

## Chapter 19

# Health

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Hong Kong's healthcare system provides comprehensive healthcare services to the community, including a highly subsidised public healthcare safety net that aims to ensure no one is denied medical care due to lack of means. The government strives to develop Hong Kong into an international health and medical innovation hub.

The Health Bureau is committed to promoting and protecting public health in Hong Kong, upholding the quality and efficiency of the healthcare system, enhancing the health of all citizens, and ensuring access to medical services is not denied due to lack of means.

The Department of Health is the government’s health adviser and public health authority to execute policies and statutory functions. It safeguards the community’s health through regulatory functions, and promotional, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services.

The Hospital Authority manages public hospitals and related healthcare service units. It offers public healthcare and rehabilitation services through hospitals, specialist clinics, general outpatient clinics and outreach service units.

Figures at a Glance

Infant mortality rate	2023	1.6 per 1,000 registered live births	
Maternal mortality ratio	2023	3.0 per 100,000 registered live births	
Life expectancy at birth	2024	82.8* (Male)	88.4* (Female)
	2046 ( <i>projected</i> )	86.4 (Male)	91.8 (Female)

\* Provisional figures

Hong Kong has an excellent healthcare system supported by a highly professional team of workers. The infant mortality rate in 2023 was among the lowest in the world.

The government’s recurrent funding for health has risen by about 33 per cent over the past five years, from \$82.1 billion in 2019-20 to \$109.5 billion in 2024-25. It accounted for 19 per cent of the government’s recurrent expenditure in 2024-25.

Hong Kong’s Domestic Health Accounts<sup>1</sup> show that, excluding identified Covid-19 expenditure, total and current health expenditure respectively increased from 6.1 to 8.4 per cent and 5.8 to 8 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 2012-13 to 2022-23. Over the same period, total and current public health expenditure respectively rose from 50 to 54 per cent (\$130.1 billion or 4.6 per cent of the GDP) and from 49 per cent to 52 per cent (\$117.7 billion or 4.1 per cent of the GDP) of the total and current health expenditure.

Treatment-oriented secondary and tertiary health care, especially public hospital services, account for the majority of healthcare services and spending. In 2022-23, the current health expenditure, excluding identified Covid-19 expenditure, was roughly 30 per cent on primary health care (\$62.3 billion) and 70 per cent on secondary and tertiary health care (\$164 billion). Owing to heavily subsidised public hospital services, 88 per cent of public health expenditure was spent on secondary and tertiary health care (\$103.1 billion) and 12 per cent on primary health care (\$14.6 billion).

<sup>1</sup> A series of accounts compiled over the years in accordance with the International Classification for Health Accounts Framework developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development to keep track of Hong Kong’s health spending and to allow for international comparison.

## **Healthcare Reform**

The government is undertaking reform initiatives to enhance the quality and long-term sustainability of the healthcare system. To enhance people's health, improve healthcare, and capitalise on the health sector's strengths, the government will reform the functions and division of work among the Hospital Authority, the Department of Health and the Primary Healthcare Commission. In parallel, the government will enhance private healthcare services in terms of quality, cost-effectiveness and price transparency.

To uphold the city's global standing and regional advantage in healthcare, the government supports personnel training and technology innovation, aiming to develop Hong Kong into an international health and medical innovation hub, an advanced medical service centre in Asia, a place where medical professionals cluster and a bridge for East-and-West healthcare exchanges.

### **Primary Healthcare Reform**

The government officially established the Primary Healthcare Commission on 15 July to oversee the strategic planning and provision, standard setting and quality assurance of primary healthcare services and the training of primary healthcare professionals.

### **Manpower Planning and Professional Development**

To meet long-term manpower demand and foster professional development, the government is increasing the number of local subsidised healthcare training places and attracting more qualified non-locally trained healthcare professionals.

### **Developing International Health and Medical Innovation Hub**

To develop Hong Kong into an international health and medical innovation hub and support the development of clinical trials in the city, the government is enhancing the drug and medical device regulatory regime, with the long-term objective of establishing an internationally recognised authority that registers medical products under the primary evaluation approach which directly approves applications for registration of medical products based on clinical trial data.

### **Public Healthcare Services Reform**

To provide better public healthcare, the government studies the effectiveness of the service, the governance and structure of the Hospital Authority, and reviews the relevant structure and levels of fees and charges.

The Governance and Structure Reform Committee, set up in December, will implement governance and structure reforms of the Hospital Authority to enhance the overall quality and safety of public healthcare services, ensuring sustainability and public confidence in the healthcare system.

To make best use of the Hospital Authority's resources, the government and authority are examining the authority's structure and fees and charges to encourage prudent use of services while increasing support to patients with financial difficulties, as well as strengthening the financial sustainability of targeted subsidisation.

## Primary Health Care

Primary health care is the first step in the healthcare process. It includes health promotion and disease prevention, general outpatient and allied health services, and special services for people in specific age groups who do not need immediate hospital attention.

General outpatient and allied health services are provided mainly by the private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In 2023-24, private Western clinics handled about 26 million outpatient visits. NGOs operate community clinics, and many also organise health promotion and educational activities. Some NGOs provide health assessments for the elderly and medical check-ups for women.

The public sector provides primary health care mainly through the Department of Health and Hospital Authority. The authority operates 74 general outpatient clinics, including community health centres, used mainly by the elderly, low-income families and chronic disease patients. In 2024, about 1.83 million patients used these services, with 6.64 million attendances recorded.

