

Acting Secretary for Health chairs 20th meeting of Cancer Coordinating Committee (with photos)

The Acting Secretary for Health, Dr Libby Lee, chaired the 20th meeting of the Cancer Coordinating Committee (CCC) today (June 3) to discuss the response strategies and measures against cancer with relevant government departments and organisations.

Dr Lee said, "Cancer has been the top killer in Hong Kong for years, accounting for more than 40 deaths every day on average. According to the World Health Organization, 30 per cent to 50 per cent of cancer cases could be prevented by modifying or avoiding key risk factors and implementing evidence-based prevention strategies. Prevention as well as early detection and management of cancer patients are the most cost-effective long-term strategies in reducing the cancer burden."

During the meeting, the CCC examined the implementation of the Hong Kong Cancer Strategy (the Strategy). Promulgated in July 2019, the Strategy was Hong Kong's first holistic plan on the work of cancer prevention and control, aiming to identify service gaps and formulate strategic priorities and directions to reduce the local disease burden of cancer.

The CCC also examined the city-wide population-based cancer surveillance data for 2022, including figures on incidence, mortality, survival rates and cancer prevalence in the population for major cancers. A total of 35 373 newly diagnosed cancer cases were recorded in 2022, involving 17 239 males and 18 134 females. In other words, 97 new cancer cases were diagnosed every day on average. Among which, lung cancer (5 707 cases) remains the most common cancer in Hong Kong, while breast cancer (5 208 cases, including male breast cancer) has for the first time outnumbered colorectal cancer (5 190 cases), accounting for the second and third most common cancers, respectively.

Dr Lee said, "Cancer mortality rates of both males and females have shown a declining trend over the past three decades, indicating Hong Kong's healthcare system has yielded positive results in combating cancer. In addition, the stage-specific survival rates of various cancers show that the survival rate will be higher if a patient has the cancer detected at an early stage followed by early treatment. In Hong Kong, most patients with early-stage cancers have a five-year relative survival rate reaching 90 per cent or higher. The ratio of surviving for more than five years for those with certain early-stage cancers, such as female breast, prostate and thyroid cancers, is comparable to that of the general population."

The CCC also reviewed and discussed various work on cancer prevention and control, including surveillances, prevention and screening; diagnosis, treatment and survivorship care; and research (see Annex for details).

Among which, the Department of Health (DH) has been promoting a healthy lifestyle as the primary strategy for cancer prevention to enhance public understanding of cancer prevention and screening. For prevention, primary prevention (i.e. reducing exposure to cancer risk factors) is the most important strategy for reducing the risk of developing cancer. The Government has long been adopting a multipronged approach, including publicity, education, promotion, legislation and regulation, to encourage citizens to adopt a healthy lifestyle, such as a healthy diet, regular physical activities and maintenance of a healthy body weight and waist circumference, as well as avoidance of smoking and alcohol, to reduce the risks of contracting non-communicable diseases including cancer.

For screening, the DH has implemented the Cervical Screening Programme, the Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme and the Breast Cancer Screening Pilot Programme. Most of the cancer cases identified through various screening programmes are at earlier stages, leading to a more favourable prognosis. In view of this, the 2024 Policy Address announced that the Government will explore the use of artificial intelligence to assist lung cancer screening and implement hepatitis B screening to prevent liver cancer. Details of these works will be announced in due course.

Established in 2001 and chaired by the Secretary for Health, the CCC comprises cancer experts and doctors from the public and private sectors, academics and public health professionals. The CCC makes recommendations on the formulation of strategies for cancer prevention and control, while steering the direction of work in relation to cancer prevention and screening, treatment, surveillance and research, etc. The Cancer Expert Working Group on Cancer Prevention and Screening under the CCC regularly reviews international and local evidence and makes recommendations on cancer prevention and screening applicable to the local setting. In addition, the Hong Kong Cancer Registry, the Hospital Authority and the Research and Data Analytics Office of the Health Bureau oversee cancer surveillance, treatment and research respectively.

