

LCQ20: Eligibility for public benefits of residents permanently departed from Hong Kong

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hak-kan and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (May 11):

Question:

Over the past two years, there has been a net outflow of over 120 000 Hong Kong residents, whilst the number of withdrawal claims of Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) benefits on ground of permanent departure from Hong Kong in the fourth quarter of last year was 8 700. It is learnt that some of such persons, after withdrawing their MPF benefits, are still eligible for public benefits, including receiving Social Security Allowance (SSA) payments and health care vouchers (HCVs), as well as residing in public rental housing (PRH) units. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics on the number of persons who, after withdrawing their MPF benefits in the past three years on ground of permanent departure from Hong Kong, has continued to (i) receive SSA payments, (ii) receive HCVs and (iii) reside in PRH units; and

(2) whether it has plans to amend the relevant legislation or requirements to stipulate that, except for the recipients covered by the Guangdong Scheme and the Fujian Scheme under the SSA Scheme, any persons withdrawing their MPF benefits on ground of permanent departure from Hong Kong will, from the date of such withdrawals, lose their eligibility for the aforesaid public benefits?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant bureau and departments, my consolidated response to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) Given that the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Scheme, Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme, Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (EHVS) and allocation of public rental housing (PRH) each has its own policy objectives, eligibility criteria and operating parameters, and that the personal data privacy of service recipients is subject to protection, the relevant bureau and departments do not have information on the number of persons who continue to receive SSA, health care vouchers or live in PRH flats after they have withdrawn their MPF benefits on the grounds of permanent departure from Hong Kong.

(2) In relation to the SSA Scheme, recipients who have resided in Hong Kong

for not less than 60 days in a payment year are entitled to a full-year allowance. Those who have resided in Hong Kong for less than 60 days in a payment year are only entitled to allowance for the periods during which they have resided in Hong Kong. Recipients need to declare to the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in case of any changes in circumstances, including absences from Hong Kong exceeding the permissible limit. The SWD will also conduct data matching with the Immigration Department on a monthly basis to ascertain recipients' compliance with the residence requirements. The SWD will recover overpayments from recipients whose absences from Hong Kong exceed the permissible limit. Notwithstanding, in view of the pandemic, The SWD has implemented a special arrangement since January 2020 to give consideration to disregard absences from Hong Kong of applicants or recipients of various social security schemes (including the SSA Scheme).

Under the EHVS, eligible elderly persons should receive the healthcare services provided by the enrolled healthcare service providers (including ten types of healthcare professionals who are registered in Hong Kong, District Health Centres and District Health Centre Expresses, as well as designated Outpatient Medical Centres and Medical Service Departments of the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital) in person before they can use their vouchers to settle the relevant service fees. Vouchers must be used on the elderly person himself/herself and cannot be transferred to or shared with another person. Moreover, vouchers cannot be issued in advance or redeemed for cash.

With respect to PRH, according to the Tenancy Agreement (TA) signed between the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and PRH tenants, tenant and family members listed in the TA should take up tenancy within one month after commencement of the tenancy and retain regular and continuous residence in the leased premises. Tenants should notify the HA immediately of any changes in the family condition for tenancy record updating. The HA will check the occupancy position of PRH households during biennial inspections and act on complaints for detecting irregularities. Should irregularities be detected, the HA will contact the households concerned to verify the position and, depending on the situation, take necessary enforcement actions.

The relevant bureau and departments have no plan to revise the arrangements above.

Application for new niches at Wo Hop Shek Columbarium opens

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) will allocate some 10,000 new extendable niches at Block A of Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase VI in Fanling, which are open for application from today (May 11) to June 10.

An FEHD spokesman said, "The 10,900 niches concerned include 10,657 standard niches (5,730 smoke-free niches and 4,927 non-smoke-free niches) and 243 large niches (120 smoke-free niches and 123 non-smoke-free niches). If the number of applications exceeds the quantity of niches available for allocation in Block A, a corresponding quantity of niches in Block B will be added for allocation."

Members of the public can visit the FEHD's website (www.fehd.gov.hk) for details and download the application forms. Leaflets and application forms are also available at the department's Hong Kong or Kowloon Cemeteries and Crematoria Office, District Environmental Hygiene Offices and Home Affairs Enquiry Centres of the Home Affairs Department. In addition, members of the public may call 2841 9111 or email apply_newniche@fehd.gov.hk for enquiries and request application forms by fax.

The spokesman encouraged applicants to fill in and submit the application forms online so as to avoid postal delay or non-delivery. Applications can also be submitted by fax (2333 1716), via email (apply_newniche@fehd.gov.hk), by post or in person to the FEHD Hong Kong or Kowloon Cemeteries and Crematoria Office.

Information on the Cemeteries and Crematoria Offices and Public Niche Allocation Office of the FEHD is as follows:

Hong Kong Cemeteries and Crematoria Office

Address: 1J Wong Nai Chung Road, Happy Valley, Hong Kong

Tel: 2570 4318

Fax: 2591 1879

Kowloon Cemeteries and Crematoria Office

Address: Upper Ground Floor, 6 Cheong Hang Road, Hung Hom, Kowloon

Tel: 2365 5321

Fax: 2176 4963

Public Niche Allocation Office

Address: Units 3501-3511 and 3520-3525, 35/F, Tower 1, Metroplaza, 223 Hing Fong Road, Kwai Fong, New Territories

Tel: 2330 5635

Fax: 2333 1716

The spokesman reminded those who wish to apply for allocation of the above niches for the deceased to submit the completed application forms together with the copies of required documents on or before June 10 to avoid missing this application period.

