

# Flag-lowering ceremony cancelled

Â Â Â Â Owing to the thunderstorm warning, the flag-lowering ceremony to be conducted at Golden Bauhinia Square, Wan Chai at 6pm today (July 17) will be cancelled.

Â Â Â Â If the thunderstorm warning is cancelled and weather conditions permit by then, the flag-lowering ceremony may be resumed without further notice.

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## LCQ4: Prevention of flooding and landslides

â€œFollowing is a question by the Hon Stanley Li and a reply by the Secretary for Development, Ms Bernadette Linn, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

â€œIn recent years, there were severe flooding and landslides in many parts of Hong Kong under extreme and adverse weather conditions. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the rainfall patterns in Hong Kong in the past five years; whether it has assessed if the design standards of the stormwater drainage systems in Hong Kong are sufficient to cope with extreme and adverse weather conditions in the future, and how the stormwater drainage systems can be upgraded to improve the flooding situation;

(2) whether the Government has assessed if the rise in sea level will affect the effectiveness of the stormwater drainage systems in Hong Kong, and how the Government will solve the problem of coastal and low-lying areas being vulnerable to flooding and seawater infusion or rainwater backflow under extreme and adverse weather conditions; and

(3) given that many districts were hard hit by flooding and landslides under extreme and adverse weather conditions, such as Tso Wo Hang and Marina Cove in Sai Kung, the outdoor car park outside LOHAS Park, as well as Wan Tsui Road in Chai Wan, of the Government's plans to improve the relevant infrastructure facilities and cope with emergencies?

Reply:

President,

â€œFacing the extreme weather, the Government has been continuously strengthening its overall capability to respond to extreme weather through enhanced measures in four aspects including advanced emergency preparedness, enhanced early warning, decisive emergency response and speedy recovery.

â€œRegarding each part of the question, my reply is as below:

(1) According to the information provided by the Environment and Ecology Bureau and the Hong Kong Observatory, the annual rainfall recorded at the Hong Kong Observatory Headquarters in the past five years ranged from about 2 200mm to more than 2 700mm, with detailed figures as set out as follows:

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
2396.2mm	2395.0mm	2307.1mm	2205.4mm	2774.5mm

â€œAgainst the background of global warming, there is an increasing trend in Hong Kong's annual rainfall over a long period, and extreme rainfall events have become more frequent. Taking the hourly rainfall recorded at the Hong Kong Observatory Headquarters as an example, a record-breaking hourly rainfall of 158.1mm was recorded in September last year, breaking the record of 2008. In the past, record breaking events of hourly rainfall used to occur once every few decades. However, the occurrence of these events have become more frequent in the recent decades.

â€œHong Kong's flood protection standards, including the design return period of 200 years for trunk drains, are on par with major cities in the Mainland and overseas, including Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Singapore, Tokyo, London, Copenhagen and Amsterdam. To cope with the impacts of extreme rainstorms, the Drainage Services Department (DSD) updated the Stormwater Drainage Manual, making reference to the Sixth Assessment Report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations and the results of its relevant studies, as well as the rainfall data collected from the heavy rainstorm in September 2023 in Hong Kong. Taking the standard of the return period of 200 years as an example, the hourly design rainfall parameter has been increased from 145mm to 155mm after the update. Moreover, new facilities will be designed with reference to projections in the United Nations' report for mid-century, with a view to ensuring that the design of drainage capacity of newly built stormwater drainage systems can cope with sea level rise and increase in rainfall in the mid-21st century.

The â€œDSD is currently taking forward the construction of 11 major drainage improvement works and it is anticipated that these projects will be completed progressively from 2024 to 2030 in batches. Besides, subject to the funding approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council, another seven drainage improvement works will commence within this year.

â€œIn addition, the DSD is conducting a study to further assess the impact of climate change on Hong Kong's stormwater drainage systems till the

end of the century in order to formulate a long term integrated flood management strategy. It is expected that the study will be completed in the fourth quarter this year.

(2) In response to sea level rise and storm surges caused by climate change, the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) completed a coastal hazards study in end-2021, which identified 26 coastal low-lying or windy residential areas with higher risks for formulation of improvement works and management measures. The improvement works have been progressively taken forward and are anticipated to be completed by 2027.

â€œIn the long term, the CEDD has also commenced a study on Shoreline Management Plan with an aim to formulating strategies and preventive measures in the longer term for planning and implementing coastal development and protection. It is expected that the study will be completed in the fourth quarter this year.

(3) It is a consensus amongst the international communities that it is impossible to pursue infrastructure facilities that can completely eliminate flooding as setting such an excessively high standard is neither practical nor cost-effective. While the Government continues to implement drainage improvement works and coastal improvement works across the territory, it will also adopt appropriate emergency response and management measures to deal with the challenges we are facing.

