

LCQ12: Retrofitting noise barriers on existing roads

Following is a question by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for the Environment, Mr Wong Kam-sing, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

Regarding the retrofitting of noise barriers on existing roads to alleviate the traffic noise nuisance caused to nearby residents, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the respective numbers of noise barriers retrofitting works projects that were (i) completed, (ii) in progress and (iii) under planning, in each of the past five years; whether it has studied what factors have contributed to the year-on-year changes in those numbers;

(2) of the following information (if applicable) on the works projects referred to in (1): (i) the (expected) commencement dates of the works, (ii) the (expected) completion dates of the works, (iii) the progress of the works, (iv) the traffic noise levels at the road sections concerned, (v) the (estimated) project costs, and (vi) the (expected) numbers of persons benefitting from the works;

(3) of the order of commencement of those noise barriers retrofitting works projects currently under planning; the mechanisms adopted by the Government for determining the order and design of the noise barriers; as some residents of Heng Fa Chuen have indicated that they have, for many years, been suffering greatly from the noise nuisance caused by the traffic on Island Eastern Corridor, whether the Government will expedite the retrofitting of noise barriers on the road section concerned;

(4) in respect of those road sections on which noise barriers retrofitting works are needed but have yet to commence, of the short-term measures the Government has in place to alleviate, before the completion of the relevant works, the noise nuisance caused by the traffic on the road sections concerned to nearby residents;

(5) whether it will expedite the planning of noise barriers retrofitting works projects, and set a target for the number of such works projects to be completed per year; and

(6) in view of the completion of two major infrastructure projects last year, whether the Government will seize the opportunity presented by the relatively abundant supply of construction workers at present to expedite the implementation of noise barriers retrofitting works projects?

Reply:

President,

Our reply to the question raised by the Hon Kwok Wai-keung is as follows:

(1) The respective numbers of noise barriers retrofitting works that were completed, in progress and under planning in each of the past five years are tabulated below:

Year	Completed	In Progress	Under Planning
2014	7	0	24
2015	0	1	23
2016	0	2	22
2017	0	2	22
2018	0	3	21

Noise barrier retrofitting works on existing roads are public works, the implementation of which follows the procedures of the Public Works Programme. Procedures such as detailed design and tendering work will commence only upon funding approval.

Among the seven noise barriers retrofitting works completed in 2014, six were located at various sections of the Tuen Mun Road. As the retrofitting works were conducted in tandem with the road widening works carried out by the Highways Department (HyD) at those road sections, the six retrofitting works were completed concurrently.

For those works still in progress, they are expected to be completed within the next few years. Details of the retrofitting works are set out in (2) below.

(2) Other information on the retrofitting works referred to in (1) is tabulated as follows:

Retrofitting works completed

Road section	Commencement date (Year)	Completion date (Year)	Works progress	Maximum traffic noise level (dB(A))	Project costs (\$ million)	Approximate number of residents benefitted
--------------	--------------------------	------------------------	----------------	-------------------------------------	----------------------------	--

Tuen Mun Road (Tsuen Wan section)	2009	2014	Completed	85	1 257	12 840
Tuen Mun Road (Yau Kom Tau section)	2010					
Tuen Mun Road (Castle Peak Bay section)	2010					
Tuen Mun Road (Anglers' Beach section)	2009					
Tuen Mun Road (Sham Tseng section)	2009					
Tuen Mun Road (Tsing Lung Tau section)	2010					
Tai Po Tai Wo Road (near Po Nga Court)	2012	2014	Completed	78	97	480

Retrofitting works in progress

Road section	Commencement date (Year)	Expected completion date (Year)	Works progress	Maximum traffic noise level (dB(A))	Project costs (\$ million)	Approximate number of residents benefitted
Tuen Mun Road (Town Centre section)	2015	2020	In progress	86	827	5 450
Tuen Mun Road (Fu Tei section)	2016	2019	In progress	80	786	2 580
Tai Po Road (Sha Tin section)	2018	2023	In progress	81	852	6 660
Long Tin Road	2019 (expected)	2023	Funding application under preparation	77	304	1 360

