

(Translation)

Elderly Commission
Minutes of the 113th Meeting

Date: 18 December 2023 (Monday)

Time: 11:00 a.m.

Venue: Conference Room 3, G/F, Central Government Offices,
2 Tim Mei Avenue, Tamar, Hong Kong,

Present

Chairman

Dr LI Kwok-tung, Donald, SBS, JP

Members

Prof BAI Xue

Ms CHAN Man-yee, Grace

Ms IP Shun-hing, BBS, MH, JP

Prof LAI Wing-leung, Daniel

Mr LAU Tat-chuen

Dr LEE Shun-wah, Jenny

Mr LIT Hoo-yin, Horace

Dr LUK Ka-hay, James

Ms MAN Wei-yin, Queenie

Mr SIU King-wai, Kyrus

Mr SU Yau-on, Albert, MH, JP

Ms WONG Chor-kei, Macy, MH

Ms YU Chui-yee, BBS, MH

Ms LAU Yim, Alice, JP

Miss LEE Pui-sze, Charmaine, JP

Mr LEE Lik-kong, Eddie, JP

Dr HO Lei-ming, Raymond

Ms AU Mo-ching, Katherine

Dr LEUNG Lok-hang

Permanent Secretary for Labour
and Welfare

Director of Social Welfare

Deputy Secretary for Health 2

Assistant Director of Health
(Elderly Health)

Chief Manager/Management
(Support Services Section 2),
Housing Department

Chief Manager (Primary and
Community Services), Hospital
Authority Head Office

In attendance

Mr CHONG Wing-wun	Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2
Ms LAW Lai-tan, Linda	Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 3
Ms YAN Lai-ming, Jenny	Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly)
Dr FONG Fu-fai, Steve	Head of Department of Social Work, Hong Kong Shue Yan University
Ms LI Siu-heung	Project Manager, Information Gateway for Carers
Ms HO Koon-ling, Rosanna	Chief Executive Officer (Welfare) 4, Labour and Welfare Bureau
Mr LEUNG Wing-cheong, Geoff	Assistant Executive Manager (Welfare) 4, Labour and Welfare Bureau

Absent with apologies

Dr CHAN Chi-kau, Johnnie Casire, SBS, JP
Prof LAM Chiu-wa, Linda
Mr MA Heng, Theodore

Secretary

Ms CHAN Ah-wing, Ivy
Principal Assistant Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 4

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Dr LI Kwok-tung, Donald, the Chairman, welcomed all Members to the meeting.

2. The Chairman reminded Members that they must declare potential conflicts, if any, between their interests and matters under discussion.

Agenda item 1: Confirmation of the Minutes of the 112th Meeting

3. Members did not propose any amendments to the Chinese and English versions of the draft minutes of the 112th meeting issued by the Secretariat on 29 November 2023. The minutes were confirmed.

Agenda item 2: Matters Arising

4. There were no matters arising from the 112th meeting.

Agenda item 3: Briefing on Relevant Initiatives in the Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address

5. With the aid of slides, Mr CHONG Wing-wun, Deputy Secretary for Labour and Welfare (Welfare) 2, and Mr LEE Lik-kong, Eddie, Deputy Secretary for Health 2, briefed Members on social welfare and healthcare policy initiatives relevant to the elderly as set out in the Chief Executive (CE)'s 2023 Policy Address (PA) respectively.

6. After the briefing, the Chairman and Members expressed views and raised questions as follows:

- (a) amid an ageing population, there was manpower shortage in different positions within residential care homes (RCHs). Such shortfall affected the implementation of relevant government policies and initiatives;
- (b) it was suggested to hire experienced foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) with more than ten years of service within the RCH sector at the remuneration level of care workers, or relax the requirements for importing qualified personnel from the Mainland to alleviate the manpower shortage in RCHs;
- (c) consideration should be given to extending the coverage of the Residential Care Service Voucher for the Elderly and the Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly (CCSV), so

as to subsidise the employment of experienced FDHs by elderly persons on the Central Waiting List for Long Term Care Services maintained by the Social Welfare Department (SWD);

