

Government to Launch Elderly Health Care Voucher Pilot Reward Scheme next Monday

The Department of Health (DH) today (November 9) announced that the Government will launch the three-year Elderly Health Care Voucher Pilot Reward Scheme (Pilot Reward Scheme) next Monday (November 13) to optimise the use of resources so as to promote primary healthcare and support the healthcare needs of elderly persons. Through providing rewards, the Government encourages eligible Hong Kong elderly persons aged 65 or above to use health care vouchers on designated primary healthcare services provided by the private healthcare service sector. It is estimated that almost 1.7 million eligible elderly persons will be able to benefit from the Pilot Reward Scheme.

The Government launched the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (EHVS) in 2009. The policy objective is to strengthen disease prevention and health management through providing financial incentives enabling elderly persons to choose private primary healthcare services that best suit their needs. The Pilot Reward Scheme proposed in "The Chief Executive's 2022 Policy Address" is to further incentivise elderly persons by guiding them to make better use of healthcare vouchers for continuous preventive healthcare and chronic disease management services, so as to achieve the original policy objective of the EHVS, and tie in with the main development direction focusing on disease prevention as put forward in the Primary Healthcare Blueprint.

The Pilot Reward Scheme will be implemented from November 13 this year until December 31, 2026. For each year during this period, elderly persons only need to accumulate the use of vouchers of \$1,000 or more on designated primary healthcare purposes such as disease prevention and health management services within the year (from January to December), and they will be automatically allotted a \$500 reward into their voucher account by the eHealth (System) Subsidies (System), which can be used on the same designated primary healthcare purposes, without the need for registration. In other words, for elderly persons who met the above criterion and are allotted the reward, the amount of vouchers they receive in that year is increased from \$2,000 to \$2,500.

The designated primary healthcare services under the Pilot Reward Scheme include:

- (i) Services on disease prevention and follow-up/monitoring of long-term conditions provided by medical practitioners, Chinese medicine practitioners and dentists enrolled in the EHVS, such as health assessment, body check, screening, vaccination, treatment of chronic diseases, dental examination, scaling, extraction and filling, etc;
- (ii) Hypertension and diabetes mellitus screening, as well as treatment phase services provided under the Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme;
- (iii) Personalised services and Community Rehabilitation Programme provided

by District Health Centres/District Health Centre Expresses; and
(iv) Outpatient services on preventive and follow-up/monitoring of long-term conditions provided by 11 designated Outpatient Medical Centers of the University of Hong Kong – Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZ Hospital) and the Health Centre operated by the HKU-SZ Hospital.

Under the Pilot Reward Scheme, special arrangement is made for the period for accumulating voucher spending for the first-year reward (i.e. 2024 Reward). The period of accumulation will start on November 13 this year and end on December 31 next year (i.e. 2024). The corresponding accumulation period for the two years in 2025 and 2026 will begin on January 1 and end on December 31 of the year. Each elderly person can be allotted the reward once each year at most, and the reward for each year can be used until December 31 of the following year. Unused rewards cannot be accumulated and will lapse after the expiry date. Accumulation of voucher spending will start afresh at the beginning of each year.

The annual voucher amount provided to an elderly person is kept separate from the amount of reward allotted, hence the accumulation limit of vouchers (currently set at \$8,000) will not be affected. When an elderly person uses voucher to pay for designated primary healthcare service fee, the System will automatically deduct the relevant fee from the reward (if available) first, and then deduct the remaining fee from the balance in his/her voucher account if necessary. The amount of the reward used to pay for designated primary healthcare service fees will not count towards the accumulated voucher spending for obtaining the reward; i.e. a reward cannot be used to earn another reward.

In addition, according to the "user accumulates" principle, if an elderly person uses his/her spouse's voucher to pay for designated primary healthcare services, the amount spent will only be recorded as his/her own accumulated voucher spending and cannot be counted together with the accumulated voucher spending of his/her spouse's. Shared use of reward between spouses is not allowed. Whenever an elderly person uses reward and/or voucher to pay for designated primary healthcare service fees, he/she will receive an SMS message notification about the balance of his/her reward and/or voucher. Elderly persons should consult the healthcare service provider when receiving healthcare services for queries about the related record.

A spokesman for the DH reminded, "The reward for each year comes with an expiry date, after which it will lapse. The relevant arrangement aims to encourage elderly persons to seek health management services regularly. Elderly persons should take note and make a thorough plan on how to make the best use of the reward for designated primary healthcare services before it expires."

To ensure the proper use of public money, the DH will strictly deal with all suspected cases of non-compliance in accordance with the established monitoring mechanism, and take appropriate measures or actions including referring cases to the law enforcement agencies and/or the relevant professional regulatory boards or councils for follow-up as appropriate.

The spokesman added, "The DH and healthcare service providers will never, in relation to the use of vouchers or reward, ask elderly persons to provide bank account information (including passwords etc) via phone calls or SMS messages, or to click on a web link. Elderly persons should stay vigilant against scams."

To ensure healthcare service providers' understanding of the operation of the Pilot Reward Scheme, the DH has held briefing sessions for relevant healthcare service providers from end-October, and explained the detailed arrangements and responded to their enquiries.

The Government will closely monitor the implementation of the Pilot Reward Scheme and evaluate its effectiveness in promoting the receipt of health assessment, disease screening and chronic disease management services by elderly persons. We will also continue to review the health benefits brought by the EHVS in planning for the future development of primary healthcare.

â€œIf members of the public would like to obtain more information on the EHVS, they may browse the EHVS website (www.hcv.gov.hk) or call the EHVS hotline (2838 2311).