Retrofitting works under planning

Road section (Note)	Maximum traffic noise level (dB(A))	Preliminarily estimated project costs (at September 2018 prices) (\$ million)	Approximate number of residents benefitted
Castle Peak Road (Hung Shui Kiu section)	74	20	50
Castle Peak Road (Ping Shan section)	78	108	180
Chai Wan Road	76	102	470
Fanling Highway (near Tsung Pak Long)	79	111	280
Hoi On Road	79	347	1 900
Island Eastern Corridor (near Heng Fa Chuen)	81	82	420
Jockey Club Road and San Wan Road (near Fanling Wai)	77	83	190
Ma Wang Road	72	82	260
New Clear Water Bay Road	80	321	4 430
Po Lam Road North	74	364	1 150
Po Lam Road North (near Hong Sing Garden and King Ming Court)	76	188	260
Po Ning Road	76	201	2 420
Po Shek Wu Road	81	180	2 140
San Tin Highway	83	476	1 220
Sha Tin Road	79	519	3 170
Sha Tin Road near Wong Uk Village	76	24	50
Tai Po Road (Sham Shui Po)	78	181	1 080
Tam Kon Shan Road	78	201	1 610
Tsuen Wan Road	79	176	2 850
Yuen Wo Road	77	40	920

Note: Listed in alphabetical order of the road sections concerned. As the works are still under planning, details on their expected commencement and

completion dates as well as works progress are unavailable.

(3) When determining the order of noise barriers retrofitting works, the Government will accord priority to road sections with the greatest noise impact and the largest number of residents affected. Moreover, if other road works (e.g. road widening works) will be carried out near the road sections concerned, the relevant departments will explore the feasibility of combining the works to minimise inconvenience caused to road users and nearby residents.

As to the design of noise barriers, due consideration will be given not only to their effectiveness in noise reduction but also to the following technical factors:

(a) whether the noise barrier will obstruct emergency access or fire fighting;

(b) whether the noise barrier will undermine road safety or impede pedestrian and vehicular movements; and

(c) whether there is adequate space and structural capability (applicable to flyovers) for supporting the noise barrier.

(4) In respect of those road sections on which noise barriers retrofitting works are being planned and not yet commenced, the Government will explore whether other feasible traffic noise mitigation measures can be put in place. For example, a section of the Island Eastern Corridor near Heng Fa Chuen has been resurfaced with low noise material to reduce the traffic noise impact on nearby residents.

(5) and (6) The Government has been looking for ways to expedite the planning of noise barriers retrofitting works. To this end, the HyD had engaged a consultant to conduct a feasibility study for a number of noise barriers retrofitting works under planning. The consultancy report has provided preliminary feasible options for the projects and relevant details on the advance design to enable faster and smoother work at the detailed design stage. To save time, the Government is also combining the detailed design work for noise barriers retrofitting works on different road sections. Given that government works must follow the funding procedures, and that due consideration has to be given to all relevant factors, the Government is unable to set a target for the number of works to be completed per year.

LCQ20: Land administration of shipyard

sites

Following is a question by the Hon Au Nok-hin and a written reply by the Secretary for Development, Mr Michael Wong, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

The Lands Department (LandsD) conducted a tendering exercise in 2012 to let 16 shipyard sites along Ap Lei Chau Praya Road by way of short-term tenancies (STTs). The STTs concerned were granted for a term ranging from five to seven years commencing from 2013, with the lowest monthly rental being around \$10,000-odd. It is stipulated in the STTs that the sites concerned may only be used for ship or boat building and/or repairing. However, it has been reported that while slipways are originally intended for temporary anchorage of vessels pending repair only, some tenants have, for profiteering purpose, let such slipways as berthing spaces for yachts. Over the years, I have received a number of complaints from local residents alleging that certain sites have been put to uses not permitted under the STTs, such as vehicle repairing, yacht sale shows and barbecue parties. The structures erected on such sites have also exceeded the structure height restrictions stipulated in the STTs. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether the LandsD has set priorities for handling complaints about alleged breaches of STT conditions; if so, of the details;

