

LCQ22: Barrier-free taxi services

Following is a question by the Hon Tony Tse and a written reply by the Secretary for Transport and Logistics, Mr Lam Sai-hung, in the Legislative Council today (May 24):

Question:

It is learnt that currently, members of the public who call barrier-free taxis by telephone need to pay a booking fee of more than \$100, and a survey has revealed that the absence of regulation of relevant fees has resulted in their being on the high side. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the current number of taxis equipped with ramps for wheelchair access; whether such number meets the target set by the Government;

(2) whether it knows the following information about the wheelchair accessible vehicle transport services currently provided for passengers in the form of "hire-as-a-whole service": the number of taxis or other types of vehicles providing the services, the number of operators, and the levels of fees charged for the services;

(3) as a study report has pointed out that in 2015, 58 per cent of taxis in England were wheelchair accessible, and all 22 500 taxis in London were wheelchair accessible, whether the authorities will enact legislation or formulate policies to require that taxis must be wheelchair accessible; and

(4) of the current regulatory measures put in place by the authorities for the situation of members of the public being charged booking and other fees for calling barrier-free taxis by telephone; given that some wheelchair users have been charged a barrier-free taxi telephone booking fee in addition to the fee calculated by the taximeter for using barrier-free taxi services, whether the drivers concerned have violated the relevant provisions of the Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374D) or the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487)?

Reply:

President,

After consulting the Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau, our reply to Hon Tony Tse's question is as follows:

The Government has been pursuing a public transport-oriented policy, promoting the arrangement to facilitate the use of public transport services by people with disabilities (PwDs) and committed to implementing the concept of "Transport for All". The Government has also been improving public transport facilities and promoting a barrier-free transport system in collaboration with various public transport operators to cater for the travel needs of PwDs.

(1) and (3) Currently, there are 18 163 taxis in Hong Kong, of which around 3 900 are wheelchair accessible models.

The Government has no plan of mandating all taxis be replaced with wheelchair accessible models at the moment. Nevertheless, under the concept of "Transport for All", the Government has been actively encouraging the taxi trade to introduce more wheelchair accessible taxis and different models, so that wheelchair users may have more choices and more convenient access to wheelchair accessible taxis. The Government will continue to communicate with the taxi trade and vehicle suppliers to help them better understand the relevant standards and approval procedures for introduction of wheelchair accessible taxis, thereby facilitating their search for suitable wheelchair accessible taxi models for use in Hong Kong.

Besides, to further improve taxi service quality, the Government has earlier reviewed the overall taxi operation and management, and proposed to take forward a series of measures to enhance the development of the taxi industry. One of the proposed measures is to introduce a taxi fleet management regime, under which existing taxis may form a fleet and apply to the Transport Department (TD) for a Taxi Operator Fleet Licence. We propose to specify in the fleet licence conditions that the fleet must include a certain number of wheelchair accessible taxis to facilitate travelling by wheelchair users. The Government is formulating the details of the relevant legislative amendments and will submit them to the Legislative Council for scrutiny in due course.

(2) It is understood that there are individual taxi operators and taxi owners in the market that provide wheelchair accessible taxi booking services. The fees for such taxi services are generally based on the hire-as-a-whole mode as agreed between the taxi operators or owners and the passengers. The TD does not have the information on the number of taxis, the number of operators or the level of fees of such services.

In addition, there are currently private vehicles issued with hire car permits that provide wheelchair accessible vehicle pick-up and drop-off services. The number of vehicles providing such services is 50, and these vehicles are held by 28 hire car permit holders. The fees of the hire car services are agreed between the permit holders and passengers. The TD does not have the relevant information.

(4) In general, the fare for the hiring of taxis should be calculated in accordance with the scale of fares specified in Schedule 5 to the Road Traffic (Public Service Vehicles) Regulations (Cap. 374D) (the Regulations) (i.e. the fare as shown on the taximeter). If a taxi picks up passengers (including wheelchair users) directly on the street or at a taxi stand on a non-booked basis, the taxi cannot charge any fare other than the scale of fares specified in Schedule 5 to the Regulations.

Nonetheless, under Regulation 38 of the Regulations, a registered taxi owner may also hire the taxi to a hirer for a period of time at a rate based on the period during which the taxi is hired (whether or not an additional charge is payable for the mileage travelled while the taxi is hired) or on

other terms as agreed with the hirer. Regarding whether the booking fee charged by individual taxi operators or owners in providing wheelchair accessible taxi services is in compliance with the Regulations, it would depend on the specific circumstances of the case (e.g. whether the taxi is hired as a whole and whether the registered taxi owner has agreed with the hirer on the fee in accordance with Regulation 38 of the Regulations).