â€œThe DSD will continue to maintain liaison with the Hong Kong Observatory and make advance arrangements and preparations. Whenever a severe rainstorm is forecasted, the DSD will plan in advance and early deploy emergency teams to inspect about 220 locations prone to flooding and clear blocked drains to reduce flooding risk. The DSD will also review the causes of each flooding case and implement targeted mitigation measures through minor improvement works in district areas. Taking the locations mentioned in the question as examples, the minor drainage improvement works at Wan Tsui Road in Chai Wan have been completed; the minor improvement works to the outdoor car park opposite to LOHAS Park will be completed in the third quarter of this year; and the DSD is currently providing technical support to the Sai Kung District Lands Office and the Home Affairs Department for the follow-up drainage improvement works near Tso Wo Hang and Marina Cove in Sai Kung.

â€œIn relation to landslides, we have required government departments responsible for the maintenance of over 60 000 man-made slopes to conduct routine inspection and maintenance annually, and to engage engineers to conduct a more comprehensive inspection every five years. On top of the regular inspection, the Geotechnical Engineering Office under the CEDD has further identified approximately 500 government man-made slopes adjacent to sole accesses to community or important livelihood facilities, and has required relevant slope maintenance departments to complete special inspection for these slopes before the wet season so as to minimise the risks of slope incidents.

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## LCQ15: Measures to facilitate cross-boundary medical consultations for members of the public

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Chun-ying and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (July 17):

Question:

Following the implementation of the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the Hospital Authority in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (the Pilot Scheme), eligible Hong Kong elderly persons may use the Elderly Health Care Vouchers to pay for dental treatment at the designated medical institutions in the Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA). On the other hand, Hong Kong people employed in the Mainland are required to join the basic medical insurance for employees, while retired Hong Kong people living in the Mainland may take out the basic medical insurance for urban and rural residents. It is learnt that both plans are entitled to the same social insurance protection as Mainland residents. In addition, it has been reported that some Hong Kong insurance companies have partnered with Mainland medical institutions to provide simpler and faster direct claims settlement services for Hong Kong people who receive medical consultations and medical treatment in the Mainland under the "direct billing without paying upfront" approach. Regarding the measures to facilitate cross-boundary medical consultations for Hong Kong people, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has compiled statistics on the current respective numbers of people who have used the Elderly Health Care Vouchers to go north for dental treatment and those who have participated in the Pilot Scheme; if so, whether both numbers meet the expectations;

(2) whether it has compiled statistics on the current respective numbers of Hong Kong people who have joined the mandatory and the voluntary medical insurance schemes in the Mainland; if not, of the reasons for that;

(3) whether it has plans to study and promote with the Mainland authorities the possibility of allowing Hong Kong residents holding the Mainland Travel Permits for Hong Kong and Macao Residents to take out the basic medical insurance for urban and rural residents in the Mainland; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether it will introduce policies to encourage more Hong Kong insurance companies and "Grade 3A" hospitals in GBA to provide direct billing services to Hong Kong people who receive cross-boundary medical consultations; if so,

of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government has been following the principles of complementarity and mutual benefits to enhance the healthcare-related co-operation with various Mainland cities of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), on the premise of benefitting the development of the healthcare systems of Hong Kong and the Mainland, so as to promote the overall enhancement of the medical professional standards within the GBA and provide options of healthcare services for Hong Kong residents who choose to develop and reside on the Mainland. In particular, through collaboration with suitable healthcare organisations in the Mainland cities of the GBA, the Government successively launched the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the Hospital Authority in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and the Elderly Health Care Voucher Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme (EHCv GBA Pilot Scheme), as well as proposed new functions under the five-year plan of eHealth+ to allow members of the public to keep and use their personal health records from within and outside Hong Kong.

As the HKSAR is a member of the GBA, the HKSAR Government, in formulating cross-boundary healthcare measures, will not only focus on meeting the needs of Hong Kong citizens, but will also consider the potential impact of the policies on the social resources and livelihood of citizens on the Mainland. The healthcare resources and needs, relevant laws and regulations, as well as regulatory regimes for healthcare professions are different in Hong Kong and the Mainland. Upholding her important role of protecting the health of Hong Kong citizens, the HKSAR Government will continue to provide quality healthcare services to Hong Kong citizens. The Government will also explore cross-boundary healthcare measures under the premise that these measures are feasible and mutually beneficial, with an aim to provide Hong Kong citizens who choose to develop and reside on the Mainland with additional convenient access to and choices of healthcare services.

