

Speech by FS at HKHS International Housing Conference 2018 (English only) (with photos/video)

Following is the speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at the HKHS International Housing Conference 2018: "Building a Smart and Liveable City for an Ageing Community" today (November 2):

Walter (Chairman of the Hong Kong Housing Society, Mr Walter Chan), Mr Tan (Deputy Director of the Liaison Office of the Central People's Government in the HKSAR Mr Tan Tieniu), government colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

First and foremost, I congratulate the Hong Kong Housing Society on its 70th Anniversary. Also, a very warm welcome to Hong Kong to our friends from the Mainland and overseas.

Back in 1948, when the Hong Kong Housing Society was established, Hong Kong's population was only around 1.8 million. Today, Hong Kong is home to more than 7.4 million people. Throughout Hong Kong's rapid growth and transformation over the past 70 years, the Housing Society has moved with the times, providing innovative solutions to meet the housing needs of our fast-changing community.

Yet, there is still much more to be done. The theme of this year's conference, "Building a Smart and Liveable City for an Ageing Community", reflects both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. It also echoes the Government's vision for a modern and liveable environment for all.

It is anticipated that Hong Kong's population aged over 65 years old will reach 2.37 million, amounting to 31 per cent of our population, by 2036. That represents a doubling of the number of people in this age group compared to 2016,. In light of Hong Kong's ageing population, we need to be forward-looking in our approach to make Hong Kong a better city for our senior citizens to enjoy a comfortable and fulfilling time in their later years. The Government strives to achieve this objective in different ways.

Housing Policy

The Government first announced the Long Term Housing Strategy (the Strategy) back in December 2014, the first long-term strategic document on housing since 1998. It sets out the Government's vision of helping all households in Hong Kong gain access to adequate and affordable housing – in other words, "housing for all". And of course, elderly is included.

As reaffirmed in the Strategy, the Housing Society has been an important partner of the Government in implementing housing policy and has assumed the very unique role of being a "housing laboratory". As a pioneer in the face of challenges posed by an ageing population, the Housing Society has spared no effort in promoting age-friendly home concepts and providing ageing-in-place support for the elderly.

Over the past seven decades, the Housing Society has rolled out several programmes to meet the housing needs of the elderly from different socio-economic backgrounds. For the lower-income elderly, the Housing Society provides around 1 000 elderly person's flats at concessionary rents in its rental estates. Housing, healthcare and social care support are provided under a three-pronged model in 20 rental estates.

For middle-income elderly, the Housing Society has implemented the Senior Citizen Residences Scheme (SEN) since 2003. This Scheme comprises housing and care services under one roof and is the first of its kind in Hong Kong. It provides elderly residents with holistic care services including medical, professional care and rehabilitation services, as well as catering and recreational facilities. The current projects in Tseung Kwan O and Jordan Valley together with a new project in Hung Hom can provide around 1 000 units for this purpose, but of course we need more.

As for elderly people who are more financially capable and may have higher expectations after retirement, the Housing Society has launched the Tanner Hill project, which is another ground-breaking elderly housing initiative. This non-subsidised senior housing project comprises about 590 independent living units affixed with home care support features and comprehensive healthcare and supporting facilities. The project can serve as a model for the private sector to encourage private developers to provide purpose-built elderly housing in order to meet the needs of the ageing community.

In addition to the Housing Society, the Hong Kong Housing Authority has also introduced a series of policies and measures in favour of our elderly. The Housing Authority aims to provide an age-friendly and barrier-free access environment in housing estate to address the needs of residents of different ages and physical abilities. For example, the Housing Authority has introduced various Harmonious Families Schemes to encourage the younger generation to live together with their parents and to take good care of them.

Elderly people may also need a suitable physical environment to help them carry out basic daily activities safely and independently, including barrier-free access within the estate and well-designed homes and facilities. In view of these special needs, the Housing Authority has since 2002 gradually adopted the concept of "Universal Design" in residential units and common areas of newly built public rental housing estates. For existing public rental housing units, the Housing Authority undertakes works to adapt or modify homes to suit the needs of current or prospective elderly residents, with advice from physiotherapists or medical professionals.

Apart from the on-going efforts of both the Housing Society and the Housing Authority, we see value in introducing more elderly-friendly measures while making better use of our existing housing resources. As announced in the Policy Address, the Government has accepted the Housing Society's recommendation of launching a Flat for Flat Pilot Scheme for Elderly Owners on a trial basis for its subsidised sale flats with premium not yet paid. Under the Pilot Scheme, elderly owners can sell their original flats and then buy a smaller one in the Secondary Market without having to pay premium. This enables eligible elderly owners to move into flats which better suit their needs, for instance, closer to family members. By trading down, they would have more money to spend.

The Policy Address also suggests that the Housing Authority launch a new concessionary initiative allowing elderly tenants to enjoy full rent exemption for the rest of their lives, upon transferring to smaller units. This again aims to provide a rent-free housing option for all-elderly households, to reduce living expenses.

For elderly owners with their own residential property, they can opt for taking out reverse mortgage with the Hong Kong Mortgage Corporation. The programme enables the elderly owners to use their residential property and at the same time receive monthly payouts.