### *District Health Centres*

District Health Centres (DHCs) and DHC Expresses (collectively referred to as DHCs) operated by NGOs with government funding have been set up across all 18 districts to enhance district-based primary healthcare services. DHCs serve as healthcare resource hubs that connect public and private primary healthcare service providers from different sectors and disciplines in the community. DHCs provide services such as promoting lifelong healthy habits, health risk assessments, disease screening, chronic disease management and community rehabilitation services. As at end-2024, nearly 350,000 citizens have become members of DHCs.

### *Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme*

The Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme enables Hong Kong residents aged 45 or above with no known medical history of diabetes mellitus or hypertension to receive government-subsidised screening for these two diseases and subsequent medical follow-up. As at end-2024, around 93,000 citizens have participated in the scheme. Among them, over 53,100 participants have completed screening, and around 21,000 participants were diagnosed with prediabetes, diabetes mellitus or hypertension.

An expansion of the scheme is planned in 2025 to cover blood lipid testing, allowing for a more comprehensive approach to the assessment and proper management of cardiovascular disease risk factors, including the ‘three highs’ – blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol.

## Family Health

There are 28 maternal and child health centres and three woman’s health centres under the Department of Health that provide immunisation, parenting, health and developmental surveillance, and breastfeeding support for children from birth to five years of age and women aged 64 or below. Antenatal, postnatal, family planning and cervical screening services as well as health education are also offered for women. Around 14,000 expectant mothers and 33,000 newborn babies attended such centres in 2024.

### **Student Health**

There are 13 student health service centres that provide health screening and individual counselling to primary and secondary students. Services include physical examinations; screenings for health problems related to growth, nutrition, vision, hearing, scoliosis, psychosocial health and behaviour; individual counselling; health education and vaccination. In the 2023-24 school year, about 257,000 primary students and 173,000 secondary students attended the services.

Eight school dental clinics provide preventive dental services, including annual check-ups and basic care. In 2023-24, about 313,700, or 98 per cent, of all primary students participated in such services. For special schools, students with disabilities can use these services until age 18.

### **Elderly Health**

Eighteen Elderly Health Centres provide primary health care to members aged 65 and above, including assessment, treatment, education and counselling, and 18 Visiting Health Teams conduct health promotion activities for the elderly and provide training to carers. In 2024, there were about 32,000 enrolments and 125,000 attendances for health assessment and medical consultation, as well as some 353,000 attendances at promotional activities organised by the Elderly Health Service.

### **Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme**

The Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme provides subsidies to the elderly to receive private primary care in the community that best suits their needs. Each eligible elderly person is currently provided with an annual voucher of \$2,000, with a maximum accumulation limit of \$8,000. The government launched the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme in 2024 to extend the service points to cover seven medical/dental institutions in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), offering eligible elderly persons more convenience and flexibility. By end-December, over 1.7 million eligible elderly persons had used the vouchers, accounting for about 100 per cent of the eligible population.

### **Community Outreach Health Care**

Community outreach health care aims to reduce reliance on inpatient services and help patients recover in the community. In 2024, the Hospital Authority conducted 2.24 million home visits and outreach care services for, among others, the elderly and people with mental illnesses. As at 31 December, around 86 per cent of those receiving community nursing services were elders. Community geriatric assessment teams visit residential care homes for the elderly regularly to provide medical and nursing care to frail residents who are unable to attend specialist outpatient clinics. These teams also train carers at the homes to care for their residents. The Patient Support Call Centre provides support to high-risk elderly patients discharged from public hospitals, offering advice on disease management and care support, and arranging referrals to appropriate services for patients in need.

## Oral Health

The Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care, tasked with reviewing and advising on dental strategies, issued its final report in December. It emphasised that oral health is an integral component of general health.

The government aims to enable all citizens to improve their oral hygiene and lifestyle, through publicity, education and the promotion and development of primary oral health and dental care. To achieve tooth retention, the focus is on prevention, early identification and timely intervention of dental diseases. The government also ensures underprivileged groups with financial difficulties and special needs have access to essential dental care services.

In response to the working group's recommendations, the government enhanced the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme, funded by the Community Care Fund, in July, providing more eligible elderly people with access to services such as dental check-ups, scaling, tooth extractions, and fillings. The Department of Health strengthened the special care dental services provided under the Healthy Teeth Collaboration for persons with special needs and disabilities.

## Mental Health

The government adopts an integrated approach in promoting mental health, encompassing prevention, early identification, timely intervention and rehabilitation. Cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary support and care services are available through collaboration among government bodies and other relevant organisations including the Health Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau, the Education Bureau, the Hospital Authority, the Social Welfare Department and the Department of Health.

The Hospital Authority is a major medical service provider for people with mental disorders. Its psychiatric services include inpatient facilities, day hospitals, specialist outpatient clinics and community outreach. In 2023-24, about 309,400 people received treatment and support through these services.

The Advisory Committee on Mental Health advises the government on mental health policies and follows up on recommendations in the Mental Health Review Report. The committee implements the Shall We Talk mental health promotion and public education initiative, with various activities to enhance mental health awareness and encourage the public to seek help. As part of the initiative, the Mental Health Workplace Charter aims to promote a mental health-friendly workplace.

The 18111 – Mental Health Support Hotline provides one-stop, round-the-clock support for people with mental health needs, rendering them immediate mental health support and referral services.

## Secondary, Tertiary and Specialised Health Care

As at end-2024, the city had 30,816 public hospital beds, comprising 24,470 general beds, 1,961 infirmary beds, 3,710 beds for the mentally ill and 675 for the mentally disabled. There

were 5,179 private hospital beds, comprising 4,833 inpatient beds and 346 day beds, and 801 in institutions run by the Correctional Services Department. There were 4.9 beds per 1,000 population<sup>2</sup>.

