

## LCQ2: Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan and a reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (July 15):

The Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme, implemented for over a decade since its launch in 2009, aims to provide additional choices for the elderly on top of the public primary healthcare services, with a view to enhancing the primary healthcare services for the elderly. Some members of the public have criticized that after enhancement by the Government for a number of times, the Scheme still has long-standing shortcomings, including the small value and the narrow scope of use of health care vouchers, as well as the elderly being overcharged, etc. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) why the Government did not, for this year, provide each eligible elderly person with additional one-off health care vouchers amounting to \$1,000, as it did in June of the past two years; whether any mechanisms or criteria are currently in place for deciding if there is a need to adjust the value of health care vouchers; if so, of the details;

(2) whether it has studied the feasibility of the arrangements under which health care vouchers may be transferred for spouse's use; if so, of the outcome; if the outcome is in the negative, the reasons for that and the difficulties involved; and

(3) whether it will conduct in the near future a comprehensive review of the cost-effectiveness of the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme, so as to ensure that the implementation of the Scheme meets its original aim; if so, of the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government has implemented the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (the Scheme) since 2009. Currently, the Scheme provides an annual voucher amount of \$2,000 to eligible Hong Kong elders aged 65 or above to choose private primary healthcare services that best suit their health needs. The Scheme aims to enhance primary healthcare for the elderly and provide them with an added choice of service, thereby supplementing the existing public healthcare services and making it easier for the elders to receive healthcare services from their chosen service providers.

In consultation with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, my reply to the various parts of the question raised by the Hon Chan Hoi-yan is

as follows:

(1) In the Budgets of 2018-19 and 2019-20, the Government provided eligible elders with an additional, one-off voucher amount of \$1,000. The Government will consider whether there is a need to provide one-off support or relief measures, having regard to the economic prospect of the coming year, the Government's fiscal position and the needs of the various sectors in society. When considering whether there is a need to adjust the prevailing voucher amount, we must take into account various related factors and make a prudent assessment. The Government has implemented a number of enhancements to the Scheme in recent years, including progressively increasing the annual voucher amount from the initial \$250 to the current \$2,000, lowering the eligibility age from 70 to 65 in 2017, as well as raising the accumulation limit of the vouchers to \$8,000, allowing the use of the vouchers at District Health Centres (DHCs), and regularising the Pilot Scheme at the University of Hong Kong–Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH), etc., last year. With Hong Kong's aging population, we expect that both the number of elders who use the vouchers and the related financial commitment will continue to increase. When considering whether there is a need to adjust the voucher amount in the future, we will give full regard to the situation of Hong Kong's public and private healthcare services and the long-term implications on public finance, as well as carefully assess the Government's affordability.

(2) As regards whether couples should be allowed to share the voucher amounts, having considered that every elder's health conditions and needs are different, in order to ensure that the elders spend the vouchers on themselves and based on the principle of fairness, we consider that the use of the vouchers and the voucher accounts should continue to be on an individual basis. This can also help prevent the elders from transferring the vouchers to their spouse at the expense of their own needs. Allowing elders to share their voucher amounts is also misaligned with our policy objectives to encourage elders to better manage their own health and improve their primary healthcare. Hence, the Government has no plans to allow the sharing of voucher amounts by couples.

(3) The Department of Health (DH) completed a comprehensive review of the Scheme early last year. The findings of the review showed that the Scheme had largely achieved its intended objective, which is to provide elders with additional choices with respect to private primary healthcare in addition to public healthcare services. With the subsidies provided under the Scheme, elders can more easily obtain the preventive, curative and rehabilitative services that suit their health needs from their chosen private primary healthcare service providers in the community. According to a survey conducted under the review, the vouchers had been well received by the elderly users, as seen from their utilisation, awareness and attitude towards the Scheme. The Government had briefed the Legislative Council Panel on Health Services on the review findings and the proposed enhancement measures in March last year.

DH started to progressively roll out the various measures starting from mid-2019 to enhance the operation of the Scheme. The measures included

allowing the use of the vouchers at DHCs; strengthening education for the elders on the proper use of the vouchers and forward planning; enhancing the checking, auditing and monitoring on voucher claims; minimising over-concentration of voucher use; and regularisation of the Pilot Scheme at HKU-SZH, etc. Vouchers will continue to support the Government's policy objective of promoting primary healthcare, support elders' health needs, assist to enhance their awareness of disease prevention and self-management of health, as well as complement the development of DHCs.

