

# COVID-19 Online Dispute Resolution Scheme launched today (with photos)

In anticipation of an upsurge of disputes arising from or relating to COVID-19, the Government announced on April 8 the establishment of the COVID-19 Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) Scheme under the Anti-epidemic Fund to provide speedy and cost effective ODR services to the general public and businesses, in particular micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. The Scheme is launched today (June 29). The eBRAM International Online Dispute Resolution Centre (eBRAM Centre) has been engaged to provide ODR and related services under the Scheme and will operate the Scheme independently.

The Scheme will cover:

- (1) disputes arising out of or in relation to COVID-19 directly or indirectly;
- (2) cases where the claim amount is not more than \$500,000; and
- (3) cases where either one of the parties to the dispute is a Hong Kong resident or company.

The parties are required to enter into a dispute resolution agreement under the Scheme and pay \$200 each as registration fees. The fees for mediators and arbitrators will be paid by the Government.

Under the Scheme, parties will attempt to resolve their disputes through a multi-tiered dispute resolution mechanism comprising negotiation, mediation and arbitration. Each tier will be conducted within a limited time. The Scheme aims to offer a speedy and cost effective means to resolve disputes among parties, avoiding disputes and differences from being entrenched, thereby helping to build and reinforce a harmonious society. It may help relieve the court's caseload in civil claims and have the benefit of job creation and job advancement for the legal and dispute resolution sector. Moreover, the Scheme will utilise an ODR platform thereby strengthening Hong Kong's lawtech capability.

With the soft launch of the platform under the Scheme, eBRAM Centre has commenced a series of publicity work to introduce the Scheme to stakeholders and the public. For instance, eBRAM Centre delivered a presentation at the Department of Justice this morning demonstrating the operation of the ODR platform and process. For more details on the Scheme, please visit the website ([www.ebram.org/covid\\_19\\_odr.html](http://www.ebram.org/covid_19_odr.html)).



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## Subsidy for employers of long-term casual employees under Anti-epidemic Fund for construction sector to open for application next month

The Development Bureau (DEVB) announced today (June 29) that the subsidy offered to construction sector employers who have employed casual employees on a long-term basis will be open for application from July 6 to 31.

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If an employer in the construction sector has made contributions for a "casual employee" under the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) Industry Schemes for at least 15 days in March this year, the employee will be regarded as a "qualified employee". An employer may apply for a subsidy of \$36,000 per "qualified employee". Successful applicants have to undertake not to make their employees redundant between August 2020 and January 2021 and to spend the full amount of the subsidy on paying wages to their "qualified employees".

The Government has appointed the Construction Industry Council (CIC) to handle the applications and subsidy disbursement. Applicants will have to download the application and undertaking forms from the CIC's website and submit the completed forms together with supporting documents via email.

Applicants have to authorise the MPF trustees to provide their MPF contribution data in March this year and from August 2020 to January 2021 directly to the Government and the CIC. The Government and the CIC will process the applications and determine the number of "qualified employees" and the approved subsidy amount based on the contribution data, which will also be used in the future for monitoring the applicants' compliance with their undertakings.

"We expect the subsidy will be disbursed to applicants within six to

eight weeks upon receipt of applications. The CIC will notify the applicants of the results via email, and arrange for the disbursement of the subsidies by autopay," a spokesman for the DEVB said.

On the other hand, the one-off subsidy of \$20,000 offered to eligible suppliers of construction-related machinery and equipment rental under the second round of the Anti-epidemic Fund is open for application from June 23 until August 31. To submit their applications, applicants have to submit the completed application form together with supporting documents to the DEVB by email. Suppliers may visit the CIC's website for more details:

[www.cic.hk/eng/main/anti\\_epidemic\\_fund\\_2nd/suppliers/](http://www.cic.hk/eng/main/anti_epidemic_fund_2nd/suppliers/).

The Government has launched two rounds of the Anti-epidemic Fund so far. As of yesterday (June 28), a total of more than \$4.3 billion in subsidies had been disbursed to some 440 000 construction workers and some 16 000 construction-related enterprises.

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## **CHP investigates suspected case of food poisoning**

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health is today (June 29) investigating a suspected food poisoning case involving consumption of mushrooms.

The case involves a man aged 53 and a woman aged 56, who developed vomiting, diarrhoea, cold sweating and abdominal pain around five hours after consuming cooked mushrooms at home yesterday (June 28). The mushrooms were bought from a store in Sham Shui Po. The patients sought medical attention at the Accident and Emergency Department of Yan Chai Hospital today and were admitted for further management. They are in stable condition.

The CHP investigations are ongoing and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department was also alerted to the incident.

"Mushroom poisoning is generally acute. Common presentations include gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain appearing shortly after ingestion. Depending on the mushroom species, patients may also have other symptoms like profuse sweating, hallucination, coma or other neurological symptoms as well as liver failure. Death may result in severe cases," a CHP spokesman said.

