

CE expresses deep sorrow over passing of COVID-19 patients

On the occasion of Ching Ming Festival today (April 5), the Chief Executive, Mrs Carrie Lam, on behalf of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), expressed deep sorrow over the passing of COVID-19 patients amid the epidemic, and extended her deepest condolences to the families and friends of the deceased. She also expressed her gratitude to an alliance formed by local social welfare organisations to fight the epidemic for mobilising six religious groups (Buddhism, Catholicism, Confucianism, Islam, Christianity and Taoism) to produce a video aired today in memory of the deceased.

Over the past two years or so, the HKSAR Government has been steadfastly implementing the strategy of "preventing the importation of cases and the spread of the virus in the community" in fighting the epidemic to safeguard the lives and health of the people of Hong Kong. It has also enhanced the support for the residential care homes for the elderly, promoted vaccination among the elderly and mandated the personnel of the residential care homes to take regular virus tests to prevent large-scale infections. However, upon the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant strain, the fifth wave of the epidemic has been rapid and fierce. The epidemic situation has quickly deteriorated since the Lunar New Year in early February, outgrowing the capacities of various parts of the HKSAR Government's anti-epidemic chain. The situation has been so critical that thousands of staff members, and tens of thousands of residents, at residential care homes have been infected. It is saddening that over 8 000 deaths, of which more than 90 per cent are elderly people aged 65 or above, have been recorded to date amid the current wave.

In response to the epidemic development and taking into account the views of the Mainland experts sent in by the Central Government to support Hong Kong's anti-epidemic work, the HKSAR Government has since early March focused on reducing deaths, severe cases and infections in its current-stage anti-epidemic work, addressing infection risks in key groups of people, premises and organisations, and according priority to the elderly. The HKSAR Government has been enhancing its anti-epidemic capabilities on various fronts and leveraging the Central Government's support to admit and treat COVID-19 patients. The measures implemented include supporting the Hospital Authority to procure sufficient quantities of two COVID-19 oral drugs for prescription and convert Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Kowloon Central Cluster and other hospitals into designated hospitals for COVID-19 patients; increasing the capability of the community treatment facility at AsiaWorld-Expo with the integration of Chinese and Western medicines in treatment; and setting up various holding centres to take care of those elderly patients at residential care homes with mild or no symptoms and those in the course of recovery and suitable for admission. The HKSAR Government has also strengthened support for the residential care homes for the elderly and

people under isolation or quarantine at home by distributing to them anti-epidemic kits as well as ramping up designated clinics and support hotlines. Last Saturday (April 2), distribution of anti-epidemic service bags to all households started.

Mrs Lam said, "The first three months of 2022 have just passed, when Hong Kong has been facing the most severe situation since the global outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in early 2020. The epidemic situation has caused anxiety and sorrow to members of the public who have lost their loved ones. The HKSAR Government will spare no effort in working in unity with all sectors of society and leveraging the staunch support of the Central Government to stabilise the epidemic as soon as possible."