(2) since the commencement of the STTs of the aforesaid 16 shipyard sites in 2013, of the respective numbers of (i) inspections made by staff members dispatched by the LandsD and (ii) occasions on which the LandsD found that the shipyard tenants had breached STT conditions; the actions taken by the LandsD in respect of those cases involving breaches of STT conditions and the outcome thereof;

(3) as the LandsD had reportedly written to the shipyard tenants concerned in late 2017 requesting them to provide information to prove that the land uses at that time had not breached STT conditions, whether the LandsD has assessed if such a practice is sufficient for ensuring tenants' compliance with STT conditions; whether the LandsD (i) has other measures in place to ensure that the shipyard tenants will comply with STT conditions and (ii) has reviewed the effectiveness of such measures;

(4) as the STTs for 15 out of the 16 shipyard sites will soon expire, whether the LandsD has plans to conduct a tender exercise for letting such sites again; if so, of the details; and

(5) whether it has made long-term plans for the uses of these 16 shipyard sites?

Reply:

President,

A consolidated reply to the five-part question in consultation with the Transport and Housing Bureau (THB) is as follows:

(1) At present, there are over 5 000 short-term tenancies (STTs) in Hong Kong, covering a total area of some 2 500 hectares. Upon receipt of complaints or referrals, District Lands Offices will conduct appropriate investigations and follow up actions having regard to the circumstances of individual cases, such as making site inspections, issuing enquiry letters to tenants, consulting relevant bureau(x) and department(s) on actual operations, and seeking legal advice on tenancy conditions and enforcement, etc. If it is found that a tenant has breached STT conditions, the relevant District Lands Office will require the tenant to rectify within a specified period. If the situation shows no improvement, the District Lands Office, acting in the capacity of landlord, will take enforcement actions in accordance with the tenancy conditions, including terminating the relevant STT as the last resort. Where appropriate, District Lands Offices will also carry out proactive inspections on STTs which involved breach of conditions previously to monitor their compliance.

(2),(3) and (4) With the policy support of the THB, the Lands Department (LandsD) conducted open tender for 16 shipyard sites along Ap Lei Chau Praya Road for award to the highest bidders in 2013. The STTs of these sites were effective from 2013, with 14 sites let out on a term of seven years and the remaining two on a term of five years. After consulting the THB and relevant department(s), the LandsD recently re-tendered the latter two sites in December 2018, with the two STTs commencing in April and May 2019 respectively. The tenure of both sites is a fixed term of five years, but extendable for two years thereafter (i.e. a maximum of seven years in total) if the tenant of a site applies to and obtains approval from the Town Planning Board for use of the site as shipyard permanently. The LandsD will consult relevant bureau(x) and department(s) at an appropriate time and handle the remaining 14 sites according to the applicable policies.

Whether the use of an individual shipyard site is in breach of the tenancy user conditions depends on the actual operation of the shipyard concerned and the content of the STT conditions involved. As regards the 16 sites concerned, their STT conditions stipulate that the sites shall only be used for ship or boat building and/or repairing (excluding building and/or repairing of steel ships or boats). In general, mooring of such vessels awaiting repair within the STT area will not constitute a breach of STT conditions. Nevertheless, it will be a breach of STT conditions if a tenant sublets land within the STT area to others for berthing of vessels or uses the site for other purposes unrelated to building/repairing of such vessels.

In light of complaints and referrals regarding suspected breaches of tenancy user conditions, the LandsD wrote to Ap Lei Chau Praya Road shipyard tenants in November 2017, enquiring about the current use of the shipyard

sites and whether they had been sub-let for berthing of yachts, as well as reminding them of the user restriction under their respective STTs and their responsibility to rectify any breach of STT conditions. At that time, the shipyard tenants replied that the shipyard sites had been used only as shipyards, and not sub-let for berthing of yachts. The LandsD and the Marine Department (MD) subsequently conducted joint site inspections (including surprise checks) on Ap Lei Chau Praya Road shipyards in batches in January, March, June, and November 2018. Among the 16 sites mentioned in the question, after consulting the MD, the LandsD considers that there is no evidence to substantiate breaches of tenancy user restrictions in respect of nine of the shipyards. As for the remaining seven shipyards, in view of the substantial amount of information involved, the LandsD is consolidating the results of the joint inspections and will consult the MD in due course to confirm whether there is any breach of tenancy user restriction.