In consultation with the Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau, the reply to the questions raised by the Hon Chan Chun-ying is as follows:

(1) Under the Elderly Health Care Voucher (EHCv) Scheme at the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital (HKU-SZH), eligible elderly persons may currently use EHCvs to pay for services provided by the HKU-SZH and its Huawei Li Zhi Yuan Community Health Service Center (Huawei CHC), including dental services. The numbers of voucher recipients using EHCvs for paying for the services received at the dental clinic of the HKU-SZH in the past five years are tabulated as follows:

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
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Number of voucher recipients	320	252	296	238	498
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Note: Eligible elderly persons may also receive different kinds of outpatient services, including Family Medicine, Chinese Medicine, Dental Services and Physiotherapy, at the Huawei CHC set up by the HKU-SZH. Yet, the Department of Health only keeps data on the total claims at the Huawei CHC. Thus, the figures as provided above do not include the number of voucher recipients receiving dental services at the Huawei CHC.

Moreover, "The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address" announced the roll-out of the EHCV GBA Pilot Scheme to extend the coverage of EHCVs to five medical institutions providing integrated services (all with dental services) in the GBA and two dental institutions in Shenzhen. EHCV is allowed to be used in the First Affiliated Hospital, Sun Yat-sen University since June 28 this year, and will be extended to Zhongshan Chen Xinghai Hospital of Integrated Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine tomorrow (July 18). The EHCV GBA Pilot Scheme is expected to expand to the remaining pilot medical institutions in the third quarter of this year. Since the implementation of EHCV GBA Pilot Scheme has just started at the pilot medical institutions, the Government currently does not have the data on the number of participants. The HKSAR Government will review the utilisation of EHCVs at the pilot medical institutions in due course.

The policy principle of the HKSAR Government in enhancing the Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme (EHVS) is to enable elderly persons to use primary healthcare services appropriately so as to ensure the optimal use of resources for the EHVS and better use of their vouchers in primary healthcare services for disease prevention and health management. The Government's policy of allowing EHCVs to be used in the GBA also aims at offering more convenience and flexibility for eligible Hong Kong elderly persons residing in Mainland cities in the GBA by providing more service points for them to use their EHCVs to meet their primary healthcare needs for improving their health, and to allow eligible Hong Kong elderly persons to opt for receiving dental services with EHCVs across the boundary at medical institutions in Shenzhen and even other Mainland cities in the GBA, with a view to addressing the pressing demand of Hong Kong elderly persons for dental services.

The Government also launched the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the Hospital Authority (HA) in the GBA on May 10, 2023, by making reference to the experience from the Special Support Scheme during the COVID-19 epidemic, so that patients with scheduled follow-up appointments at designated Specialist Out-patient Clinics or General Out-patient Clinics of the HA can receive subsidised consultations at the HKU-SZH. Having considered the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the HA in the GBA in meeting the needs of relevant patients for frequent follow-up consultations, the HKSAR Government extended the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the HA in the GBA for one year to March 31 next year. Since the launch of the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the HA in the GBA in May last year, more than 4 400 patients have participated in the Pilot Scheme, amounting to over 12 300 attendances as at the end of June this year. According to a questionnaire survey conducted by the HKU-SZH with patients,

over 90 per cent of the participating patients are of the view that the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the HA in the GBA allowed them to enjoy the convenience of attending follow-up consultations on the Mainland, sparing them the tiring journeys between the Mainland and Hong Kong.

Since the EHCV Scheme at the HKU-SZH, the EHCV GBA Pilot Scheme and the Pilot Scheme for Supporting Patients of the HA in the GBA all aim to provide more options for Hong Kong citizens residing in or travelling frequently among GBA cities, the HKSAR Government does not set a target for the number of beneficiaries of the schemes.

(2) and (3) In considering their healthcare policies, the governments of different places need to take into account key factors such as the overall social resources and policy objectives. As regards health insurance on the Mainland, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and the National Healthcare Security Administration promulgated the Interim Measures for Participation in Social Insurance by Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan Residents in the Mainland in 2019, allowing eligible Hong Kong residents to participate in the national health insurance schemes on the Mainland. The health insurance arrangements for Hong Kong residents on the Mainland fall within the scope of responsibilities and authority of the relevant Mainland authorities and commissions as well as the healthcare security administrations of various provinces and municipalities, while there are certain differences in the arrangements for national health insurance arrangements among various cities in the GBA. At present, the relevant bureaux and departments of the HKSAR Government do not keep the statistics of Hong Kong residents participating in the health insurance schemes on the Mainland. The HKSAR Government will continue to monitor the implementation arrangement of the Interim Measures.

(4) With the changes in Hong Kong citizens' behaviours in utilising cross-boundary healthcare services, individual Hong Kong insurance companies currently, taking into account their commercial decisions and considerations, collaborate with relevant Mainland healthcare institutions to provide various types of streamlined administrative arrangements (e.g. pre-approval of medical expenses and direct claim settlement services) for the convenience of the insured persons.