### **Public Hospital Services**

Public hospitals spent \$60 billion providing inpatient services in 2023-24 and discharged 2.02 million inpatients and day inpatients in 2024.

The Hospital Authority's specialist outpatient clinics arrange appointments for new patients based on their clinical conditions. Patients who require urgent medical attention will receive priority. Patients with stable conditions may be referred to family medicine and general outpatient clinics, or to private general practitioners. In 2024, the specialist outpatient clinics recorded 8.66 million attendances.

To enhance service quality and patient experience, the authority provides telehealth services for different outpatient, day patient, inpatient and outreach services so that suitable patients can receive services without leaving home. The medication delivery and telepharmacy services also allow delivery of medications to patients' homes or designated addresses, and pharmacists can also provide telecounselling where necessary.

### **Allied Health Service**

Allied health professionals working in the Hospital Authority include audiologists, audiology technicians, bioinformaticians, clinical psychologists, dental technicians, dietitians, genetic counsellors, medical laboratory technologists, medical social workers, mould laboratory technicians, occupational therapists, optometrists, orthoptists, physicists, physiotherapists, podiatrists, prosthetists and orthotists, radiographers, and speech therapists. They provide patient care through rehabilitation, supporting diagnosis and supporting technology adoption while working with other clinical team members. In 2024, the authority's allied health outpatient departments recorded 3.58 million attendances.

### **Accident and Emergency Services**

Accident and emergency services are available at 18 public hospitals, delivering high-quality care for critically ill or injured people and victims of disasters.

Patients are classified under five categories according to their clinical conditions: critical, emergency, urgent, semi-urgent and non-urgent. This triage system ensures patients with more urgent needs receive prompt treatment. In 2024, all critical patients received immediate treatment, over 95 per cent of emergency patients were treated within 15 minutes, and most urgent patients were treated within 30 minutes.

Accident and emergency services entailed some \$4.4 billion in expenditure in 2023-24 and handled 2 million visits by 1.23 million people in 2024, an average of about 5,500 attendances per day. Semi-urgent and non-urgent cases accounted for more than 55 per cent of

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<sup>2</sup> Consisting of all beds in the Hospital Authority's hospitals, private hospitals and correctional institutions.

attendances. The Hospital Authority adopts various measures to maintain its coping capacity during surge periods without being unduly affected by non-urgent cases.

### **Medical Charges and Waivers**

Public hospital and clinic services are heavily subsidised by the government at an average of over 97 per cent and there are no itemised charges except for drugs.

Under the existing medical fee waiver mechanism, the Hospital Authority grants waivers to needy groups including Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients, low-income patients, Old Age Living Allowance recipients aged 75 or above, the chronically ill and elderly patients with financial difficulties.

### **Private Hospital Services**

There are 14 private hospitals which complement the public sector by providing a range of specialist and hospital services. In 2023, the private hospitals served 345,761 inpatients, representing 15 per cent of the city's total. Spending on private inpatient services, excluding identified Covid-19 expenditure, amounted to \$24 billion in 2022-23, accounting for 29 per cent of overall expenditure on public and private inpatient services.

### **Public-private Partnership Programmes**

The government has launched various clinical public-private partnership programmes through the Hospital Authority to leverage private sector resources to help alleviate pressure on the public system. Such services include cataract surgery, haemodialysis, colon assessment, radiological investigation, glaucoma treatment, trauma operation, breast cancer surgery, radiation therapy and laboratory services.

The authority's General Outpatient Clinic Public-private Partnership Programme subsidises clinically stable patients with hypertension and/or diabetes mellitus under the care of its general outpatient clinics to opt for primary care from the private sector. Under the programme, a co-care service model for designated specialties enables clinically stable patients under the authority's specialist outpatient clinics to receive healthcare services from the private sector. As at end-December, over 640 service providers and 51,600 patients had participated in the programme.

### **Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme**

The Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme aims to regulate the quality of individual indemnity hospital insurance products and improve market transparency, providing consumers with greater confidence in health insurance and private healthcare services, thereby alleviating pressure on the public healthcare system. As of end-2024, the number of scheme policies reached 1,428,000.

### **Genomic Medicine**

The Hong Kong Genome Institute implements the Hong Kong Genome Project, aiming to sequence 40,000 to 50,000 genomes by 2025. The pilot phase focused on patients with undiagnosed disorders and hereditary cancers, and their family members. The main phase was



launched in 2022, with an expanded scope covering cases related to genomics and precision health. The sequencing results may help the diagnosis or clinical management of participants, and the resulting genomics database will facilitate relevant scientific research.

### ***Organ Donation and Transplant***

The Health Bureau, Department of Health and Hospital Authority work with community partners to promote organ donation. By end-2024, the Centralised Organ Donation Register had recorded more than 391,000 registrations. The number of patients waiting for kidney, liver, heart and lung transplants stood at 2,476, 79, 77 and 21 respectively. During the year, there were 41 kidney, 23 liver, four heart, two double-lung and 306 cornea donations from the deceased in public hospitals.

The Human Organ Transplant Ordinance regulates the transplant of human organs and import of human organs for transplant purposes, and prohibits commercial dealings in human organs intended for transplant. Approval from the statutory Human Organ Transplant Board is required for the transplant of human organs between living persons who are not genetically related or a couple whose marriage has subsisted for not more than three years. In 2024, the board received 11 applications for organ transplants between living non-related persons and Hong Kong imported 65 human organs for transplant purposes.

