

## LCQ21: Owner-occupied residential properties owned by applicants for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance

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

Question:

A Guide to Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and the webpage of the government hotline 1823 both set out the manner in which owner-occupied residential properties are treated and counted as assets in the asset test conducted by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for applications for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA): (i) the value of the owner-occupied residential property may be disregarded in cases where the applicant has a family member who is old or disabled or has been medically certified to be in ill-health, (ii) the owner-occupied residential property of an able-bodied adult applicant will be counted as assets only after a grace period of 12 months, and (iii) the Director of Social Welfare may, at his discretion, extend the grace period for an applicant who is a single parent with a child/children aged below 15. However, the webpage on CSSA of SWD's website and the Pamphlet on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme both contain merely a brief statement: the total value of the capital assets (including properties ...) owned by a CSSA applicant and his/her family members must not exceed the prescribed limit of the relevant CSSA category. It is learnt that quite a number of people have, based on this simple statement, mistakenly thought that their owner-occupied residential properties must be counted as assets and they are therefore ineligible for CSSA. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) Of the respective numbers of CSSA applications, which were made by applicants owning owner-occupied residential properties, received and approved by SWD in each of the past five years, with a breakdown by CSSA category; and

(2) Of the reason why SWD has not expounded on its webpage on CSSA and in the aforesaid pamphlet the manner in which owner-occupied residential properties are treated and counted as assets; whether SWD will make improvements and make publicity efforts in this regard to avoid the disadvantaged groups from giving up applying for CSSA as they are unaware of the relevant arrangements; if not, of the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme provides a safety net for those who are unable to support themselves financially so as to assist them to meet their basic needs. Having regard to this consideration, CSSA applicants are subject to means-testing. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has to ensure that public funds are used properly on the one hand, and cater for the circumstances of applicants who are in old age, with disabilities and in ill-health on the other. In this connection, the full value of owner-occupied properties of eligible household applicants (mainly for those with family members in old age, with disabilities or in ill-health) is disregarded in the asset test. This arrangement is to allow these persons to continue to live in their original homes and familiar districts. Meanwhile, the value of owner-occupied properties of other household applicants are generally disregarded for the grace period of the first 12 months.

My reply to the Member's question is as follow:

(1) From 2014 to 2018, the number of cases residing in purchased flats in private housing (including cases residing in flats which are not owned by relevant CSSA households but are not required to pay rent) are tabulated below. SWD does not maintain the statistics according to case nature.

	End-December 2014	End-December 2015	End-December 2016	End-December 2017	End-December 2018
Number of CSSA cases residing in purchased (i.e. not rented) flats in private housing	9 156	8 616	8 056	7 683	7 310

Note: The relevant figures reflect the position as at December 31 each year, i.e. the number of cases which were receiving CSSA and residing in purchased (i.e. not rented) flats in private housing on that date.

The above figures do not include the number of cases which reside in public rental housing purchased under the Tenants Purchase Scheme. SWD does not maintain the relevant breakdown.

(2) To facilitate the public in understanding the CSSA Scheme, e.g. its eligibility requirements, relevant criteria and means-testing arrangements (including the treatment of owner-occupied properties and the relevant calculations), etc., SWD has uploaded to its website a Guide to CSSA which sets out the relevant details. Apart from referring to the Guide, the public may also approach the Social Security Field Units or call the SWD's hotline to enquire about the CSSA Scheme. Owing to the limited space of the Pamphlet on the CSSA Scheme, SWD has only included basic information of the Scheme for easy reference of the public. SWD will review the relevant publicity materials as and when necessary.

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## HKETO Sydney holds reception in Sydney to celebrate Year of the Pig (with photos)

To celebrate the Year of the Pig, the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Sydney (HKETO Sydney) co-hosted a Chinese New Year reception in Sydney yesterday (February 19) with the Hong Kong Trade Development Council, Invest Hong Kong and the Hong Kong-Australia Business Association under the theme of "Connect and Excel".

Speaking at the reception, the Director of HKETO Sydney, Mr Raymond Fan, said 2018 was an incredibly successful year for Hong Kong and a landmark one for the Hong Kong-Australia relationship.

"Hong Kong continued to build on its reputation as the gateway to Asia, growing its connections with the Mainland of China and the region. Hong Kong continues to be one of the best connected cities in the world, with world-class transport and infrastructure making it a business, transport and trade hub.