- (d) it was suggested to include short messaging and email services in the hotlines for carer and mental health support to enhance communication;
- (e) regarding measures to expand the cross-boundary elderly care service, it was asked what were the Government's considerations in selecting recognised Mainland RCHs, and whether Mainland care workers looking after Hong Kong elderly people retiring in the Mainland would be trained in accordance with relevant service standards adopted in Hong Kong;
- (f) many carers were under considerable physical and mental stress, and even suffered from physical strain, but the waiting time for consultation in public hospitals was excessively long. It was suggested that the Government should allocate resources to assist carers, such as introducing healthcare vouchers applicable to carers;
- (g) it was suggested to enhance coordination among government departments and the District Services and Community Care Teams (Care Teams) for consolidating community resources and forces to support the Government's district work, for example, elderly care and respite service, and to strengthen district information networks;
- (h) certain drugs were still unsubsidised under the public healthcare system, causing financial burden on patients and their families. It was asked whether the Government had any long-term plans to subsidise more common yet relatively costly drugs;
- (i) it was suggested that the Government should pay special

attention to the needs of elderly persons (particularly those suffering from dementia) in the provision and development of dental care and other professional services, as well as enhance the understanding of and training for relevant sectors on dementia, in order to cope with our ageing population and the increasing number of dementia patients;

- (j) given the persistent ageing trend in the local population, it was expected that the percentage of elderly in the total population of Hong Kong would increase from about 20% currently to about 30% in a decade. Also, the Care Teams might continue to identify more elderly persons requiring assistance over time. It was asked what strategies the Government would adopt to address the substantial demand of elderly persons seeking treatment of chronic diseases;
- (k) having regard to the recent legislative proposals on advance medical directives and dying in place, it was enquired how the Government would facilitate the implementation of relevant arrangements, such as whether primary care doctors would be deployed to RCHs or households to provide care for the terminally ill elderly; and
- (l) it was asked how the Government would facilitate access to the Mainland's healthcare services by Hong Kong elderly persons retiring in the Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area (GBA), so as to save them from returning to Hong Kong once their health conditions deteriorated and exerting pressure on local public services.

7. In response to Members' views and questions, Ms LAU Yim, Alice, Permanent Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr LEE Lik-kong, Eddie, Mr CHONG Wing-wun and Ms YAN Lai-ming, Jenny, Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Elderly), gave consolidated replies as follows:

- (a) the Government had been addressing the manpower shortage problem in RCHs through multi-pronged measures, including:

- (i) introducing the Special Scheme to Import Care Workers for RCHs, with the quota for importation capped at 7 000. Taking into account some 4 000 imported care workers currently in Hong Kong, there were around 3 000 additional quotas, among which the SWD had completed vetting for about 2 000 quotas. The Government would continue to keep in view the demand for imported care workers and review the scheme in due course;
- (ii) providing a total of over 3 300 fully-subsidised Enrolled Nurse (General) training places from 2017/18 to 2027/28 academic years. Trainees were required to work in social welfare units continuously for at least two or three years upon graduation;
- (iii) amending the Nurses Registration Ordinance to provide new pathways for the admission of eligible non-locally trained nurses with suitable qualifications;
- (iv) reviewing the skill and qualification requirements of RCH staff providing health and rehabilitation services, and establishing professional standards and career progression paths for them (including exploring the creation of a new rank of senior health worker), so as to attract more locals to join the RCH sector and retain the required talents;
- (v) developing the additional option for the elderly to retire in the Mainland GBA cities, which might also alleviate the manpower needs of local RCHs; and
- (vi) encouraging and supporting ageing in place by, for example, launching the CCSV Scheme and providing online rehabilitation services. In addition, the Government had injected funds into the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care and broadened its scope to cover gerontechnology products suitable for household use. Eligible elderly and rehabilitation service units could

apply for procuring and renting suitable technology products for lending to elderly persons and their carers for use at home, thereby improving the quality of life of the elderly while relieving the pressure on care staff and carers. Members were welcomed to offer suggestions, if any, in this regard to the Secretariat;

