

Relief and enhancement measures under Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme

The Department of Health (DH) today (June 5) announced that, as a relief measure in the 2019-20 Budget, an additional \$1,000 worth of Elderly Health Care Vouchers will be provided, on a one-off basis, to each eligible elderly person with effect from June 26. The accumulation limit of the vouchers will also be increased to \$8,000 on the same day. It is estimated that the above measures will benefit about 1.3 million elderly people.

The following enhancement measures will also take effect on June 26:

- (a) setting a cap of \$2,000 every two years on the voucher amount that can be spent on optometry services;
- (b) improving the enquiry system for checking voucher balances; and
- (c) regularising the Pilot Scheme at the University of Hong Kong – Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH).

"In January 2019, the annual voucher amount of \$2,000 was released to all eHealth (Subsidies) accounts of elderly people aged 65 or above. With the passage of the Appropriation Bill 2019, an additional one-off \$1,000 worth of vouchers will be deposited into their accounts on June 26," a spokesman for the DH said.

The spokesman added, "In view of the outcome of a review on the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme, the DH will also implement several enhancement measures with effect from June 26 to enable eligible elderly people to make better use of their vouchers.

"The accumulation limit of the vouchers will also be raised from \$5,000 to \$8,000 as a regular measure. Persons aged 65 or above in 2019 (i.e. those born in 1954 or before) who have yet to create an eHealth (Subsidies) account on June 26 will receive their entitled voucher amount on the day they create an account, including the additional \$1,000, subject to the accumulation limit of \$8,000.

"Furthermore, a cap of \$2,000 every two years on the voucher amount that can be spent on optometry services will be introduced to encourage elderly people to use the vouchers on different primary healthcare services. For elderly people who are eligible to use vouchers in 2019 (i.e. those born in 1954 or before), the first cycle will run from June 26, 2019, to December 31, 2020 (i.e. the capping amount is still \$2,000 despite the first cycle being less than two years), while the second cycle will run from January 1, 2021, to December 31, 2022, and so on. For elderly people born in 1955 or after, the relevant cycle will start to count from January 1 of the year in which they become eligible to use vouchers.

"Elderly people can currently check their voucher balances via the

Scheme's website and Interactive Voice Response System (2838 0511). The services will be improved from June 26 to allow elderly people to also check the amount of vouchers to be disbursed to their accounts on January 1 of the coming year, and the amount of vouchers expected to be forfeited on that day due to the accumulation limit being exceeded. We expect that the new measure can help elderly people more effectively manage and plan for the use of their vouchers.

"To safeguard the rights of elderly people, we suggest that voucher users learn about the service fees and check their voucher balance before using the vouchers to avoid being charged by service providers at a higher rate than non-voucher users.

"In addition, the Government will regularise the Pilot Scheme at HKU-SZH launched in 2015, allowing eligible elderly people to continue to use the vouchers to pay for outpatient services provided by designated departments at HKU-SZH. This will enable Hong Kong elderly people who reside in places near Shenzhen to use primary healthcare services in Shenzhen."

The Scheme aims to subsidise eligible elderly people to use private primary healthcare services. Vouchers are issued and used through an electronic platform. Elderly people do not need to pre-register, collect or carry the vouchers. Elderly people who intend to use the vouchers only need to show to the participating service providers their valid Hong Kong identity card or Certificate of Exemption issued by the Immigration Department, and sign a consent form confirming the voucher amount to be used after receiving healthcare services in person. For elderly people who do not have an eHealth (Subsidies) account, the service providers will create an account for them on the same occasion free of charge.

The DH will later issue letters to notify participating service providers of the details of the above measures, and publicise them to members of the public through different channels. Members of the public may also visit the Scheme's website (www.hcv.gov.hk) or call the enquiry hotline (2838 2311) for relevant information.