In addition, having consulted the THB and the MD, in order to strengthen the monitoring of the use of the STT sites, special tenancy conditions have been incorporated in the two recently re-tendered Ap Lei Chau Praya Road shipyard STTs, requiring tenant to produce job sheets in relation to shipyard use on the STT site, as well as opinion from certified public accountants or other relevant documents upon request by the Government, to confirm that the tenant's income from business carried on the STT site is related to shipyard use.

As for the issue of the building height of structures mentioned in the preamble of the question, the LandsD conducted investigation and followed up in October 2015 on a complaint about breach of height restriction in one of the shipyard sites. The relevant tenant rectified the breach in the same month.

The LandsD and the MD will conduct joint inspection of the shipyard sites concerned in a timely manner as and when necessary to ensure that the use of the sites complies with the tenancy conditions. If there is evidence substantiating that tenancy conditions have been breached in the use of the shipyard sites, the LandsD will take appropriate enforcement actions.

(5) The 16 shipyard sites located along the Eastern side of Ap Lei Chau Praya Road are zoned "Industrial" on the approved Aberdeen and Ap Lei Chau Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) No. S/H15/33. According to the Explanatory Statement of the OZP, the area at the Eastern side of Ap Lei Chau Praya Road is developed for boatyards and engineering workshops to serve the local fishing fleet. Providing timely and adequate repairing and maintenance services to sea vessels is of paramount importance to port operation, maritime safety, and sustainable development of the shipping industry. At present, the Government has no plan to change the existing planned use in the area.

LCQ14: Declaration of ownership of properties outside Hong Kong by public rental housing applicants and tenants

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chi-chuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Housing, Mr Frank Chan Fan, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

Applicants for public rental housing (PRH) are required, if they themselves or their family members own properties outside Hong Kong, to declare so. Under the "Well-off Tenants Policies", PRH tenants likewise are required, if they own such properties, to declare so. It has been reported that quite a number of new arrivals from the Mainland concealed the ownership of properties on the Mainland when applying for PRH and they, upon being allocated a PRH unit, reside on the Mainland on a long-term basis. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of (i) the number of new applicants for PRH who declared that they owned properties outside Hong Kong, (ii) the number of reports received by the Housing Department (HD) regarding PRH applicants concealing the ownership of this type of properties, (iii) the respective numbers of concealment cases uncovered upon receipt of reports and upon investigations initiated by HD, and (iv) the respective numbers of cases in which applicants were prosecuted and convicted for concealing the ownership of this type of properties, in each of the past three years; if HD did not initiate any investigation, of the reasons for that;

(2) of (i) the number of PRH tenants who declared that they owned properties outside Hong Kong, (ii) the number of reports received by HD regarding tenants concealing the ownership of this type of properties, (iii) the respective numbers of concealment cases uncovered upon receipt of reports and upon investigations initiated by HD, and (iv) the respective numbers of cases in which tenants were prosecuted and convicted for concealing the ownership of this type of properties, in each of the past three years; if HD did not initiate any investigation, of the reasons for that; and

(3) whether HD will adopt measures (e.g. setting up a dedicated investigation team) to take the initiative to investigate and verify if PRH applicants and PRH tenants own this type of properties; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Chi-chuen

is as follows.

Public rental housing (PRH) is precious social resources. To ensure that PRH will be allocated to those with genuine needs, PRH applicants are obliged to declare all the information as required, including all assets (such as properties) owned by them in and outside Hong Kong in a true and accurate manner. Moreover, they are required to make a declaration that all the particulars furnished are true and correct. It is a criminal offence under the Housing Ordinance to provide false information and make a false statement. The PRH applicants concerned will have their applications cancelled and may be liable to prosecution. The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) conducts regular case reviews, random checks and data matching with other Government departments and organisations.