- (b) allowing FDHs to work in non-household settings would involve significant policy changes with far-reaching implications, including posing greater challenges to hundreds of thousands of families who needed to hire FDHs. At present, many RCH care workers imported by the sector came from the Mainland GBA cities. They played a positive role in alleviating the shortage of care workers;
- (c) “ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up” was the policy direction adopted by the Government for elderly services. Allowing experienced FDHs to take care of elderly persons at home could not only effectively slow down the need for admission to subsidised RCHs, but also relieve manpower shortage within the sector. To strengthen the skills of FDHs in elderly care and enhance elderly persons’ quality of life in the community, the SWD launched the Pilot Scheme on Training for FDHs in Elderly Care in 2018, and commenced the Phase III training courses in October 2023. Currently, all 41 District Elderly Community Centres in 18 districts across the city participated in the pilot scheme. To encourage FDHs’ participation in training, these centres would arrange relevant care services or activities for needy elderly persons when their FDHs were at training sessions. The pilot scheme had also been extended to cover FDHs caring for persons with disabilities;
- (d) in order to facilitate Hong Kong elderly persons to retire in the Mainland GBA cities, the Government would increase the number of recognised RCHs and expand the coverage of cities under the Residential Care Services Scheme in Guangdong, and implement the scheme in GBA cities where more Hong

Kong people settled. When selecting recognised service providers, the SWD would consider factors such as the ratings, service quality, fee levels and locations of the RCHs, and maintain close communication with the Mainland authorities. The SWD would also make site visits to individual RCHs. Through bilateral exchanges and complementary development of competitive edges (for example in terms of the professional standards and service quality in Hong Kong as well as the land and human resources in the Mainland), service standards of the Mainland RCHs might be enhanced;

- (e) the Government currently provided low-income carers with a living allowance to support them in meeting their daily or medical needs;
- (f) starting from the first quarter of 2024 and piloting in Tsuen Wan and Southern Districts, Care Teams would help identify carers of elderly persons, carers of persons with disabilities, singleton and doubleton elderly households requiring support through visits or contacts, and refer cases requiring assistance to relevant social welfare service units for follow-up. From the second quarter of 2024 onwards, the SWD would assist and subsidise eligible elderly persons, persons with disabilities and their carers referred by the Care Teams to install emergency alarm systems as necessary;
- (g) the Hospital Authority (HA) had an established mechanism in place for expanding its Drug Formulary, under which the expert panels would review the related drugs' cost-effectiveness and the Government's affordability, etc.;
- (h) the Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care under the Health Bureau recommended to promote primary dental care services focusing on prevention of dental diseases. Measures proposed by the Working Group included enhancing the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme under the Community Care Fund by lifting the requirement of fitting removable dentures to allow eligible elderly persons to receive dental

services such as dental check-ups, scaling, extractions and fillings without applying for fitting dentures. Regarding dental treatment, the Government would increase emergency dental services for vulnerable elderly persons with financial difficulties. Besides, to alleviate shortage of manpower in dental care, the Government would introduce into the Legislative Council a bill to amend the Dentists Registration Ordinance to provide new pathways for admission of qualified non-locally trained dentists to practise in specified institutions and modernise the regulatory framework for dentists and ancillary dental workers. In parallel, the Government would gradually increase the training places of ancillary dental workers and provide tuition sponsorship;

- (i) in order to effectively address the pressure on the healthcare system brought about by an ageing population, the Government had proposed different enhancements in previous PAs, including the rollout of the Elderly Health Care Voucher Pilot Reward Scheme in November 2023. Under the scheme, elderly persons, upon claiming at least \$1,000 from their voucher accounts for designated primary healthcare services such as health assessment, chronic disease screening and management, would automatically be allotted a \$500 reward to their accounts for the same use. The aim was to encourage more effective use of primary healthcare services by the elderly. In addition, the Government would strengthen the two-way training and exchange of healthcare talents between Hong Kong and the Mainland while admitting non-locally trained nurses to practise in Hong Kong for enhancing the service capacity of our healthcare system. The Government would also promote the concept of making advance medical directives and enabling the terminally ill to die in place, with a view to minimising the need for admissions to and discharges from hospitals during the final days of the elderly patients; and
- (j) the Government launched the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the HA in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao GBA in 2023 to enable eligible Hong Kong citizens to receive

subsidised consultations at the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH), and meanwhile support the healthcare needs of Hong Kong citizens residing in the GBA. Under the scheme, eligible patients were entitled to a consultation subsidy capped at RMB 2,000 per year. Hong Kong elderly persons residing in the GBA could, if other needs arose, use the elderly healthcare vouchers to pay the fees of outpatient healthcare services provided by the HKU-SZH and its offsite Huawei Li Zhi Yuan Community Health Centre.