Besides, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has advised that, according to the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (Cap. 487) (the Ordinance), it is unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against a service user by treating him/ her less favourably on the ground of disability during the provision of goods, services or facilities. As regards the arrangement for individual operators or persons to impose booking fee when providing wheelchair accessible taxi services, the EOC has advised that if the same amount of additional charges is imposed uniformly on all passengers (regardless of whether they are PwDs (including wheelchair users)), no disability discrimination under the Ordinance would be constituted.

LCQ21: Supporting people with swallowing difficulties

Following is a question by the Hon Tik Chi-yuen and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (May 24):

Question:

According to the Hong Kong Population Projections 2020-2069 released by the Census and Statistics Department, the number of elderly people aged 65 or above will account for more than 30 per cent of the total population in 2040 and, among them, the number of those aged 85 or above will double from about 250 000 in 2023 to over 500 000. There are views that with Hong Kong facing an ageing population and the number of people suffering from swallowing difficulties due to old age and illness gradually increasing, how to provide them with suitable meals is not only a problem for carers, but also a challenge for society. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the specific services the Government has put in place currently for helping people with swallowing difficulties (especially elderly people);
- (2) whether it knows the number of people who were assessed as having swallowing difficulties and, among them, the number of those who received the services mentioned in (1) and the expenditure involved, in each of the past five years;

(3) given that the Government has provided additional resources for subsidised residential care homes for the elderly and community care service units for the elderly since October 2020 for providing soft meal service to elderly people with swallowing difficulties, of the number of elderly beneficiaries and the expenditure involved since the service was launched; whether the Government will provide more resources to enhance the service; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(4) whether the Government will draw reference from or tie in with the studies and pilot programmes in the community on the basic dietary needs of people with swallowing difficulties, such as the Guideline of Care Food Standard jointly compiled by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, the Food Research Centre of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Swallowing Research Laboratory of the Faculty of Education of the University of Hong Kong; if so, of the details and the timetable; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Having consulted the Health Bureau, my consolidated reply is as follows:

(1) to (3) Swallowing difficulty, which is caused by degeneration or such diseases as stroke, dementia, Parkinson's disease and cancer, is a common health problem among the elderly. If swallowing difficulty is detected, healthcare professionals of the Hospital Authority (HA) will provide clinical assessment, treatment and counselling services for elderly persons with swallowing difficulty in order to prevent, reduce and overcome difficulties in swallowing, and to enhance the elderly's quality of life. HA's healthcare professionals also assess whether elderly persons have special dietary needs and provide recommendations on the appropriate modified food texture and liquid consistency. The Health Bureau and the HA do not maintain statistics on the number of persons with swallowing difficulty.

To provide soft meals to elderly persons and persons with disabilities with swallowing difficulty, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has, since October 2020 and October 2022 respectively, been providing additional resources to subsidised residential care service/community care service units for the elderly and for persons with disabilities, involving an annual recurrent expenditure of about \$129 million. As at end-December 2022, about 12 700 elderly persons and about 3 600 persons with disabilities benefitted from the abovementioned soft meal services.

In addition, the Government allocated \$1 billion in December 2018 to set up the Innovation and Technology Fund for Application in Elderly and Rehabilitation Care (the Fund) to subsidise eligible elderly and rehabilitation service units to procure, rent or trial use technology products. Eligible service units could apply for the Fund to procure equipment, tool or technology product for the production of soft meals, e.g.

puree diet system machine and cutter/mixer for soft diet. Thus far, a total of \$4.2 million has been granted to 116 service units for the procurement of the above products.

(4) The HA has, since the third quarter of 2021, adopted the categorisation methods suitable for dysphasic patient under the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI)'s standardised dietary framework (known as the IDDSI framework) and taught carers to assist patients in consuming the appropriate foods and drinks in accordance with the guidelines. When subsidised elderly and rehabilitation service units formulate individual care plans for elderly persons and persons with disabilities, social workers and healthcare professionals will, through a multi-disciplinary approach, assess the physical conditions and care needs of service users with swallowing difficulty and provide them with soft meals and other services that suit their needs.

LCQ12: Supporting participation of persons with disabilities in cultural and arts activities

Following is a question by the Hon Kenneth Fok and a written reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Chris Sun, in the Legislative Council today (May 24):

Question:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the right of persons with disabilities (PWDs) to equal participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sporting activities. Besides, there are views that instilling concern for the artistic needs of PWDs and developing their artistic abilities can promote social inclusion and enhance the vibrancy of the city. Regarding supporting the participation of PWDs in cultural and arts activities, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) as it is learnt that owing to resource constraints, disabled arts groups in Hong Kong are generally smaller in scale, whether the authorities have plans to provide more financial and policy support to PWDs who wish to receive arts training, so as to enable the healthy development of such persons; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(2) as it is learnt that due to resource considerations, it is difficult for ordinary cultural and arts performances to include accessibility services for PWDs, such as sign language interpretation and audio description, which is

not conducive to the fair participation of PWDs in cultural and arts life, whether the authorities will consider enhancing the terms of the existing cultural and arts funding schemes, and granting additional financial resources to organisations providing accessibility services for PWDs, so as to promote social inclusion; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;