Starting from July 2017, HA has put in place a new computer system for processing PRH applications which records certain statistical data. As at December 2018, HA had received about 120 PRH application cases with declarations of ownership of premises/properties (including domestic properties, shops, parking spaces, etc. in and outside Hong Kong). The system, however, does not maintain a breakdown of premises/properties in and outside Hong Kong. Before July 2017, HA did not maintain statistics of asset items by types.

Apart from initiating random checks, upon receipt of reports of suspected concealment of information (including income, assets, family status, etc.) in PRH applications, HA will carry out in-depth investigations into those cases with reasonable grounds to suspect. In the past three years, HA had received about 380 reports relating to PRH applicants' concealment of information, and had initiated random checks on about 1 800 PRH application cases. Among such cases, about 50 cases involved the concealment of ownership of properties outside Hong Kong. There were four cases in which the offenders were successfully prosecuted and convicted.

Regarding PRH tenants, under the prevailing "Well-off Tenants Policies", PRH tenants who have been living in PRH for ten years are required to make a declaration biennially. Also, households who are granted a new tenancy under the Policy on Grant of New Tenancy (Note 1) and those who have their applications approved under the Tenancy Management Policies for PRH (Note 2) are also required to make a declaration biennially under the "Well-off Tenants Policies", regardless of their length of residence. Each year, over 250 000 households are required to make declarations under the "Well-off Tenants Policies". HA does not maintain detailed statistics classified by whether the properties declared by the PRH households are in or outside Hong Kong.

To make good use of public housing resources, HA is committed to combating tenancy abuses and is taking stringent action against all tenancy abuse cases. HA also conducts random checks on the information declared by PRH tenants. In case of doubt or complaints, HA will conduct in-depth investigations, and consult institutions both in and outside Hong Kong when necessary.

In the past three years, HA has received on average about 4 000 complaints related to tenancy abuse each year, and has conducted about 6 000 random checks on the income and assets declarations (Note 3) each year. HA does not maintain statistics on PRH tenants concealing properties outside Hong Kong. In the past three years, there were no prosecution cases by the Housing Department regarding PRH tenants concealing their properties outside Hong Kong.

Note 1: According to the Policy on Grant of New Tenancy, upon the death or moving out of a principal tenant, if there is no surviving spouse, a new tenancy may be granted to other authorised family members living in the PRH unit, provided that the prescribed limits and the requirement of not owing any domestic property in Hong Kong under the "Well-off Tenants Policies" are fulfilled.

Note 2: For example, the Territory-wide Overcrowding Relief Exercise and Living Space Improvement Transfer Scheme, Transfer of Tenants Occupying Converted One-person Flats, addition of family members, household splitting and housing arrangements for divorced couples in PRH units, etc.

Note 3: Including PRH applications.

LCQ10: Certification systems for Chinese medicines pharmacists and personnel

Following is a question by the Hon Wong Ting-kwong and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

Some members of the Chinese medicines industry have relayed that currently, there is no professional qualification certification system for Chinese medicines pharmacists and personnel in Hong Kong, resulting in a lack of protection for the health of those members of the public who take Chinese medicines. In addition, the Office of The Ombudsman published in December last year a direct investigation report, recommending that the Government consider setting up a certification system for Chinese medicines pharmacists. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of reports, received by the authorities in each of the past five years, about members of the public feeling unwell or being poisoned as a result of taking Chinese medicines wrongly; the measures (including those

about proper dispensation and decoction of Chinese medicines) currently put in place to protect the health of members of the public in taking Chinese medicines;

(2) whether it knows the current number of Chinese medicines personnel in Hong Kong and, among them, the respective numbers of those responsible for dispensing Chinese medicines (i.e. Chinese medicines pharmacists) and those holding professional qualifications of Chinese medicines pharmacists certified by authorities outside Hong Kong;

(3) given the establishment of a registration system for Chinese medicines pharmacists on the Mainland, an examination system for Chinese medicines pharmacists in Taiwan, and a certification system for Chinese medicines technicians in Macao, whether the authorities have plans to set up a certification system for Chinese medicines pharmacists; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) as members of the Chinese medicines industry generally support the setting up of a professional qualification certification system for Chinese medicines personnel to strengthen the relevant regulatory and training work, whether the authorities have plans to explore this matter with the industry and to provide the needed assistance; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the four parts of the question is as follows:

(1) At present, a stringent regime has been set up under the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (Cap. 549) (CMO) in Hong Kong for the regulation of Chinese medicines (including Chinese herbal medicines (Chms) and proprietary Chinese medicines (pCms)) and Chinese medicines traders, including:

(i) Regulation of proprietary Chinese medicines

All pCms falling within the definition specified in the CMO must be registered by the Chinese Medicines Board (CMB) under the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong (CMCHK) before they can be imported, manufactured or sold in Hong Kong. To be registered in Hong Kong, all pCms must meet the registration requirements regarding safety, quality and efficacy prescribed by the CMB.

Noting the progress of pCm registration and that there is room for improvement in the regulation of pCms, the Government has embarked on relevant work. On amending the definition of "pCms" under the CMO, the Department of Health (DH) conducted several rounds of consultation with the industry and various stakeholders on the amendment proposal in 2018. We will brief the Legislative Council about the amendment proposal in due course.

Furthermore, in accordance with the requirements of the Import and Export (General) Regulations (Cap. 60A), importation or exportation of pCms specified in Schedules 1 and 2 must be covered by an import or export licence. The DH has also been working closely with other government departments, such as the Hong Kong Police Force, the Customs and Excise Department, the Government Laboratory and the Consumer Council, for the exchange of intelligence and the conduct of joint operation when necessary.

(ii) Regulation of Chinese herbal medicines

As for Chms, since there are a huge range of varieties of Chms, under the prevailing regulatory mechanism, they are classified into different categories according to their toxicity and degree of popularity in Hong Kong. Having regard to the need of regulatory control, we have included 605 types of Chms in the CMO, of which 31 types are listed in Schedule 1 and 574 types are listed in Schedule 2. Schedules 1 and 2 have clearly stated the origin of each Chm such as the information of the scientific name of plant or animal origin (including the family, genus and species) and the medicinal parts for identification. The Chms specified in Schedules 1 and 2 shall only apply to the dried or processed form of such medicines.

According to the Import and Export (General) Regulations, all Chms in Schedule 1 and five Chms in Schedule 2 (namely Radix Clematidis, Flos Campsis, processed Radix Aconiti, processed Radix Aconiti Kusnezoffii and Radix Gentianae) are subject to import and export control. Importation or exportation of these Chms must be covered by an import or export licence.

(iii) Regulation of Chinese medicines traders

Any person engaging in the business of retail or wholesale of Chms, as well as wholesale or manufacturing of pCms, must apply for and obtain the relevant licence from the CMB before commencing business. Licensed Chinese medicines traders, when carrying on business operations, shall comply with the CMO and its subsidiary legislation, the practising guidelines for Chinese medicines traders and restrictions prescribed in other laws, otherwise the CMB may consider taking disciplinary action against them.

As regards the dispensing of Chms, the CMO stipulates that the Chm retailers concerned shall ensure that each responsible person and his deputy(ies) must comply with the requirements regarding knowledge and experience as set out in Schedule 1 to the Chinese Medicines Regulation (Cap. 549F). In addition, the CMCHK has compiled the Practising Guidelines for Retailers of Chinese Herbal Medicines with an aim to encourage people engaging in the Chinese medicines trade to acquire the relevant knowledge and adhere to professional ethics, thereby ensuring the quality and safety of Chinese medicines.

(iv) DH's surveillance mechanism

To ensure the compliance of Chinese medicine products with safety and quality standards, the DH has put in place a market surveillance mechanism

under which samples of Chinese medicines are collected from the market for testing on a regular basis. To safeguard public health, the DH has also established a mechanism for reporting adverse incidents related to Chinese medicines. Through this mechanism, the DH works closely with the Hospital Authority to conduct risk assessment, management and reporting on suspected adverse incidents arising from the use of Chinese medicines. If any sub-standard Chinese medicine products are found, the DH may request the Chinese medicines traders concerned to recall the products, prosecute the traders, refer the cases to the CMB for follow-up actions, and issue press statements. The DH also conducts regular inspections in the premises of Chinese medicines traders to ensure their compliance with the requirements of the law and the practising guidelines. To further enhance the capability of Hong Kong in handling problems related to the safety and quality of Chinese medicines, the DH has established a communication mechanism to maintain close liaison with the relevant Mainland regulatory authorities.