The authority performs organ matching regularly on renal patients and their relatives who have joined the Paired Kidney Donation Programme.

### ***Other Specialist Services***

Specialist facilities under the Department of Health, include 18 methadone clinics, 17 chest clinics, eight social hygiene clinics, four dermatological clinics, two integrated treatment centres, seven child assessment centres, two travel health centres and three operating public mortuaries. These facilities recorded around 1.8 million attendances in 2024.

### ***End-of-life Care***

In June, amendments to the Coroners Ordinance and Births and Deaths Registration Ordinance took effect to facilitate the choice of dying in place for terminally ill patients in residential care homes. The Advance Decision on Life-sustaining Treatment Ordinance was passed in November and will take effect in mid-2026, with the aim of safeguarding terminally ill patients' autonomy on deciding arrangements for their treatments and care. This is a milestone in the provision of end-of-life care in Hong Kong.

## **Chinese Medicine**

### ***Flagship Infrastructure***

The government announced in October the naming of Hong Kong's first Chinese medicine hospital as the Chinese Medicine Hospital of Hong Kong. The hospital, which is under construction, will promote the development of Chinese medicine services, education and training, innovation and research. It signed a strategic collaboration agreement with the Guangdong Provincial Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine in January to foster cooperation on various fronts.

The Government Chinese Medicines Testing Institute specialises in the testing of and scientific research on Chinese medicines, aiming to set internationally recognised reference standards. The institute launched the Digital Herbarium for Chinese Medicines in March, providing comprehensive digital information on Chinese medicines.

These flagship projects are both expected to be commissioned in phases from end-2025.

### **Chinese Medicine Services**

At the district level, 18 Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres promote the development of Chinese medicine through services, training and research, under a collaboration model involving the Hospital Authority, NGOs and local universities. The centres provide an annual quota of 800,000 government-subsidised Chinese medicine outpatient services, covering general consultation, acupuncture service and bone setting/*tui na* services. They also provide non-government subsidised Chinese medicine outpatient services. There were about 1.6 million<sup>3</sup> attendances in 2024.

The Hospital Authority has implemented the Integrated Chinese-Western Medicine programme at public hospitals by providing treatment through the 18 Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres to inpatients of designated disease areas. In 2024, the authority expanded the programme's services to 61 designated sites at 26 public hospitals, and launched two pilot programmes in respiratory diseases care and knee osteoarthritis care, and extended the cancer care pilot programme progressively.

Private Chinese medicine clinics record about 16 million attendances each year.

### **Development Initiatives**

The functions of the Chinese Medicine Unit, under the Health Bureau, were enhanced in 2023-24 to strengthen policy coordination work. The Commissioner for Chinese Medicine Development assumed office in May and led the unit in formulating the Chinese Medicine Development Blueprint in collaboration with the Chinese medicine sector.

The Chinese Medicine Development Fund provides support for nurturing talent, quality enhancement, public education and research and innovation, with about 8,700 funding applications approved since its launch in 2019. An additional \$500 million was injected into the fund in 2023-24 and a new scheme for strategically commissioned projects and several other enhancement measures were launched in response to the sector's latest development needs.

From November 2023, two short-term and one medium-term editions of the Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Talent Training Programme, co-organised by the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Health Bureau, were conducted to nurture talent for the development of Chinese medicine and the Chinese Medicine Hospital of Hong Kong.

<sup>3</sup> Attendances include regular services at the Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres, such as government-subsidised and non-government subsidised Chinese medicine outpatient services, integrated Chinese-Western medicine services and designated Chinese medicine services for civil service eligible persons.

The first Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Culture Festival, supported by more than 80 Chinese medicine sector and community organisations to orchestrate over 200 promotional activities, opened in December and will run until February 2025, promoting the health values and culture inheritance of Chinese medicine.

## **Public Health and Disease Prevention**

The Department of Health is the public health authority responsible for public health, health promotion and disease prevention.

### ***Smoking and Health***

Hong Kong's tobacco control policy aims to discourage smoking, contain the proliferation of tobacco use and minimise the impact from passive smoking through legislation, publicity, education, enforcement, smoking cessation and taxation. The smoking prevalence of Hong Kong dropped from 9.5 per cent in 2021 to 9.1 per cent in 2023.

The Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance stipulates statutory no-smoking areas, regulates the packaging and labelling of tobacco products, and prohibits advertising and promoting such products. During the year, the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office had conducted over 26,030 inspections, issued 64 summonses and over 13,480 fixed penalty notices for smoking offences.

To curb tobacco consumption, the government increased tobacco duty by \$0.8 per stick in February and announced the roll-out of next-phase tobacco control measures in June.

The Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health, an independent statutory body, advises the government on smoking, passive smoking and health matters, and publicises the hazards of smoking. The council also conducts publicity, education and community involvement campaigns, and receives enquiries and suggestions from the public on smoking and health matters.

### ***Health Promotion***

The Department of Health formulates and implements strategies and measures to promote healthy eating, regular physical activity and mental health to target groups at different settings. It updates information and health advice on infectious diseases and produces materials in various languages to raise awareness among ethnic minorities of how to prevent communicable diseases and adopt a healthy lifestyle.

The department works closely with Healthy Cities projects, NGOs and other community partners to carry out health promotion activities, disseminate health information, alert the public to health threats and facilitate implementation of preventive measures.

