

## **37<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Elderly Commission** **Summary for Press Briefing**

The Elderly Commission (EC) held its 37<sup>th</sup> meeting today (4 May 2004) with the following items on the agenda: -

### **(1) Presentation of the Report on “Comprehensive Study on the Housing Needs of the Elderly in Hong Kong”**

- The Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) has briefed the Elderly Commission on the findings of a consultancy study “Comprehensive Study on the Housing Needs of the Elderly in Hong Kong” carried out by a consultant team of the University of Hong Kong. The HKHS will publicly announce the results of the study later this month.

### **(2) Assistance to Elderly Owners of Dilapidated Buildings**

- At the last meeting of the EC, Members considered that the issues relating to the difficulties faced by elderly property owner-occupiers as identified in the Society for Community Organization’s report should be further explored. Today, Members were briefed on the measures taken and assistance provided by the Government to help elderly owner-occupiers of dilapidated buildings.
- Members welcomed that, as a transitional arrangement, the Housing Department (HD) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) are exploring the feasibility of allowing elderly owner-occupiers with genuine housing need to move into the Housing for Senior Citizens (HSC) of the Housing Authority (HA) and the Hong Kong Housing Society (HKHS) for one year under compassionate housing arrangement. During this period, the elderly property owners can dispose of their property and handle other related matters so that they will subsequently meet the eligibility criteria for applying public rental housing. If they are still unable to meet those criteria while still beset with problems of daily living after a year, HD and HKHS may consider exercising discretion to extend their stay in HSC.
- Other existing measures include:
  - a wide range of community support and residential care services provided by NGOs and SWD;
  - financial assistance through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme to help elders pay rates and government rents;
  - interest free loans or extension of repayment of loans under the Building

Safety Loan Scheme to help elders carry out works for improving the safety of their properties;

- since 2001, property owners may apply for public rental housing immediately after disposing of their property, subject to they meeting the prevailing income and asset limits; and
- various elderly priority schemes which expedite public housing allocation for elders. Also, compassionate rehousing is available for individuals and families who have genuine and imminent housing problems which cannot be resolved due to their specific circumstances and personal factors.

### (3) Update on Support for Vulnerable Elders

- At the meeting, SWD briefed Members on the strategies and recent developments in the provision of programmes / services supporting vulnerable elders.

*The strategies adopted to reduce the vulnerability of elders to abuse and suicide include*

- (a) enhance understanding of the problems of elderly suicide and elder abuse by strengthening data collection, improving statistical analysis and undertaking local researches;
- (b) strengthen public education and publicity programmes so as to encourage the elders, their families and friends to seek help as early as possible and to facilitate early identification;
- (c) implement dedicated projects on elder abuse and suicide;
- (d) adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to tackle the problems; and
- (e) conduct training for both frontline professionals as well as non-professionals to enhance their knowledge and skills in handling such cases.

#### *Understanding the Problem*

- To enhance understanding on the problem of elderly suicide, “A Multi-Disciplinary Study on the Causes of Elderly Suicide in Hong Kong” was published in 2002. With the support from the Government, HKU has set up the Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention in 2002 under which a surveillance and monitoring system is being set up to provide timely and more accurate estimate of suicide rates in Hong Kong.

- Besides, the Central Information System on Elder Abuse Cases has commenced operation in March 2004. As at 8 April 2004, 58 elder abuse cases handled by different service units since January 2004 were reported to the System.

*Public education and publicity programmes*

- The three-year project “Live Life – Joint Project on Prevention of Elderly Suicide” has been implemented by SWD, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and the Hong Kong Psychogeriatric Association since mid 2001. Up to the end of 2003, 66 district-based community education programmes on the prevention of elderly suicide were subsidised. An Asia-Pacific Regional Conference was also held in March 2004 in Hong Kong to promote prevention of elderly suicide.
- The Life Education Centre (LEC) of the Samaritan Befriender Hong Kong has organized various publicity & community education programmes in promoting life education and training up community gatekeepers on the prevention of suicide. Up to the end of 2003, over 750 elders have participated in the talks/workshops arranged by the LEC.
- Under the two three-year Pilot Projects on Prevention and Handling of Elder Abuse with the Haven of Hope Christian Service (HOH) and Caritas – Hong Kong (Caritas) which were implemented from April 2001 to end of March 2004, 708 community education programmes were organized and over 59 sets of resource/training materials were developed for the reference of the public as well as helping professionals by the two pilot projects to raise awareness on elder abuse

*Dedicated projects on elder abuse and suicide*

- Up to the end of 2003, a total of 972 calls and 166 cases in need of intensive counseling or psychogeriatric treatment were handled under the 3-tier Coordinated Service Model of the “Live Life – Joint Project on Prevention of Elderly Suicide”.
- The two three-year Pilot Projects on Prevention and Handling of Elder Abuse have handled 216 elder abuse cases. To consolidate the knowledge and experience gained and to facilitate the transfer/sharing of experiences to/with other organizations, HOH and Caritas have been granted an additional allocation from the Lotteries Fund to extend the

Pilot Projects on Prevention and Handling of Elder Abuse for one more year from April 2004 to March 2005.

*Adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to tackle the problems*

- In the planning and delivery of prevention strategies and policies on elderly suicide and elder abuse, Inter-departmental Working Group on Suicide and Working Group on Elder Abuse were set up in 2001 respectively.
- The Hong Kong Christian Service has completed its two-year Project on Elder Abuse Research and Protocol at the end of March 2004 and has submitted to SWD a research report, a draft multi-professional protocol and an elder abuse registry. The research report is being finalized and will be published later this year. The multi-professional protocol “Procedural Guidelines for Handling Elder Abuse Cases” and the Central Information System on Elder Abuse Cases have been implemented since March 2004.

*Training for both frontline professionals*

- SWD has organized various training programmes relating to identification/intervention of elderly suicide. A package of focused training was provided for 505 social workers to enhance their assessment and intervention skills.
  - NGOs have provided training and developed resources on different topics relating to elder abuse and suicide to frontline professionals under various pilot projects.
- Members noted the above strategies and programmes and services developed to prevent and tackle elderly suicide and elder abuse.

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