The Government introduced the Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme (VHIS) in 2019 to regulate individual indemnity hospital insurance products and improve market transparency, providing consumers with greater confidence in purchasing health insurance. Moreover, the VHIS provides tax deduction to encourage members of the public to purchase VHIS products. As per the basic protection of the VHIS Standard Plans, insurance companies are required to provide global coverage, such that the fees of hospitalisation, day case surgical procedures and prescribed diagnostic imaging tests in and outside Hong Kong (including Mainland cities in the GBA) are covered (except for psychiatric treatment, which is limited to hospitalisation in Hong Kong). The VHIS does not restrict cross-boundary claims measures of insurance companies, which may make arrangements based on market needs.

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## Consultation conclusions for legislative proposal to implement regulatory regime for stablecoin issuers in Hong Kong released

The Financial Services and the Treasury Bureau (FSTB) and the Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) jointly issued today (July 17) the consultation conclusions on the legislative proposal to implement a regulatory regime for fiat-referenced stablecoin (FRS) issuers in Hong Kong.

During the two-month public consultation period completed in February this year, 108 submissions from market participants, industry associations, business and professional organisations and other stakeholders were received. A vast majority of respondents agreed that with the increased prevalence and evolving development of virtual assets (VAs), a regulatory regime should be introduced for FRS issuers, with a view to facilitating proper management of the potential monetary and financial stability risks, as well as providing transparent and suitable guardrails. The proposed regulatory requirements and implementation arrangements received general support from respondents, with some further enhancements suggested in the submissions.

The Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury, Mr Christopher Hui, said, "In addition to the existing regulatory regime for VA trading platforms, the establishment of a licensing regime for FRS issuers will further strengthen the VA regulatory framework in Hong Kong in line with international standards and effectively mitigate possible financial stability risks associated with FRS issuance activities."

The Chief Executive of the HKMA, Mr Eddie Yue, said, "We are grateful for the respondents' valuable comments and are encouraged by the general support for the proposed regulatory regime. We believe that a well-regulated environment is conducive to the sustainable and responsible development of the stablecoin ecosystem in Hong Kong."

The FSTB and the HKMA will take into account the views and suggestions from respondents in finalising the legislative proposal for implementing the regulatory regime, with a view to introducing a bill into the Legislative Council as soon as possible.

The consultation conclusions are available on the websites of the [FSTB](#) and the [HKMA](#). The HKMA is also processing the applications for the stablecoin issuer sandbox, with the list of sandbox participants to be announced shortly.



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# Hospital Authority welcomes passage of Nurses Registration (Amendment) Bill 2023 at Legislative Council

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

The Hospital Authority (HA) welcomed the passage of the Nurses Registration (Amendment) Bill 2023 at the Legislative Council today (July 17), which opens up new pathways for admitting eligible non-locally trained nurses to practice in Hong Kong. The HA will fully support the Government's policy by proactively launching promotions in different countries and regions and actively recruiting more non-locally trained nurses to alleviate the pressure on public hospitals.

"The amended Bill will help the HA to expand the source of nursing manpower supply so as to maintain the sustainability of public healthcare services. In view of the aging population and increasing demand for healthcare services, the HA has proceeded with the two Hospital Development Plans to increase hardware facilities and the service capacity of public healthcare. In addition, to continuously attracting local healthcare talent, the HA can also recruit more eligible non-locally trained nurses through the new limited registration/enrolment and special registration/enrolment pathways to cope with the increasing service needs," an HA spokesperson said.

"The HA is planning to visit various countries and regions, including Singapore this month and Malaysia in August, to promote this new policy and introduce development opportunities in our public hospitals in order to attract eligible non-locally trained nurses to practice in Hong Kong. The HA will have dedicated staff to provide one-stop support and counselling services to interested applicants, including offering employment information, following up on enquiries and handling related applications."

In addition, the HA has been encouraging professional exchanges between local nurses and their counterparts worldwide, including the Greater Bay Area Specialty Nursing Knowledge-exchange Programme launched earlier. The HA will actively reach out to healthcare professional institutions and organisations in different countries and regions to promulgate the policy, as well as to explore various forms of exchange programmes under the new registration/enrolment system, in a view to enhancing the overall standard of the nursing profession.

The spokesperson emphasised that locally trained healthcare professionals remain the cornerstone of the public healthcare service. The HA will continue to prioritise the recruitment of suitable locally trained nurses, while also adopting various human resource initiatives, which include continuous enhancement of professional development, training opportunities

and career ladders of nursing staff, as well as continue the recruitment of full-time and part-time nurses and the Special Retired and Rehire Scheme, etc, to increase and retain nursing manpower.