### ***Disease Prevention and Control***

The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health works with local and international counterparts to prevent and control diseases in Hong Kong. It works on three principles: real-time surveillance, rapid intervention and responsive risk communication. The centre keeps track of communicable diseases and issues surveillance reports and laboratory

data reports regularly. It works with the District Councils, District Services and Community Care Teams, academics and other stakeholders to disseminate health information and guidelines, alert the public to health threats, and facilitate prompt implementation of preventive measures.

### ***Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases***

The Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance specifies 53 statutory notifiable infectious diseases in Hong Kong. During the year, about 11,100 cases were reported. The Centre for Health Protection reviews and updates its strategies for coping with major outbreaks of infectious diseases, ensuring both the government and community are prepared.

The government is implementing various aspects under the Hong Kong Strategy and Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (2023-2027), which sets out response strategies to the threat of antimicrobial resistance.

The government is also implementing the Hong Kong Viral Hepatitis Action Plan 2020-2024, which sets out strategies and priorities to meet the World Health Organization's (WHO) target of eliminating the threat posed by viral hepatitis by 2030.

To prevent and control the spread of infectious and other serious diseases into or out of Hong Kong, the Port Health Division, under the Department of Health, enforces health quarantine measures according to the International Health Regulations and the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance.

The government will enhance the local capacity in surveillance, early warning and prevention and control of infectious diseases; strengthen the joint disease prevention and control as well as manpower training with the Mainland authorities; and promote international cooperation in scientific research in areas such as vaccines.

### ***Vaccination***

The Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme protects children against vaccine-preventable diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis B, poliomyelitis, tetanus, pertussis, measles, diphtheria, mumps, rubella, chickenpox, pneumococcal disease and human papillomavirus (for school girls of suitable grades). Pertussis vaccinations are provided for women between 26 and 34 weeks of pregnancy, as part of routine antenatal care at maternal and child health centres.

The government provides free or subsidised seasonal influenza vaccines to eligible groups, including children and those aged 50 or above, through various programmes. These vaccinations are provided at outlets including kindergartens and child care centres, primary and secondary schools, hospitals, clinics, DHCs, residential care homes for the elderly and for persons with disabilities, residential child care centres and designated institutions serving people with intellectual disabilities. The government also provides pneumococcal, Covid-19 and Mpox vaccinations to respective eligible groups.

### ***HIV Testing, Counselling and Education***

The Department of Health's Red Ribbon Centre works with community partners to enhance awareness and prevention of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and to promote the care and acceptance of people with HIV. In 2024, the centre organised 61 activities for more than 68,000 participants.

The HIV Testing Service website provides information on HIV and sexually transmitted infections, as well as an enhanced function for ordering HIV self-test kits. In 2024, over 2,200 HIV self-test kits were ordered. In addition, the department also provides a counselling and testing service, where appointments can be booked via the website or a multilingual hotline. In 2024, around 1,715 appointments for HIV testing were arranged.

In December, the Red Ribbon Centre, working with 12 NGOs and 10 supporting organisations, launched the inaugural HIV Testing Month in Hong Kong, encouraging people who have had sex to undergo HIV testing at least once to keep track of their own health status. It aimed to normalise HIV testing by increasing public awareness of HIV testing, as well as help the public understand how to get tested easily through a variety of channels.

### ***Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases***

Non-communicable diseases including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes mellitus together accounted for about 51 per cent of all registered deaths in 2023.

The government is implementing its action plan, Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong, which sets out nine targets and a portfolio of initiatives to reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases.

The Hong Kong Cancer Strategy aims to reduce the cancer burden in the local population and improve the quality of life and survivorship of cancer patients. The government promotes a healthy lifestyle as the primary preventive strategy, which includes no smoking, avoiding alcohol consumption, eating a balanced diet and engaging in regular physical activity.

### ***Cancer Screening Programmes***

The government provides screening for cervical cancer, colorectal cancer and breast cancer. The Cervical Screening Programme encourages women aged between 25 and 64 who have ever had sex to undergo regular screening while the Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme subsidises asymptomatic residents aged between 50 and 75 to undergo screening. The Breast Cancer Screening Pilot Programme provides screening services for eligible women, aiming to detect breast cancer before symptoms appear for early treatment.

## **Health Infrastructure Development**

### ***Medical Innovation***

Hong Kong was accepted as an observer to the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use and also introduced the 1+ mechanism for new drugs registration in 2023.

On 5 June 2024, the Department of Health set up the Preparatory Office for the Centre for Medical Products Regulation to plan the establishment of the regulation, which will be a step towards the transition to the primary evaluation approach in approving applications for registration of medical products. This will help speed up bringing new drugs and medical devices to the market, and foster the research and development and testing of medical products and related industries.

The 1+ mechanism for the registration of new drugs was extended to all new drugs, including vaccines and advanced therapy products, on 1 November. This will attract more new drugs from different parts of the world seeking approval for registration in Hong Kong, giving patients more choice and further strengthening the local capacity for drug evaluation, while enhancing the development of relevant software, hardware and expertise.

On 21 November, the Greater Bay Area International Clinical Trial Institute opened in the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone. The institute will coordinate clinical trial resources in local public and private sectors, including those from the Hospital Authority, private healthcare institutions and universities, serving as a one-stop clinical trial support platform for medical research institutions while streamlining workflow, training talent and increasing collaboration across the GBA.

### ***Public Hospital Development Projects***

The government and the Hospital Authority have been implementing the First Hospital Development Plan since 2016, for which \$200 billion has been earmarked for 16 projects which will redevelop or expand 11 existing public hospitals and construct a new acute public hospital, three new community health centres and one new supporting services centre, providing over 6,000 additional beds and 94 additional operating theatres. It will also increase service capacity of specialist outpatient clinics and general outpatient clinics.