Active Ageing Initiatives

The current generation of elderly people is generally healthier, better connected to society, better educated, and more independent in planning and taking care of their needs. Therefore, in addition to providing elderly housing and services, the Government has implemented a wide range of initiatives to suit their needs and lifestyles. For example, the Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme, which charges just HK\$2 per trip, encourages elderly to get around and participate in social activities. Under the Scheme, nearly 940 000 trips are made by senior citizens daily.

To foster active-aging and a greater sense of self-worth amongst the elderly, the Elder Academy Scheme was launched back in 2007 to encourage senior citizens to pursue life-long learning in a school setting. The Scheme has since been expanded to cover tertiary institutions for various disciplines. About 140 Elder Academies have so far been set up and more than 10 000 learning places are provided each year.

Building Age-friendly Communities

Under the policy of promoting "ageing in place as the core, institutional care as back-up", the Government strives to provide quality and cost-effective community support and care services for the elderly, including frail elderly persons.

At present, there are 210 subvented elderly centres in Hong Kong providing a series of community support services for the elderly, in particular those with no or only mild impairment, and their carers. The

services include counselling, referral, emotional support, arrangement of social and recreational activities, meal services and training for carers of elderly persons.

On this front, the Housing Society also assists the elderly in the community at large to achieve ageing-in-place through public education, assessment of physical well-being and home environment, and consultation services are also provided by the Elderly Resources Centre. It features a simulated age-friendly living space, displaying age-friendly home design and products. In November 2017, the Housing Society further launched the MIND-Friendly Home Exploration Centre, the first of its kind in Hong Kong. The Centre demonstrates how dementia-friendly housing features can be applied in local flats, so as to help relieve the difficulties faced by the caregivers, while supporting the patients to have an independent and enjoyable lifestyle.

At the same time, community care services are specifically provided for frail elderly persons with moderate or severe impairment. These services include centre-based day care services provided by 76 day care centres or units for the elderly and home-based care services provided by 94 home care services teams.

To ease the financial burden for elderly citizens, the Government launched the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly back in 2013. This flexible "money-following-the-user" approach means that the subsidy is provided directly to the service users in the form of vouchers. In other words, recipients can freely choose the service providers and the service packages that best suit their individual needs. Additional vouchers will be provided in the coming financial year under the second phase of the Pilot Scheme to support ageing in place for elderly persons with moderate or severe impairment.

Nowadays, more elderly people encounter cognitive, mood and psychological problems, while the percentage of elderly people suffering from dementia has been on the rise. Apart from continuously increasing the number of subsidised service places through a multi-pronged approach, we are also implementing a series of measures to enhance dementia care and support at the community level. For instance, the Government will regularise the Dementia Community Support Scheme from February next year onwards. The Scheme provides cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary support services for elderly persons with mild or moderate dementia and their carers through a medical-social collaboration model at the district level. We have also allocated more resources to service units providing community care and support services to enhance provision of dementia care service and related staff training. In addition, we have launched a three-year territory-wide public education campaign to enhance public understanding of dementia, thereby promoting a more inclusive society.

Combining Elderly Services and Innovative Technology

Another important strategy for addressing the challenges of an ageing community is gerontechnology, which amalgamates elderly services with

innovation and technology. To promote gerontechnology as a way of improving the quality of life for the elderly and reduce the pressure on carers, the Government will set up a new \$1 billion Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care. The fund will subsidise eligible elderly people and rehabilitation service units to test and procure or rent technology products.

Last month, I visited the Hong Kong Society for the Blind Jockey Club Yan Hong Building in Yuen Long. It is the first elderly home for visually impaired elderly. The building is equipped with innovative facilities, including a computerised medication system, a management system that uses radio frequency identification technology and features an anti-wandering function and more. It demonstrates how we can improve the quality of life for the elderly through innovation and technology.

When the Government published the Smart City Blueprint for Hong Kong last December, one of our missions is to provide better care for the elderly and promote healthy ageing in the community. Besides merging technology into elderly services, we also aim for Smart Mobility and Smart Living. The Government will continue to retrofit barrier-free access facilities. The Hospital Authority has also launched the Smart Hospital Programme to strengthen the interconnection and information exchange of service units and will study the provision of remote medical consultation services.

We also welcome technology collaboration with other cities and institutions. For example, one of such collaboration involves the Tokyo Institute of Technology and the Chinese University of Hong Kong Jockey Club Institute of Ageing. The research collaboration has led to the successful introduction and use of a Socially Assistive Pet Robot in Hong Kong. This robotic pet seal is used in the treatment and care of dementia patients and has since been adopted by Shatin Hospital and some non-governmental organisations in Hong Kong.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have mentioned some of the ways that the Government and other stakeholders are working to build a smart and liveable city for our ageing population. During this conference, we look forward to sharing more insights and learning about experiences of other places in rising to the challenges posed by ageing populations.

Once again, my sincere congratulations to the Housing Society on its 70th Anniversary. I wish you all a very rewarding conference, and our friends from around the world a very enjoyable stay here in Asia's world city.

Thank you.

