

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 137 per cent in the past decade.

The Labour and Welfare Bureau formulates social welfare policies and oversees their implementation by the Social Welfare Department 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 2020-21, the department's total recurrent expenditure was \$85.5 billion, of which \$56.5 billion, or 66.1 per cent, went towards financial assistance payments, \$20.8 billion (24.3 per cent) went into recurrent subventions to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), \$4 billion (4.7 per cent) was spent on other payments for welfare services, and the remaining \$4.2 billion (4.9 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 prevention of family problems is promoted 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 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 abuse, as well as child custody and guardianship disputes.

Services for Children

At year end, the department provided 3,928 places in residential child care services for children and young people in need of out-of-home care owing to family, behavioural or emotional problems. It also works with three NGOs accredited under the Adoption Ordinance to arrange local or intercountry adoption for children whose parents have abandoned or are unable to maintain them.

The department provides day child care services for parents who cannot take care of their children temporarily, and subsidises some standalone child care centres and child care centres attached to kindergartens to provide full-day child care. At year end, about 8,700 places out of 37,000 available at child care centres were government-subsidised. The department also funded another 452 occasional child care service places and 2,309 extended hours service places at these centres. In addition, it subsidises the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project, providing 954 places for families to receive flexible day child care services from volunteers. During the year, the department re-engineered four mutual help child care centres to provide after-school care service for pre-primary children.

Services for Young People

The department subsidises NGOs to provide people aged between six and 24 with preventive, developmental, supportive and remedial services.

These NGOs operate facilities, including 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 those who loiter at neighbourhood black spots to prevent them from going astray, 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 2021, a total of 926 school social workers were provided for 463 secondary schools to help students with academic, social and emotional problems.

The department also established the Fee-waiving Subsidy Scheme enabling primary school students from low-income families to have after-school care.

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 by the department and the police, helps juveniles who have been cautioned under the PSDS for a 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 provides financial assistance via the 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 care and support services to help them continue living in their homes. The department provides subsidised residential care services for those who have long-term needs but cannot receive adequate care at home.

The department's Opportunities for the Elderly Project encourages active ageing. It subsidises 494 programmes with government grants totalling around \$18 million in the 2020-22 phase.

Senior Citizen Cards allow holders to enjoy concessions, discounts and priority service provided by public and private organisations and government departments. There were about 1.4 million cardholders as at end-2021.

Community Care and Support

The community care and support services subsidised by the department help about 58,000 elderly people. The department subsidises 92 home care services teams and 91 day care centres/units for the elderly to support elderly people living in the community. In addition, as at the year end, there were 232 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 74,700 residential care places in Hong Kong, of which around 32,400 are subsidised by the government, including around 2,200 occupied by Residential Care Service Voucher users. The department's Working Group on the Review of Ordinances and Codes of Practice for Residential Care Homes completed a review in 2019 and put forward 19 recommendations, of which 14 require legislative amendments. The government is preparing the amendment bill and will introduce it into the Legislative Council in 2022.

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 department was providing 1,980 integrated programme places in kindergarten-cum-child care centres; 2,182 places in special child care centres, including 122 residential places; 3,984 places in early education and training centres; and 9,074 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 children with mild intellectual disabilities not receiving adequate care from their families.

Children with special needs on the waiting list of department-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 2021.

In the 2020-21 school year, the department launched a pilot project providing support services at kindergartens and kindergarten-cum-child care centres. Six project teams provide training to children awaiting assessment by the Department of Health's Child Assessment Centres and children assessed as having borderline 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 2021, day activity centres provided 5,808 day training places for persons with intellectual disabilities. The department 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 department 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 the year end, the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project had allocated more than \$154 million to 36 NGOs for setting up 136 small businesses, providing 956 job opportunities for persons with disabilities. A Marketing Consultancy Office (Rehabilitation) helps NGOs set up such businesses and manages the brand 'Let Them Shine' to promote products and services provided by persons with disabilities.

The 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 2021, the department provided 13,940 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 1,264 residential places were provided under the Bought Place Scheme for private residential care homes for persons with disabilities.

Community Support

The department supports persons with disabilities living in the community, including persons in mental 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

The Rehabilitation Advisory Committee's Persons with Disabilities and Rehabilitation Programme Plan, released in 2020, sets out 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 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.

In 2021, the department helped 2,976 offenders through the probation service and arranged for 3,069 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 Social Welfare Department and the Correctional Services Department jointly run the Young Offender Assessment Panel, providing the courts with professional views on sentencing options for offenders aged 14 to 25, and the Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Scheme, which helped 740 discharged prisoners rehabilitate and reintegrate into the community during 2021. The Social Welfare Department 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. The department's medical social workers dealt with about 210,490 cases in 2021.