In 2024, the construction of the Hospital Authority Supporting Services Centre, the Community Health Centre cum Social Welfare Facilities at Pak Wo Road in North District and the phase 1 redevelopment of Queen Mary Hospital were completed. The foundation works for the expansion of North District Hospital and Lai King Building in Princess Margaret Hospital were completed and the main works for both had begun. Other projects with main works ongoing included phase 2 redevelopment of Kwai Chung Hospital, phase 1 redevelopment of Grantham Hospital, the construction of a new acute hospital at the Kai Tak Development Area, the redevelopment of Our Lady of Maryknoll Hospital, the expansion of United Christian Hospital, the redevelopment of Prince of Wales Hospital phase 2 (stage 1), and phase 2 redevelopment of Kwong Wah Hospital.

### ***Electronic Health Record Sharing System***

The electronic record sharing platform eHealth enables healthcare providers in the public and private sectors to view and share electronic health records with the healthcare recipients' consent. It aims to encourage public-private partnership, facilitate continuity of care for patients and enhance the efficiency and quality of care.

As of end-2024, about 6.1 million people had registered with eHealth, which covered more than 80 per cent of the population. Over 3,300 healthcare providers, including the Hospital Authority, Department of Health and all local private hospitals were registered users, as well as more than 57,900 healthcare professionals. The eHealth mobile application had been downloaded more than 3.6 million times and its average monthly access was around 845,000 times during 2024. Over 4.4 billion medical records had been shared on the system.

The five-year plan to transform eHealth from a health record sharing system into eHealth+, a comprehensive healthcare information infrastructure that integrates multiple functions of data sharing, service delivery and care journey management, was announced in 2023. The aim is to establish a comprehensive and holistic smart health ecosystem that runs through the entire healthcare process and links to different sectors and tiers of the healthcare system.

Users of eHealth can access nine types of electronic health records shared on the eHealth mobile application and input their own data. To support cross-boundary healthcare needs, the government launched new functions at the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital and the seven institutions under the Elderly Health Care Voucher Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme in 2024. The government also launched the e+Life health challenge platform in September to encourage people to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

### **Health and Medical Research**

The Health and Medical Research Fund aims to build research capacity and to encourage, facilitate and support research to inform health policies, improve population health, strengthen the healthcare system, enhance healthcare practices, advance the standard and quality of care, and promote clinical excellence, through generation and application of evidence-based scientific knowledge derived from local research in health and medicine. It also provides funding to evidence-based health promotions that help people adopt healthier lifestyles.

The Health Bureau has set up the Population-based Health Data Model, which will be updated annually, to support healthcare policy planning and formulation.

### **Healthcare Professional Regulation**

As at end-2024, 16,533 doctors, 2,942 dentists, 10,654 listed and registered Chinese medicine practitioners, 71,881 registered and enrolled nurses, 4,368 midwives, 3,386 pharmacists, 338 chiropractors, 4,977 physiotherapists, 3,429 occupational therapists, 4,733 medical laboratory technologists, 2,283 optometrists, 2,972 radiographers and 647 dental hygienists were registered in Hong Kong.

The Pilot Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions enhances the society-based registration arrangements for healthcare professions not subject to statutory registration. As at end-2024, the number of voluntary registrants for each profession was 327 for the Hong Kong Institute of Speech Therapists, 69 for the Hong Kong Institute of Audiologists, 138 for the Hong Kong Academy of Accredited Dietitians, 205 for the Hong Kong Association of Educational Psychologists and 459 for the Hong Kong Institute of Clinical Psychologists.

## Doctors

To increase the number of doctors in Hong Kong, the government has more than doubled the number of training places for medical students funded by the University Grants Committee from 250 in 2008-09 to 590 in 2022-23.

Degree courses in medicine and surgery are offered at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and University of Hong Kong (HKU), which admitted 630 medical students to their bachelor's degree programmes in 2024.

Non-locally trained doctors can register and practise in Hong Kong after passing the Medical Council of Hong Kong's licensing examination and completing a period of assessment of normally 12 months in an approved hospital. Non-locally trained specialist doctors who have passed the licensing examination and have a specialist qualification comparable to a fellowship of the colleges under the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine can apply for exemption from the assessment period for six months.

During 2024, 50 non-locally trained doctors passed the licensing examination. Non-locally trained doctors may also work in specified institutions on a limited registration basis for three years, which can then be renewed. As at end-2024, there were 315 non-locally trained doctors on limited registration.

The Medical Registration Ordinance also offers an alternative pathway for non-locally trained doctors to obtain full registration in Hong Kong. The Special Registration Committee, established under the Medical Council, determines a list of recognised medical qualifications of a quality comparable to those provided by the two medical schools in Hong Kong. As at end-2024, the committee had recognised 128 such medical qualifications, and there were 106 non-locally trained doctors on special registration.

The Hong Kong Academy of Medicine is an independent statutory body which approves, assesses and accredits specialist training within the medical and dental professions. Its 15 colleges conduct training and examinations to award specialist qualifications. The Hospital Authority trains specialist doctors, offering appointments to all qualified medical graduates from CUHK and HKU each year for on-the-job specialist training. In 2024-25, about 500 doctors were recruited for specialist training. Around 300 doctors were awarded specialist qualifications by the academy in 2023.