(3) as the Government set up the Arts Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities (the Arts Fund) with a sum of \$250 million in 2019, and it is learnt that four rounds of funding schemes have been launched under the Fund so far, of the current progress and effectiveness of the various funded projects; and

(4) given that as at December last year, only a total of about \$41 million had been approved under the Arts Fund for the funded projects, whether the authorities will, in view of the substantial amount of surplus of the Arts Fund, (i) promote the Fund to more eligible non-profit-making organisations, (ii) approve funding to more applicant organisations, and (iii) raise the funding ceiling for each project, so as to enhance the effectiveness of the projects; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In consultation with the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau (CSTB), my consolidated reply to the Member's question is as follows:

(1) The Government considers that persons with disabilities should enjoy the same opportunities and rights to learn, appreciate and participate in the arts as ordinary people do. As such, it has endeavoured to promote the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural and arts activities through the collaboration with relevant arts and charity groups as well as the provision of appropriate support, with a view to giving persons with disabilities the opportunities to develop their potential and enhance their quality of life. Related policy support measures are set out below:

(a) The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has put in place support measures to promote arts development for persons with disabilities, including: (i) organising cultural programmes jointly with arts groups with artists with disabilities; (ii) providing funding support to arts organisations comprising members with disabilities in launching their cultural programmes; (iii) providing special facilities and services at LCSD's cultural venues to facilitate persons with disabilities to participate in and appreciate the arts; and (iv) consulting organisations of persons with disabilities when building new venues so as to continuously enhance accessible facilities at cultural venues;

(b) The Social Welfare Department (SWD) set up the Arts Development Fund for Persons with Disabilities (the Arts Fund) in March 2019 to foster arts development for persons with disabilities. The Arts Fund subsidises eligible

organisations to organise various time-limited arts projects or activities for persons with disabilities, including structured and ongoing training, with a view to developing their artistic abilities. The Arts Fund also subsidises eligible organisations to hire professional arts tutors and purchase relevant supplies and technical support services for providing continuous training for persons with disabilities who have potential and nurturing their artistic talents. As at April 2023, the Arts Fund approved an accumulative total of about \$57 million, subsidising 95 arts projects for persons with disabilities;

(c) The Hong Kong Arts Development Council (HKADC) also operates various funding schemes which are open for applications from all local organisations, including arts groups and projects aiming at encouraging the participation of persons with disabilities in artistic creation. Since 1995, the HKADC has funded 100 projects for the participation by artists with disabilities at a total amount of about \$15.17 million. The HKADC has also subsidised artists with disabilities and organisations for supporting these artists to take part in outbound arts events with a view to promoting inclusive arts; and

(d) The Hong Kong Arts Festival Society, with funding support from the LCSD, has been inviting overseas and local artists with disabilities to deliver performances under the No Limits annual project co-organised with the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust since 2019. The project also provides arts accessibility services, including accessible subtitles, theatrical interpretation, Cantonese audio description and/or sign language interpretation, for persons with different abilities so that they can engage in barrier-free arts activities, thus promoting social inclusion.

(2) The Government is committed to enhancing the accessibility of cultural and arts programmes and facilitating the participation of persons with disabilities in cultural and arts life through various complementary measures. Related measures taken by the bureaux/departments and statutory organisations concerned include:

(a) The CSTB provides recurrent funding support to major performing arts groups to deliver accessible performances of suitable programmes. Apart from accessible performances with audio description and sign language interpretation, some performing arts groups also deliver arts programmes specifically for persons with special needs, such as those with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual impairment or early dementia. In addition, the CSTB subsidises non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with the Film Development Fund to produce audio description soundtracks for films and to organise film appreciation with audio description specifically for visually impaired persons;

(b) The LCSD will enhance the use of various arts accessibility services in the arts programmes it presents or sponsors, including the provision of accessible subtitles, theatrical interpretation, Cantonese audio description and/or sign language interpretation. In addition, the LCSD works with arts group under venue partnership to provide a relaxed theatre environment for persons with autism spectrum disorder and other learning disabilities or

communication difficulties;

(c) As for the SWD's Arts Fund, applicant organisations may, having regard to the needs of persons with disabilities, include accessibility or support services, such as sign language tutors, sign language interpreters, audio describers and accessibility assistants, in the activities (including performances or training programmes) they apply for. If their applications are approved, the Arts Fund will provide funding support for related accessibility or support services;

(d) The HKADC also supports persons with disabilities to participate in and appreciate its funded arts activities. Many arts groups received funding support from the HKADC are providing accessibility services; and

(e) The West Kowloon Cultural District Authority collaborates with special schools, rehabilitation groups, NGOs and accessibility service groups to offer scheduled or on-request accessibility services for persons with disabilities, including audio description, sign language interpretation, theatrical interpretation, accessible guided tours, tactile aids and tactile guided tours.