8. The Chairman was thankful to the Government's concerns for elderly affairs in formulating relevant policies. Members were welcomed to express their views on the CE's 2023 PA, if any, to the Secretariat.

Agenda item 4: Information Gateway for Carers

9. With the aid of slides, Ms YAN Lai-ming, Jenny, Dr FONG Fu-fai, Steve, Head of Department of Social Work, Hong Kong Shue Yan University and Ms LI Siu-heung, Project Manager, Information Gateway for Carers, briefed Members on the Information Gateway for Carers (Information Gateway).

10. After the briefing, the Chairman and Members expressed views and raised questions as follows:

- (a) it was suggested to include tele-social services in the Service and Resource webpage of the Information Gateway, and introduce an interactive platform for carers to share their personal experience;
- (b) consideration should be given to analysing service needs and their changes based on the browsing data of the Information Gateway, and relaying such information to the SWD to facilitate its planning of relevant services. Details about the actual usage after service search, if available, could greatly inform and facilitate the design and development of future services;

- (c) there were concerns about the coordination between the Information Gateway and the Designated Hotline for Carer Support; and
- (d) attention should be paid to the algorithms of various search engines to improve the search engine optimisation of the Information Gateway to facilitate carers' easier access.

11. In response to Members' views and questions, Dr FONG Fu-fai, Steve and Ms LI Siu-heung gave consolidated replies as follows:

- (a) there were links to free online learning platforms, such as the Jockey Club CADENZA e-Tools for Elder Care, in the "Upcoming Events" webpage of the Information Gateway, providing carers with online learning resources on different areas of elderly care. As for the setting up of a platform system, careful examination would be required as it involved the arrangement of a platform administrator;
- (b) given that the Information Gateway had been launched for less than a month since November 2023, detailed browsing data were not yet available. The Information Gateway would be promoted in different districts shortly. As more browsing data become available, quarterly analysis of the browsing data and demands for various types of services (including newly launched policies) might be considered; and
- (c) despite the Information Gateway's inability to have direct communication with carers, it could render support to staff manning the Hotline, who could help collect views from carers while providing information to them, thereby improving and continuously updating the Information Gateway.

12. The Chairman indicated the Commission's support for developing the Information Gateway, and hoped that it could collect more useful data for the sector.

Agenda item 5: Progress Reports by Working Groups and Committee

Working Group on Elderly Services Programme Plan and Working Group on Ageing in Place

13. Ms CHAN Ah-wing, Ivy, Secretary to the Commission, reported that the third joint meeting of the two working groups was held on 12 December 2023, during which the Leisure and Cultural Services Department and the Hong Kong Housing Society briefed Members on the provision of recreation and sports programmes and facilities for the elderly, and elderly-friendly and accessible residence respectively.

Committee on Elder Academy Development Foundation (EADF)

14. Ms CHAN Ah-wing, Ivy, reported that:

- (a) the second round of funding applications to the Committee on EADF in 2023-24 was closed on 31 October 2023. The meeting of the Vetting Sub-committee was tentatively scheduled for February 2024 to assess the applications; and
- (b) it was announced in the CE's 2023 PA that the Government would inject an additional \$80 million into the EADF. In conjunction with generous donations and support from the community, the injection would sustain the development of the Elder Academy Scheme and encourage lifelong learning among the elderly to promote active ageing. A publicity event was tentatively scheduled for April 2024. The Secretariat would report the relevant arrangements to Members in due course.

Agenda item 6: Any Other Business

15. There was no other business for discussion at the meeting.

Time of Adjournment

16. The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Date of Next Meeting

17. The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for 27 March 2024. The Secretariat would advise Members of the meeting details in due course.

February 2024