## Dentists

HKU offers degree courses in dentistry, admitting 90 students to its bachelor's degree programme in 2024, while 34 non-locally trained dental graduates passed licensing examinations conducted by the Dental Council of Hong Kong.

The Dentists Registration (Amendment) Bill was passed in July, providing new pathways for the admission of qualified non-locally trained dentists to practise in specified institutions under limited registration and special registration.



To further enhance the professional standard of dentists, the amended Dentists Registration Ordinance requires local dental graduates and non-locally trained dentists who have passed the licensing examination directly to undergo internship or period of assessment respectively before they may obtain full registration, in keeping with the practice for local doctors. This requirement will enhance their clinical experience in real-life work settings and enable them to get familiar with the practice in Hong Kong.

### ***Dental Care Professionals***

The amended Dentists Registration Ordinance introduced a statutory registration system for two classes of ancillary dental workers, namely dental hygienists and dental therapists, and retitled ancillary dental workers as dental care professionals, to ensure their service quality through a more formalised regulatory regime and establish their professional status.

To increase the manpower resources for dental care professionals, the government has gradually increased their training places from 95 in the 2023-24 academic year to 185 in 2024-25. The Prince Philip Dental Hospital and the School of Professional and Continuing Education of the University of Hong Kong co-organise the Higher Diploma in Dental Hygiene programme and Advanced Diploma in Dental Therapy programme.

### ***Chinese Medicine Practitioners***

CUHK, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) and HKU offer full-time undergraduate degree courses in Chinese medicine. In 2024, 60 full-time local bachelor's degree graduates who passed the licensing examination were registered as Chinese medicine practitioners.

The Hospital Authority implements the Chinese Medicine Practitioner Trainee Programme at the 18 Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres, which provides 216 training places for Chinese medicine practitioner trainees, including 72 places for the first year of training.

### ***Allied Health Professionals***

Saint Francis University (SFU) (formerly known as Caritas Institute of Higher Education), Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU), Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) and Tung Wah College (TWC) offer degree programmes for allied health professionals. In 2024, the four institutions admitted a total of 811 students to their degree programmes in physiotherapy, radiography/radiation therapy, occupational therapy, medical laboratory science and optometry. The degree programmes offered by PolyU are publicly funded, while those at SFU, HKMU and TWC are self-financing and students are eligible for government subsidies. Professional accreditation for the physiotherapy degree programmes offered by SFU and HKMU were completed in 2024.

The Hospital Authority's Institute of Advanced Allied Health Studies devises structured long-term training plans for allied health staff members and runs courses on specialist and multidisciplinary training, and clinical and personal development. These include three years of in-service training for new recruits of allied health grades. In 2024, the institute offered 115 training courses and 79 overseas scholarships.

## Nurses

CUHK, HKBU, HKMU, HKU, PolyU, SFU, TWC and Hong Kong Sanatorium and Hospital (HKSH) provide pre-registration nursing training. They recruited 3,174 students into their nursing degree programmes in 2024. CUHK, HKU and PolyU enrolled another 130 students in their master's degree of nursing programmes.

SFU, Hong Kong Adventist College, HKSH, St Teresa's Hospital, TWC and Union Hospital provide pre-enrolment nursing training. They recruited 536 pupil nurses into their two-year higher diploma in enrolled nursing (general) programmes in 2024. HKMU enrolled 279 and 60 pupils in its two-year higher diploma in general health and higher diploma in mental health nursing programmes respectively.

Twenty nurses with professional nursing qualifications obtained outside Hong Kong passed the Nursing Council of Hong Kong's licensing examinations and received practising certificates for registered nurses or enrolled nurses.

Government-subsidised, self-financing undergraduate programmes in nursing offered 1,680 places in 2023-24.

The Hospital Authority's Professional Diploma in Nursing programme provides pre-registration nursing training with 304 students in the 2024-25 intake. The duration of the programme has been condensed from four years to 3.5 years from 2024-25 intake onwards, aiming to enhance the learning experience of students through improved integration of theory and practice in the clinical practicum. Another 104 pupil nurses were admitted to the two-year Enrolled Nurse (General) Training programme in 2024-25.

The authority's Institute of Advanced Nursing Studies strengthens specialty training for nurses and encourages them to improve professional standards through continuous learning. New graduates undergo simulation training to strengthen their competence and skills in clinical care and medical emergencies.

The Nurses Registration (Amendment) Bill was passed in July. It provides new pathways for the admission of qualified non-locally trained registered or enrolled nurses to practise in designated or specified institutions under limited or special registration.

## Healthcare Professional Training

The government is implementing the provision of more subsidies for students to enrol in healthcare postgraduate programmes, increasing the number of designated places on a subsidy scheme for undergraduate healthcare programmes and waiving clinical practicum training fees paid by tertiary institutions, with a view to enhancing the training of healthcare professionals.

In addition, it has set aside an additional \$10 billion to upgrade teaching facilities at CUHK, HKU and PolyU to cope with the increase of about 900 healthcare training places.

The 2024 Policy Address announced government backing to establish a third medical school. Sites in Ngau Tam Mei in the Northern Metropolis have been set aside to develop the campus and build an integrated medical teaching and research hospital.

## **Regulatory Activities**

### ***Western Medicines***

Western medicines, including advanced therapy products, are regulated in Hong Kong under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance. Acting on the authority of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board, the Department of Health provides support in evaluating and approving applications to register pharmaceutical products and issuing licences to drug manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers. The department takes action against the illegal sale of controlled drugs and enforces regulatory controls on poisons, antibiotics and dangerous drugs for medicinal use.

