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 2020, the committee advised the government on social welfare initiatives announced in the Policy Address and on suggestions about 2021-22 welfare priorities offered by the social welfare sector and other advisory bodies.

Commission on Children

The Commission on Children provides an overall steer on children's issues and sets policy directions, strategies and priorities for the benefit of children. In 2020, a consultancy study began on the feasibility of developing a central databank on children in Hong Kong, and a series of safety messages on avoidable child deaths was launched through various media. In 2020-21, 28 projects were approved under the commission's Funding Scheme for Children's Well-being and Development.

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 2019-20 school year, about 180 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 advises the government on policies and initiatives of concern to women. As at the end of 2020, the government had applied the commission's Gender Mainstreaming Checklist to around 1,000 major policies and programme areas to assess gender implications. The commission's Capacity Building Mileage Programme is a learning programme focusing on women. It had over 3,400 enrolments in 2019-20. In 2020-21, 65 projects were approved under the commission's Funding Scheme for Women's Development.

Rehabilitation Advisory Committee

The Rehabilitation Advisory Committee is the principal government advisory body on the well-being of persons 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 different sectors in promoting an inclusive culture.

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 31 December, over 4,000 organisations and more than 1.35 million individuals had registered under the SWD's Volunteer Movement.

Websites

Child Development Fund: www.cdf.gov.hk
Commission on Children: www.coc.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