"In 2018, Hong Kong International Airport handled a record-breaking 74.7 million passengers and 5.1 million tonnes of cargo, retaining its reputation as one of the busiest airports in the world. A 2019 expansion of Terminal will see this grow even further, as the airport adds 40 new check-in counters and an expanded Arrivals Hall, connecting travellers from Hong Kong to other parts of the world faster than ever before," he said.

"The Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge has been opened, measuring a staggering 55 kilometres. The Hong Kong Section of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, connecting Hong Kong and Mainland China, was opened in September last year. Travellers can reach Guangzhou in as little as 48 minutes or go as far as Beijing in less than nine hours," he added.

Hong Kong also continues to thrive as a world leader in economic freedoms and as a business hub, excelling in its endeavours to further develop its reputation as a dynamic and rewarding place to do business.

Mr Fan said 2019 is shaping up to be another excellent year both for Hong Kong and for its relations with Australia. In November, Hong Kong and Australia announced the successful conclusion of negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) at the margins of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Papua New Guinea. Through the Agreement, Australia can secure the best commitment on services that Hong Kong has ever offered in an FTA, with guaranteed certainty of access for Australian suppliers of education, financial, transport, construction, tourism and recreational services and other professional services.

"This year, we will also see the further development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, a collection of nine mainland Chinese cities, Macao and Hong Kong. With an estimated GDP of US\$1.5 trillion – comparable to Australia's GDP (US\$1.32 trillion in 2017) – and a population of nearly 70 million, the Greater Bay Area will open up co-operation, trade and people-to-people connections in Asia like never before," he said.

Mr Fan said the Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area promulgated by the Central Government on February 18 clearly supports Hong Kong in consolidating and enhancing Hong Kong's status as an international financial, transportation and trade centre as well as an international aviation hub; strengthening Hong Kong's status as a global offshore Renminbi business hub and its role as an international asset management centre and a risk management centre; promoting the development of high-end and high value-added financial, commercial and trading, logistics and professional services; making great efforts to develop the innovation and technology industries; nurturing emerging industries; and establishing Hong Kong as the centre for international legal and dispute resolution services in the Asia-Pacific region.

"These areas of work are all conducive to developing Hong Kong further as an international metropolis with enhanced competitiveness. The Greater Bay Area will surely bring Hong Kong significant opportunities to diversify its economy and develop innovation and technology, which is an economic driver in the new era," he said.

"As we enter another busy year in 2019, I look forward to the fostering of a stronger relationship between Hong Kong and Australia. Hong Kong stands ready to connect you to your next opportunity and to help you to not only succeed in your endeavours, but to excel in them," Mr Fan added.



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## [Tsing Yi Town General Out-patient Clinic resumes services after](#)

## renovation

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The spokesperson for Kowloon West Cluster (KWC) today (February 20) announced that the Tsing Yi Town General Out-patient Clinic will resume services next Monday (February 25) at its original site at 21 Tsing Luk Street, Tsing Yi, upon completion of renovation works. The service hours will remain unchanged (details are appended).

According to the spokesperson, due to the earlier renovation works, the Clinic had temporarily been relocated to the Tsing Yi Cheung Hong General Out-patient Clinic since September 24 last year. Following the completion of renovations, the Clinic will be relocated back to its original site.

Patients with chronic illnesses requiring follow-up have already been informed and arrangements made for follow-up appointments at the original clinic site. Patients with episodic illnesses can make appointments via the Telephone Appointment System (telephone number: 3157 0105) as usual.

"KWC has already informed the residents in the district of the service arrangement through various channels, including a banner outside the renovated clinic and posters in the temporary services relocation clinic. The respective district council has also been informed. A reminder message will also be added to the Telephone Appointment System of the Tsing Yi Town General Out-patient Clinic," the spokesperson added.

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## Key statistics on service demand of A&E Departments and occupancy rates in public hospitals

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

During the winter surge, the Hospital Authority is closely monitoring the service demand of Accident and Emergency Departments and the occupancy rate in public hospitals. Key service statistics are being issued daily for public information. Details are in the appended table.

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# Red flag hoisted at Clear Water Bay Second Beach

Attention TV/radio announcers:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible:

Here is an item of interest to swimmers.

The Leisure and Cultural Services Department announced today (February 20) that due to big waves, red flag has been hoisted at Clear Water Bay Second Beach in Sai Kung District. Beach-goers are advised not to swim at the beach.