In 2024, the board approved 3,119 applications to register pharmaceutical products. As at the year-end, 14,314 pharmaceutical products were registered.

### ***Chinese Medicines***

Chinese medicines are regulated under the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, which requires any person engaged in the retail or wholesale of Chinese herbal medicines or the manufacture or wholesale of proprietary Chinese medicines to obtain a licence.

The Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong is the statutory body that devises and implements regulatory measures for Chinese medicines. All proprietary Chinese medicines must be registered before they can be sold, imported or possessed in Hong Kong. As at end-2024, there were 8,081 licensed Chinese medicine traders, including 21 holding a certificate denoting good manufacturing practice; 2,194 proprietary Chinese medicines with transitional registration status; and 6,001 with a certificate of registration of proprietary Chinese medicines.

The Hong Kong Chinese Materia Medica Standards Project aims to ensure the safety and quality of common Chinese herbal medicines. It is supported by local universities and overseas and Mainland experts. As at end-2024, the Department of Health had released reference standards for 344 commonly used Chinese herbal medicines under the project.

The department's Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office is a designated WHO Collaborating Centre for Traditional Medicine which helps the WHO formulate policies and strategies and sets regulatory standards for traditional medicine. In 2024, the WHO continued its designation up to 2028.

### ***Human Reproductive Technology***

The Human Reproductive Technology Ordinance regulates the application of human reproductive technologies to ensure the procedures are conducted in a safe and informed manner, and to safeguard the welfare of children born through the technologies.

The Council on Human Reproductive Technology sets out the requirements, standards and good practices for embryo researchers and reproductive technology practitioners. As at end-2024, the council had issued 39 licences, comprising 18 treatment, 18 artificial insemination by husband, and three research licences.

## Laboratory Services

### *Public Health Laboratory Services*

The Centre for Health Protection conducts laboratory tests on clinical and surveillance specimens and provides clinical diagnostic and public health laboratory services to the public and private sectors for patient care and other public health purposes. Its laboratories participate in and contribute to various WHO laboratory networks, including influenza, poliomyelitis, measles, rubella, tuberculosis and Covid-19.

### *Private Medical Laboratories/Diagnostic Centres*

Medical laboratories/diagnostic centres provide clinical diagnostic laboratory testing services to manage, prevent and treat diseases and for health assessment. The standard of the medical laboratory service is ensured through the professional regulation of medical laboratory technologists. There were 135 private laboratories in Hong Kong as of end-2024.

## Websites

Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions: [www.ars.gov.hk](http://www.ars.gov.hk)  
 Cancer Online Resource Hub: [www.cancer.gov.hk](http://www.cancer.gov.hk)  
 Centralised Organ Donation Register: [www.codr.gov.hk/codr](http://www.codr.gov.hk/codr)  
 Centre for Health Protection: [www.chp.gov.hk](http://www.chp.gov.hk)  
 Cervical Screening Programme: [www.cervicalscreening.gov.hk](http://www.cervicalscreening.gov.hk)  
 Change for Health: [www.change4health.gov.hk](http://www.change4health.gov.hk)  
 Chinese Medicine Development Fund: [www.cmdevfund.hk](http://www.cmdevfund.hk)  
 Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office: [www.cmro.gov.hk](http://www.cmro.gov.hk)  
 Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme: [www.colonscreen.gov.hk](http://www.colonscreen.gov.hk)  
 Department of Health: [www.dh.gov.hk](http://www.dh.gov.hk)  
 District Health Centre: [www.dhc.gov.hk](http://www.dhc.gov.hk)  
 eHealth Record Office: [www.eHealth.gov.hk](http://www.eHealth.gov.hk)  
 Health Bureau: [www.healthbureau.gov.hk](http://www.healthbureau.gov.hk)  
 HIV Testing Service website: [www.hivtest.gov.hk](http://www.hivtest.gov.hk)  
 Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health: [www.smokefree.hk](http://www.smokefree.hk)  
 Hong Kong Genome Institute: [www.hkgp.org](http://www.hkgp.org)  
 Hong Kong's Domestic Health Accounts: [www.healthbureau.gov.hk/statistics/en/dha.htm](http://www.healthbureau.gov.hk/statistics/en/dha.htm)  
 Hospital Authority: [www.ha.org.hk](http://www.ha.org.hk)  
 Oral Health Promotion Division: [www.toothclub.gov.hk](http://www.toothclub.gov.hk)  
 Organ Donation: [www.organdonation.gov.hk](http://www.organdonation.gov.hk)  
 Primary Healthcare Blueprint: [www.primaryhealthcare.gov.hk/bp](http://www.primaryhealthcare.gov.hk/bp)  
 Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme: [www.primaryhealthcare.gov.hk/cdcc](http://www.primaryhealthcare.gov.hk/cdcc)  
 Red Ribbon Centre: [www.rrc.gov.hk](http://www.rrc.gov.hk)  
 School Dental Care Service: [www.schooldental.gov.hk](http://www.schooldental.gov.hk)

Shall We Talk initiative: [www.shallwetalk.hk](http://www.shallwetalk.hk)

Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office: [www.taco.gov.hk](http://www.taco.gov.hk)

Travel Health Service: [www.travelhealth.gov.hk](http://www.travelhealth.gov.hk)

Viral Hepatitis Control Office: [www.hepatitis.gov.hk](http://www.hepatitis.gov.hk)

Virtual AIDS Office: [www.aids.gov.hk](http://www.aids.gov.hk)

Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme Office: [www.vhis.gov.hk](http://www.vhis.gov.hk)