Government announces latest situation of fresh food supply from Mainland

A Government spokesman announced today (May 11) that the supply of fresh food from the Mainland yesterday (May 10) was sufficient and stable.

According to the latest information, the quantity of vegetables supplied from the Mainland to Hong Kong yesterday (as of midnight) by land and water transportation was about 2 500 tonnes, comparable to the average daily supply from the Mainland on a normal day. The volume of vegetables supplied from the Mainland to Hong Kong sold through the wholesale markets of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Vegetable Marketing Organization was about 877 tonnes. The average wholesale prices of choi sum and pak choi stood at \$5.20 and \$4.70 per catty respectively yesterday, lower than their average daily wholesale prices last year. The supply of eggs to the wholesale market remained steady, with the average daily supply standing at about 3.4 million for the past week, comparable to the average daily supply on a normal day last year.

The total supply of chilled meat from the Mainland yesterday was about 34 tonnes. The supply of live pigs was plentiful.

The supply of chilled poultry from the Mainland was over 140 000 head yesterday, and over 8 000 live chickens were slaughtered locally. The supply was abundant.

Regarding the rice supply, in compliance with the requirement by the Government, stockholders of rice have to maintain the reserve stock of rice at a level sufficient for consumption by the local population for 15 days. The trade generally stocks double the required amount, which is sufficient for one month's consumption by Hong Kong citizens. In recent years, the import and consumption of rice in Hong Kong has stood at a steady level of around 320 000 to 330 000 tonnes per year. The import quantity (including reserve stock) as of end-March 2022 was 27 300 tonnes. Suppliers also maintain a reserve for food that can be stored, such as frozen meat, for around three months' stock generally.

The Government will continue to maintain close liaison with the Mainland authorities and major food suppliers to ensure a stable food supply.

The AFCD updates and publishes the fresh food supply information daily. Members of the public may visit the AFCD website for updates on daily supplies and wholesale prices of fresh food (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/agriculture/agr_fresh/agr_fresh.html).

Government enforces "restriction-testing declaration" and compulsory testing notice in respect of specified "restricted area" in Fuk Tai House, Ka Fuk Estate, Fanling

The Government yesterday (May 10) exercised the power under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to make a "restriction-testing declaration" effective from 4.30pm yesterday, under which people (hereafter referred to as "persons subject to compulsory testing") within the specified "restricted area" in Fanling (i.e. Fuk Tai House, Ka Fuk Estate, Fanling, excluding non-domestic units on G/F) were required to stay in their premises and undergo compulsory testing. Persons subject to compulsory testing are required to stay in their premises until all such persons identified in the "restricted area" have undergone testing and the test results are mostly ascertained.

In addition, the Government issued a compulsory testing notice yesterday to any person who had been present at the above building for more than two hours from May 4 to 10, 2022 to undergo compulsory testing on or before May 12, 2022 even if they were not present in the "restricted area" at the time when the declaration took effect. The Government finished the compulsory testing exercise at around 9.15am today (May 11) and is now carrying out enforcement actions in the "restricted area" to verify that all people in the "restricted area" have undergone compulsory testing. The Government will further announce the revocation time of the declaration.

Starting from around 9.15am today, persons in the specified "restricted area" in Fanling who have undergone testing and are able to present SMS notifications with negative test results as proof of having undergone testing may leave the "restricted area" through the designated exit after providing personal information to a prescribed officer.

The Government set up temporary specimen collection stations in the "restricted area" yesterday and requested persons subject to compulsory testing to collect combined nasal and throat swab samples at the stations to undergo a COVID-19 virus test before 9.30pm yesterday. Around 1 090 people within the area had undergone testing, among which 11 cases tested positive and 6 indeterminate cases were found. The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health will arrange to follow up.

Regarding cases tested positive in the specified "restricted area", the Government has provided additional food packs, health advice for persons tested positive pending admission to hospitals or isolation facilities, disinfection products and surgical masks to these persons and their household

members pending follow-up arrangement.

Moreover, the Government also assigned staff to visit 453 households within the "restricted area", among which 60 households did not answer the door. The Government will take measures to follow up.

The Government reiterates that enforcement actions will be taken seriously. Any person who fails to present an SMS notification with a test result as proof of having undergone testing breaches the compulsory testing notice and may be liable to a fine of \$10,000. The person will also be issued with a compulsory testing order, requiring him/her to undergo testing within a specified time frame. Failure to comply with the compulsory testing order or the "restriction-testing declaration" is an offence and the offender may be liable to a fine of level 5 (\$50,000) and imprisonment for six months.

Red flags hoisted at Shek O Beach and Clear Water Bay Second Beach

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (May 11) that due to big waves, red flags have been hoisted at Shek O Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island; and Clear Water Bay Second Beach in Sai Kung District. Beachgoers are advised not to swim at these beaches.