"We advise the public to buy mushrooms from reputable and reliable suppliers and not to buy mushroom products which may be mixed with unknown species. Members of the public should not pick wild mushrooms for consumption as it is difficult to distinguish edible mushroom species from inedible ones.

Mixing of edible species with inedible or poisonous species of mushroom will not dilute toxicity. Cooking in most cases does not destroy toxicity," the spokesman added.

"If mushroom poisoning is suspected, the patient should seek immediate medical attention and bring along any available remnant for identification," the spokesman said.

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## **HKSAR Government welcomes decision to launch cross-boundary wealth management connect pilot scheme**

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) welcomes the joint announcement by the People's Bank of China (PBoC), the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) and the Monetary Authority of Macao (AMCM) today (June 29) on the decision to implement the two-way cross-boundary wealth management connect pilot scheme (Wealth Management Connect) in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, under which residents in Hong Kong, Macao and nine cities in Guangdong Province could carry out cross-boundary investment in wealth management products distributed by banks in the area.

Promoting mutual access of the financial markets progressively for the establishment of an international financial hub is an important area in the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Since the promulgation of the Outline Development Plan in February 2019, the HKSAR Government has been actively putting forward possible measures to the Central Government. Following its third plenary meeting held on November 6, 2019, the Leading Group for the Development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area announced its support for the exploration of the establishment of a cross-boundary wealth management connect mechanism. The HKMA has since then been working closely with the relevant Mainland and Macao authorities on Wealth Management Connect, which is an important measure for the financial development of the Greater Bay Area and marks another milestone in promoting mutual access of financial markets in the area.

According to the joint announcement, relevant regulators in the Mainland, Hong Kong and Macao will discuss and agree on the implementation details including investor eligibility, the mode of investment, the scope of eligible investment products, investor protection and handling of disputes. The date of the formal launch of Wealth Management Connect and implementation details will be separately specified.

The Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, said, "We are very grateful for the

support of the Leading Group and the joint efforts of the PBoC, the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission, the China Securities Regulatory Commission and the AMCM to make the launch of this important initiative possible, thereby fostering the collaboration and development of financial services in the Greater Bay Area."

The Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, said, "Wealth Management Connect brings enormous business opportunities to the entire financial industry value chain and other professional services in Hong Kong, opens up a broader market for the financial sectors of the three places and provides more wealth management product choices for the residents in the Greater Bay Area, thereby promoting the cross-boundary flow and use of Renminbi (RMB) and reinforcing further Hong Kong's position as the global offshore RMB business hub. At the same time, Wealth Management Connect provides more incentives for international financial institutions to have a foothold and invest more resources in Hong Kong so as to serve the large investor base in Greater Bay Area cities, which will in turn strengthen Hong Kong's role as the international asset and management centre and important gateway for capital flowing into and out of the Mainland."

Mrs Lam added, "The launch of Wealth Management Connect demonstrates the strong support of the Central Government and the importance it attaches to financial development in the Greater Bay Area, underlining the solid backing from the country and that Hong Kong continues to play a leading role in the country's economic development and opening up of financial markets. With the formulation of the national security law, Hong Kong will restore its stability, rule of law and sound business environment, thereby securing investors' confidence and further consolidating and enhancing Hong Kong's position as an international financial centre."

The Central Government promulgated the "Opinion on Providing Financial Support for the Development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area" on May 14, introducing various concrete measures, including Wealth Management Connect, in relation to the development of Greater Bay Area finance. The Government will continue to promote and implement in an orderly manner further measures in the Opinion to deepen financial collaboration in the Greater Bay Area.

The HKMA will maintain close communication with the relevant Mainland and Macao authorities to take forward preparations. The date of the formal launch of Wealth Management Connect and implementation details will be finalised as early as practicable.

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## Monthly threshold of Public Transport

# Fare Subsidy Scheme to be temporarily relaxed to \$200 from July to December

The Transport Department (TD) today (June 29) reminded members of the public that from July 1 till December 31, the Government will temporarily relax the monthly threshold of the Public Transport Fare Subsidy Scheme to \$200.

"The local economy has been hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in the past few months. With a view to further alleviating commuters' fare burden amidst the coronavirus pandemic situation, the Government will temporarily relax the monthly threshold for calculation of the subsidy from \$400 to \$200 from July 1 to December 31, 2020. The Government will provide a subsidy amounting to one-third of the actual public transport expenses in excess of \$200, subject to a maximum of \$400 per month for each Octopus. The estimated number of beneficiaries under the Scheme will increase from around 2.2 million to around 3.8 million per month. Commuters can collect the enhanced subsidy from August 16 onwards," the TD spokesman said.

Commuters can check their record of public transport expenses and subsidy amounts through the website of the Scheme ([www.ptfss.gov.hk](http://www.ptfss.gov.hk)), the Octopus App or the Scheme hotline 2969 5500. For enquires about the details of the Scheme, please browse through the website of the Scheme or call 1823.