(v) Publicity and public education

The DH has made continued publicity and education efforts to promote the safety of Chinese medicines. The message of safe use of Chinese medicines is conveyed to the public, the industry and relevant stakeholders through various channels, e.g. roving exhibitions, talks, promotional leaflets and brochures, and letters to Chinese medicine practitioner (CMP) organisations, Chinese medicine associations and CMPs. Moreover, the DH always reminds the public to seek advice from healthcare professionals before taking any medications. Those who feel unwell after taking medications should seek advice from healthcare professionals, or seek medical consultation immediately in severe cases.

From 2014 to 2018, the Centre for Health Protection of the DH received a total of 125 poisoning cases involving Chinese medicines (detailed in the table below). After investigation, it was found out that these poisoning cases were mainly caused by inappropriate use of medicines (including taking medicines without seeking advice from CMPs, overdose and improper decoction), and mixing up and contamination of Chms, etc.

Year	Poisoning Cases Involving Chinese Medicines
2014	28
2015	23
2016	31
2017	21
2018	22
Total	125

(2) At present, no registration system has been established for Chinese medicines pharmacists in Hong Kong. However, according to the CMO and its

subsidiary legislation (i.e. the Chinese Medicines Regulation), a Chm retailer engaging in the dispensing of Chms and a pCm manufacturer shall each nominate a person responsible for the supervision of the dispensing of Chms and the manufacturing of pCms respectively (responsible person), and not more than two deputies, one of whom shall act in the absence of that responsible person. Each of the responsible person and his deputy(ies) shall fulfil the requirements regarding knowledge and experience as specified in Schedule 1 to the Chinese Medicines Regulation (detailed at the Annex).

In addition to the above statutory requirements, the Practising Guidelines for Retailers of Chinese Herbal Medicines compiled by the CMB will also ensure that those engaging in the Chinese medicines trade have the knowledge of Chms and their preparation. The Guidelines set out the criteria for the trade to fulfil with regard to the dispensing of Chms (including verification of prescriptions, preparation, cross-checking, packaging and dispatching medicines).

As at January 31, 2019, there were 274 licensed pCm manufacturers and 4 752 licensed Chm retailers (1 352 of which were allowed to dispense Chms) in Hong Kong, with a total of about 3 600 responsible persons and deputies.

(3) and (4) The Food and Health Bureau and the DH will conduct a study on the proposed accreditation of Chinese medicines pharmacists, which matters such as the qualifications and academic requirements for Chinese medicines pharmacists, their scope of duties and functions, and information on their training needs and employment situation will need to be examined. In addition, we need to thoroughly consult the trade and relevant stakeholders in order to reach a consensus and broad support for setting the direction of relevant policy development.

Moreover, the Government will provide funding support to the Chinese medicine and Chinese medicine drug sectors through the \$500 million Chinese Medicine Development Fund in order to further promote the development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. The Fund is expected to commence operation in the first half of 2019. We will encourage the industry to utilise the support under to Fund to conduct research and make recommendations on relevant topics.

LCQ17: Support for Self-reliance Scheme

Following is a question by the Hon Tommy Cheung and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (February 20):

Question:

Currently, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) requires able-bodied recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), who are aged 15 to 64 (the relevant age ceiling was 59 prior to February 1, 2019) and are unemployed or whose monthly earnings/working hours are less than the standard amount/number, to participate in the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme, so as to encourage and assist them to move towards full-time paid employment and self-reliance. In addition, while SWD must deduct the employment earnings of such CSSA recipients in calculating the amounts of CSSA payments payable to them, a maximum amount of \$2,500 per month of the earnings may be disregarded. There are comments that since the amount of disregarded earnings (DE), which has not been adjusted since 2007, is on the low side as compared to the current wage level, and a considerable portion of the employment earnings will be offset by deduction in CSSA payments, CSSA recipients lack the motivation for finding employment. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) among the able-bodied CSSA recipients in each of the past 10 years, of the number and percentage of those who participated in SFS Scheme, and set out in the table below a breakdown by the age group (i.e. aged (i) 15 to 29, (ii) 30 to 39, (iii) 40 to 49 and (iv) 50 to 59) to which the participants belonged;