Clinical Psychological Services

During the year, 56 clinical psychologists from the department and NGOs provided 3,219 psychological assessments and 21,423 treatment sessions for 2,680 people, while eight clinical psychologists of the Central Psychological Support Service (Pre-school Service) made 891 consultation visits to pre-school rehabilitation centres and six clinical psychologists of the Central Psychological Support Service (Adult) made 801.5 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 2021, about 109,300 out of about 134,800 applications were approved, granting allowances exceeding \$1.81 billion to over 68,700 households or over 227,300 individuals, and covering about 89,600 children and youths. In light of the pandemic, the government reduced the scheme's working hour requirements for non-single-parent households from June 2021 to May 2022.

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 department prevents and combats fraud and abuse of social security to preserve the system's integrity and ensure the proper use of public funds. It receives reports from the public via a hotline. In 2021, 38 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 end-2021, there were 216,933 CSSA cases involving 306,377 beneficiaries. Total expenditure in 2021 was about \$23 billion, a decrease of 2 per cent from the previous year.

In 2021, the government raised the maximum levels of disregarded earnings substantially and extended a range of special grants to eligible non-elderly able-bodied recipients. To help the unemployed and their families cope with financial difficulties because of the pandemic, the

government doubled the asset limits under the scheme for able-bodied persons from June 2020 to May 2021, and also implemented another arrangement from April to September 2021, under which the cash value of insurance policies of able-bodied applicants was disregarded as an asset for a grace period of one 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 reside there.

Social Security Allowance

The non-contributory SSA Scheme comprises Old Age Allowance (OAA); Disability Allowance (DA), consisting of Normal and Higher DA; Old Age Living Allowance (OALA), consisting of Normal and Higher OALA; and 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 and OALA to eligible elderly people who choose to live in Guangdong or Fujian respectively.

The SSA Scheme recorded 1,124,760 recipients as at end-2021. Total expenditure was about \$39 billion during the year, a 2 per cent decrease from 2020.

Relief Measures

In accordance with the 2021-22 Budget, the government provided an additional half-month payment of the standard rate to eligible CSSA recipients and an additional half-month of allowance to eligible recipients of SSA, Working Family Allowance and the Individual-based Work Incentive Transport Subsidy.

Short-term Food Assistance Service

The government regularised the Short-term Food Assistance Service in August to provide low-income persons who have temporary difficulties in meeting their basic food expenditure with short-term and basic food items for generally not more than eight weeks each time. The service is expected to benefit about 60,000 to 80,000 users a year. In addition, from June, the government relaxed the asset limits of the service for 12 months by pitching them to those of the Working Family Allowance Scheme to support individuals and families temporarily affected by the pandemic.

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 \$8.39 million in 2021.

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 \$437 million in 2021.

Emergency Relief

Food or a cash grant in lieu of food 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 162 victims of nine disasters in 2021.

Social Security Appeal Board

The board considers appeals against the department's decisions on CSSA, SSA and Traffic Accident Victims Assistance. It ruled on 315 appeals in 2021.

Funding

Subventions and Service Monitoring

The Lump Sum Grant Subvention System provided recurrent subventions to 165 NGOs as at end-2021 to provide social welfare services. 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 visits. The Lump Sum Grant Independent Complaints Handling Committee handles grant-related complaints that cannot be resolved satisfactorily at the NGO level.

A task force appointed by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare completed its review on enhancing the grant subvention system and released its review report in July, setting out 30 recommendations.

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-2021, 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 2021, about \$47 million was allocated for 65 welfare NGOs and schools to implement 76 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 2021, it allocated \$126.59 million to 38 new projects. Ongoing projects recorded about 116,100 participants, including about 21,900 volunteers, and about 2,290 collaboration partners. Together, they have built about 200 mutual support networks.

Community Care Fund

The Community Care Fund helps people with financial difficulties, especially those who either fall outside the social safety net or have special needs that are not covered by it. As at end-2021, 59 assistance programmes were launched under the fund, with a commitment of around \$22.1 billion benefiting over 2,750,000 cases. These included pilot programmes to help the government identify measures that could be considered for incorporation into its regular assistance and service programmes. Twenty such programmes have been incorporated into the government's regular assistance programmes since the fund was set up in 2011.

Child Development Fund

The Child Development Fund provides children from disadvantaged backgrounds with personal development opportunities. Through the fund's projects, participating children 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 2021, there were 54 ongoing NGO-run projects and 57 school-based projects, of which 17 projects involving more than 900 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 the quality of life of service users, and reduce the burden and pressure on care staff and carers. By end-2021, grants totalling over \$380 million had been approved for about 1,300 elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure and rent over 9,600 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 end-2021, grants totalling some \$41 million had been approved for 37 organisations to implement 68 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 2021, the committee advised the government on social welfare initiatives announced in the Policy Address and on suggestions about 2022-23 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 2021, the commission conducted quarterly engagement sessions to canvass the views of stakeholders and children on the themes of specific needs, welfare/children protection, children's health and education

with around 230 participants. In 2021-22, 29 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 2020-21 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 end-2021, the government had applied the commission's Gender Mainstreaming Checklist to around 1,200 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 4,100 enrolments in 2020-21. In 2021-22, 50 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.

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
Women's Commission: www.women.gov.hk
Working Family Allowance Scheme: www.wfa.gov.hk