That said, the review also showed that with respect to strengthening primary healthcare, the Scheme still had room to improve in some areas, including not yet being able to more effectively facilitate healthcare providers to provide and elders to use services which are in line with the Primary Healthcare Reference Framework, and enhance elders' awareness of prevention of various diseases and promote healthy living, etc. We will continue to keep in view the operation of the Scheme and make appropriate adjustments and take suitable measures as necessary, in order to ensure that the Scheme will align with the Government's policy objectives.

Thank you, President.

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## LCQ14: Provision of temporary public markets

Following is a question by the Hon Chu Hoi-dick and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (July 15):

Question:

In view of the fact that the new Tin Shui Wai public market under planning will only be completed in 2027 at the earliest, the Government announced in October last year the plan to provide a temporary market adjacent to Tin Sau Road Park in Tin Shui Wai. The temporary market, which will be built by adopting the "Modular Integrated Construction" approach at a cost of about \$30 million, is expected to commence operation at the end of this year the soonest. Regarding issues relating to the provision of temporary public markets, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the time taken by the Government to conduct the relevant study before it announced last year the plan to provide a temporary market in Tin Shui Wai; whether it has compiled statistics on the shortest time needed for providing a temporary public market from initial thinking to commissioning upon completion;

(2) given that both Tung Chung New Town and Tin Shui Wai are in lack of a public market, and an implementation timetable is not yet available for the provision of a permanent public market in Tung Chung as planned by the Government, whether the Government will, by making reference to the practice it has adopted for Tin Shui Wai, expeditiously provide a temporary public market in Tung Chung New Town to cater for local residents' daily shopping needs in the short run; and

(3) whether it will draw up the criteria for determining the need for the provision of temporary public markets, e.g. that a temporary public market should be provided in a certain district when the need for the provision of a permanent public market in that district has been confirmed but it is impossible for the new market to be commissioned within a certain period of time?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the various parts of the question is as follows:

(1) The Chief Executive announced in the 2018 Policy Address that a new public market would be built at the section of Tin Fuk Road opposite Tin Shui Wai Station of the West Rail Line. Subsequently, we announced in October 2019 the establishment of a temporary market adjacent to Tin Sau Road Park in Tin Shui Wai, so that the public can have an additional choice for purchasing fresh provisions early before the completion of the construction of the new public market. The Modular Integrated Construction method is adopted to shorten the on-site construction time as far as possible, with a view to having the market completed and commissioned early for the benefit of the public. We are pressing ahead with the temporary market project. Subject to the actual progress, it is expected to be completed and commissioned by the end of 2020 at the earliest.

Depending on factors such as scale of works and technical requirements, etc., the time required to take forward individual projects varies from case to case and cannot be generalised.

(2) and (3) The site of the Tung Chung Town Centre new public market will be located on the lower floors of a commercial building in Area 6 adjacent to Tung Chung Mass Transit Railway (MTR) Station. It is planned to be built by the developer of the commercial building and the market design will be prepared by the developer according to the requirements and conditions specified by the Government. The technical feasibility study for the entire development project (including the public market portion) is underway. We will brief the District Council concerned on the project details in a timely manner upon completion of the study. As for the new market project in Tung Chung New Town Extension, the preliminary planning is underway. The project will tie in with the housing development plan of the district. Details of the project will be confirmed upon completion of the preliminary planning.

Providing a public market requires the use of scarce land resources and entails public financial commitment, both capital and recurrent. We have to duly assess the need for the market and cost-effectiveness to ensure proper use of public resources. Whether a temporary market should be built before the commissioning of a permanent public market depends on the actual needs and cost-effectiveness, as well as the availability of suitable sites in the vicinity. Besides, temporary markets will also need to fulfil the relevant hygiene and safety requirements. Considerable amount of resources will be required to provide the basic facilities, such as ceiling, stall partitions, electrical installations, water supply system, drainage system, sewage system, ventilation facilities, lighting system, fire safety system, refuse handling facilities, loading and unloading areas, etc. The difficulty in identifying locations for the provision of temporary markets in Tung Chung Town Centre and other developed areas cannot be underestimated.