Year	Participants		(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)
	Number	Percentage				
2018						
.....						
2009						

(2) of the monthly average amount of wage and average number of working hours of those who secured employment in each of the past 10 years with the assistance of SFS Scheme; if such information is unavailable, whether it will consider collecting the relevant data, so as to evaluate the attractiveness of SFS Scheme;

(3) given that the wage levels have generally risen in recent years, whether the authorities will raise the DE ceiling, so as to encourage able-bodied CSSA recipients who have the capacity to work to be more proactive in finding and remaining in employment; if not, of the reasons for that; if so, the details; and

(4) whether it has evaluated the effectiveness of SFS Scheme in assisting able-bodied CSSA recipients in moving towards self-reliance; if so, of the evaluation outcome, and the measures put in place to change the perception of some members of the public that SFS Scheme is a punitive measure?

Reply:

President,

The Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme aims to encourage and assist able-bodied adult CSSA recipients to secure and stay in employment, thereby achieving self-reliance. There are two components under the SFS Scheme, namely the Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance (IEAPS) and the disregarded earnings (DE) arrangement.

Since January 2013, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has commissioned non-governmental organisations to operate the IEAPS, so as to provide one-stop employment service and support to able-bodied adult CSSA recipients, as well as to assist them to overcome difficulties in finding jobs and strengthen their employability.

The DE arrangement refers to the earnings from employment that are disregarded when assessing the amount of assistance payable to a CSSA recipient. In simple terms, recipients with working income will have extra income on top of their CSSA payments.

My reply to the question raised by the Member is as follows:

(1) As individual IEAPS participants may leave or re-join the programme owing to short-term paid employment or change in their personal circumstances (such as their health conditions), SWD does not maintain the number of IEAPS participants, including data broken down by year and age.

SWD has compiled the cumulative number of IEAPS participants in person-times. From January 2013 to end-November 2018, there were 95 774 person-times participated in the IEAPS. The statistics of participating person-times broken down by age is as follows:

Age group	Person-times
15 to 29	18 211
30 to 39	15 149
40 to 49	29 798
50 to 59	32 616
Total	95 774

(2) SWD does not maintain the average monthly wage level and average number of working hours per month for IEAPS participants as mentioned in the question.

(3) The purpose of the DE arrangement is to encourage CSSA recipients to seek and stay in employment. At present, the maximum amount of DE is \$2,500 per month. The Government has announced that it would review the DE arrangements in this year, so as to consider how to strike a balance between further encouraging employment among CSSA recipients and the proper use of public

money.

(4) As for the effectiveness of IEAPS, from January 2013 to end-November 2018, out of the 95 774 person-times participated in IEAPS, 20 365 of them (comprising 21.3 per cent of the total number of participating person-times) successfully secured employment or returned to mainstream schooling. Amongst the 20 365, 4 317 left the CSSA net after participated in the IEAPS (comprising 4.5 per cent of the total number of participating person-times). That said, whether an IEAPS participant could eventually secure employment depended on a number of factors, such as their personal circumstances. It is noteworthy that IEAPS not only enables participants to acquire up-to-date employment and retraining information, it also provides appropriate counselling service and other relevant welfare support to its participants.

The Government has announced the extension of the service period of IEAPS at its current service mode to end-March 2020. The Government will also strengthen the collaboration among SWD, the Labour Department, the Employees Retraining Board and the non-governmental organisations, so as to provide more comprehensive employment and retraining services to able-bodied adult CSSA recipients. SWD will continue to listen to stakeholders' views with a view to further encouraging and assisting CSSA recipients to seek and stay in employment.