(3) The Arts Fund has already launched four batches of applications since 2019, with an accumulative total approving amount of about \$57 million, which was allocated to 64 service units to implement 95 funded projects. As at April 2023, all activities of 40 funded projects were completed. Positive feedback on the funded projects was received from the participating service units, persons with disabilities and their families. Besides, most of the participating service units showcase the art pieces or arts training outcomes of persons with disabilities by means of exhibitions or performances so as to let the public know more about their potential in the arts.

(4) As at April 2023, the Arts Fund approved an accumulative amount of about \$57 million covering a total of 95 arts projects. There are two tiers for the grants of the Arts Fund. The maximum grant for Tier One projects is \$0.75 million while there is no ceiling of the approved amount for Tier Two projects. The Grants Sub-committee (GSC) under the Arts Fund will vet all applications and allocate grants according to pre-determined criteria. The GSC is composed of representatives from different sectors, including the financial, social service, arts and medical sectors, as well as persons with disabilities.

To promote the Arts Fund, the Secretariat to the Fund has continually held briefing sessions to introduce the Fund and application methods, and produced a short video which features interviews with persons with disabilities participating in funded projects and showcases their learning outcomes. The Secretariat will continue to hold briefing sessions to let more organisations to learn about the Fund. The Arts Fund has planned to launch a new batch (fifth batch) of applications in mid-2023 to continue supporting more organisations in implementing arts projects.

Firing practice for June 2023

Firing practice will take place at two military sites, namely the San Wai/Tai Ling Firing Range and the Tsing Shan Firing Range, next month (June).

Red flags or red lamps will be hoisted at the firing areas before and during firing practice. For their safety, people are advised not to enter the firing area.

Following are the dates and times for the firing practice sessions in June 2023:

San Wai/Tai Ling Firing Range

Date	Time
June 1 (Thursday)	8am-9pm
June 2 (Friday)	8am-9pm
June 3 (Saturday)	8am-9pm
June 5 (Monday)	8am-9pm
June 6 (Tuesday)	8am-9pm
June 7 (Wednesday)	8am-9pm
June 8 (Thursday)	8am-9pm
June 9 (Friday)	8am-9pm
June 10 (Saturday)	8am-9pm
June 12 (Monday)	8am-9pm
June 13 (Tuesday)	8am-9pm
June 14 (Wednesday)	8am-9pm
June 15 (Thursday)	8am-9pm
June 16 (Friday)	8am-9pm
June 17 (Saturday)	8am-9pm
June 19 (Monday)	8am-9pm
June 20 (Tuesday)	8am-9pm
June 21 (Wednesday)	8am-9pm
June 23 (Friday)	8am-9pm
June 24 (Saturday)	8am-9pm
June 26 (Monday)	8am-9pm
June 27 (Tuesday)	8am-9pm
June 28 (Wednesday)	8am-9pm
June 29 (Thursday)	8am-9pm
June 30 (Friday)	8am-9pm

Tsing Shan Firing Range

Date	Time
June 1 (Thursday)	8am-9pm
June 2 (Friday)	8am-9pm
June 3 (Saturday)	8am-9pm
June 5 (Monday)	8am-9pm
June 6 (Tuesday)	8am-9pm
June 7 (Wednesday)	8am-9pm
June 8 (Thursday)	8am-9pm
June 9 (Friday)	8am-9pm
June 10 (Saturday)	8am-9pm
June 12 (Monday)	8am-9pm
June 13 (Tuesday)	8am-9pm
June 14 (Wednesday)	8am-9pm
June 15 (Thursday)	8am-9pm
June 16 (Friday)	8am-9pm
June 17 (Saturday)	8am-9pm
June 19 (Monday)	8am-9pm
June 20 (Tuesday)	8am-9pm
June 21 (Wednesday)	8am-9pm
June 23 (Friday)	8am-9pm
June 26 (Monday)	8am-9pm
June 27 (Tuesday)	8am-9pm
June 28 (Wednesday)	8am-9pm
June 29 (Thursday)	8am-9pm
June 30 (Friday)	8am-9pm

[Red flags hoisted at several beaches](#)

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 (May 24) that due to big waves, red flags have been hoisted at Stanley Main Beach, Shek O Beach and Big Wave Bay Beach in Southern District, Hong Kong Island; and Hap Mun Bay Beach, Silverstrand Beach and Clear Water Bay Second Beach in Sai Kung District. Beachgoers are advised not to swim at these beaches.