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## **LCQ3: Measures to support employment**

Following is a question by the Hon Vincent Cheng and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (July 15):

Question:

Amid a rapid downturn of Hong Kong's economy which has been caused by the epidemic, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate from March to May this year was 5.9 per cent, with the numbers of unemployed and underemployed persons surging to 230 000 and 130 000 respectively. To support employment, the Government has earmarked \$6 billion under the Anti-epidemic Fund to create approximate 30 000 time-limited posts in both the public and private sectors in the coming two years, and is disbursing a subsidy of \$7,500 to each eligible self-employed person (SEP) under the Employment Support Scheme. Regarding the measures to support employment, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has assessed the numbers and percentages of professional, skilled and non-skilled posts in the approximate 30 000 time-limited posts;

(2) given that among the almost 260 000 subsidy applications submitted by SEPs, about 140 000 applications were rejected, whether the Government will expeditiously review the effectiveness of the Scheme, and when it will introduce new measures to support SEPs; and

(3) whether it has assessed the industries that will recover at a slower pace, and of the plans in place to provide more timely support for such industries?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the relevant policy bureaux and departments, my consolidated response to the Member's question is set out below:

(1) To relieve the worsening unemployment situation due to the pandemic and the anti-epidemic measures, \$6 billion has been earmarked under the second round of the Anti-epidemic Fund (AEF) to implement the Job Creation Scheme. Under the Scheme, around 30 000 time-limited jobs would be created in the public and private sectors in the coming two years for people of different skill sets and academic qualifications, including technical or non-skilled staff, clerical staff and professionals, etc. As at end June 2020, the planning of around 20 000 jobs (including around 13 500 jobs in the Government and around 6 500 jobs in the non-governmental sector) has reached an advanced stage. Among these 20 000 time-limited positions, the number and percentage of professional, technical and non-skilled positions are as follows:

Type of positions	Number	Percentage
Professional	About 3 800	19%
Technical	About 1 900	10%
Non-skilled	About 4 600	23%
Others	About 9 700	48%
Total	About 20 000	100%

Save for professional, technical and non-skilled positions, other positions include those created specifically for fresh graduates, positions for providing executive and clerical support services, and those for carrying out anti-epidemic work relating to COVID-19, etc.

(2) Apart from providing wage subsidies for employers, the Employment Support Scheme (ESS) also provides one-off lump-sum subsidy of \$7,500 to self-employed persons (SEPs). An applicant must have enrolled himself or herself in a Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Scheme as an SEP and the relevant SEP MPF account should have been set up on or before March 31, 2020 (i.e. it cannot be backdated to that date or any earlier dates) and had not been terminated as of March 31, 2020. The ESS Secretariat (the Secretariat) received a total of 259 860 applications from SEPs during the application period. Thus far, about 156 000 applications have not been approved.

The main reason for rejecting the applications is that the relevant applicants fail to meet the eligibility criteria, including applications were submitted based on an employee MPF account or a personal account created after termination of previous self-employment, rather than a dedicated SEP MPF account, or the relevant SEP MPF accounts had already been terminated on or before March 31, 2020. There are also cases where some applicants have

provided in the application forms information regarding their SEP MPF accounts, which is not consistent with the records kept by the MPF trustees. The Secretariat has already informed these applicants that, if they have any questions, they should enquire through sending email to [subsidy@employmentsupport.hk](mailto:subsidy@employmentsupport.hk) within 14 days from the date of receipt of the notification from the Secretariat. The Secretariat will follow up as soon as practicable.

We are reviewing the experiences and arrangements of the first tranche of ESS and expect to announce application details of the second tranche in mid-August, including considering allowing about 100 000 SEPs who fulfill the eligibility criteria but did not apply for the one-off lump-sum subsidy under the first tranche of ESS to apply.

(3) In light of the development of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), the Government has been taking vigilant anti-epidemic measures to contain the public health risk. Having regard to the impact of these measures on the livelihood of individuals and business operation, the Government secured the approval of the LegCo Finance Committee (FC) on February 21, 2020 for a commitment of \$30 billion to set up the AEF. The purposes of the AEF are to enhance Hong Kong's capability in combating the pandemic, and to provide assistance or relief to enterprises and members of the public hard hit by the pandemic or affected by anti-epidemic measures. Taking into account the development of the pandemic and the overall situation, the Chief Executive announced on April 8, 2020 a comprehensive package of measures involving over \$130 billion in funding to support eligible individuals and businesses. The Government secured FC's approval on April 18, 2020 for the relevant funding application, including a \$120.5 billion injection to the AEF to implement second-round relief measures. The measures under the second-round AEF aims to preserve employment and assist the self-employed irrespective of the sectors to which they belong, provide extra relief to those sectors hard hit by the pandemic and pave the way for post-pandemic economic recovery.

A total financial commitment of \$150.5 billion was approved by FC for the two rounds of AEF. As of June 26, 2020, the AEF has launched 66 measures with the financial commitment amounted to over \$142 billion and nearly \$48 billion of subsidies disbursed/paid, benefitting over 5.93 million (Note) persons and about one million applications from enterprises/licence holders. There was an uncommitted contingency of around \$8 billion. The AEF Steering Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of various measures and roll out further measures to plug the gap in existing measures based on the recommendations from bureaux/departments, so as to benefit more enterprises and individuals affected by the pandemic.

Note: Including 3.93 million persons registered through the online platform to collect the CuMask+™.

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# **Fraudulent website related to Airstar Bank Limited**

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by Airstar Bank Limited on fraudulent website, which has been reported to the HKMA. Hyperlink to the press release is available on the [HKMA website](#) for ease of reference by members of the public.

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information to the website concerned or has conducted any financial transactions through the website should contact the bank concerned using the contact information provided in the press release, and report to the Police or contact the Cyber Security and Technology Crime Bureau of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

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# **Applications invited for Partnership Projects 2020 under ICH Funding Scheme**

The Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Office of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) invited applications for the Partnership Projects 2020 under the ICH Funding Scheme today (July 15).

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Applications are invited for eight items under the Partnership Projects 2020. The new items are the Survey on ICH of Different Groups in Hong Kong, the Monograph Series on ICH of Hong Kong, the Picture Book Series on ICH of Hong Kong, the ICH Hub, the ICH Domain and ICH for All. In addition, the Research and Publication on the Items of the Representative List of the ICH of Hong Kong and the Survey and Research for Enriching the ICH Inventory of Hong Kong will be relaunched.

The successful applicants of the Survey on ICH of Different Groups in Hong Kong will conduct a comprehensive survey of the ICH of communities that have settled in Hong Kong including those of Filipino, Indonesian, Indian, Nepalese, Pakistani, Thai and Vietnamese people.

Through the themes "Hong Kong ICH in Traditional Culture" and "Hong Kong ICH in the Natural and Cultural Settings of Lingnan" under the Monograph Series on ICH of Hong Kong, the successful applicants will conduct research and publish monographs to explore from a macro level the cultural and natural grounds on which the ICH of Hong Kong is rooted.



The Picture Book Series on ICH of Hong Kong will produce 10 picture books featuring a simplistic approach and stage a series of fringe activities to vividly introduce and promote ICH to primary school students as well as to enhance their interest in and understanding of ICH.

A guest curator or organisation with extensive experience in exhibition curatorship will be invited to plan, interpret, design and set up the ICH Hub, covering 200 square metres, as well as to build the ICH Hub brand to attract the younger generation in promoting and safeguarding ICH.

The ICH Domain will provide a wide array of activities for teachers and students in concert with the revamp of the exhibition at the Hong Kong ICH Centre in the Sam Tung Uk Museum, so as to enhance their understanding of ICH and encourage them to visit the ICH Centre through participation in the Centre's activities.

ICH for All will organise a wide variety of activities for persons with special educational needs and disabilities, allowing them to better understand the ICH in Hong Kong and achieve greater social inclusion.

The successful applicants of the relaunched Research and Publication on the Items of the Representative List of the ICH of Hong Kong will conduct in-depth research on the cultural content, historical development and transmission of the items inscribed onto the Representative List of the ICH of Hong Kong, as well as collect relevant documents and photographic materials for publication of monographs.

Regarding the Survey and Research for Enriching the ICH Inventory of Hong Kong, the successful applicants will conduct surveys and research on items not yet included in the ICH inventory of Hong Kong.

Application information is available at the ICH Office website ([www.lcsd.gov.hk/ICH0](http://www.lcsd.gov.hk/ICH0)). The deadline for applications is noon on August 27.