

CE chairs sixth meeting of fourth-term Commission on Poverty (with photo)

The Chief Executive (CE), Mrs Carrie Lam, chaired the sixth meeting of the fourth-term Commission on Poverty (CoP) this afternoon (May 18). As the last CoP meeting within this term of Government, the meeting was briefed on the achievements of this term of Government in poverty alleviation and supporting the underprivileged.

Since assuming office, the current term of Government has all along adhered to the governance belief of building a compassionate and inclusive society through caring for children, supporting families, caring for patients, alleviating poverty and caring for the elderly. Many targeted measures were formulated and implemented in this regard, backed up by the needed resources. For example, the recurrent expenditure in social welfare (covering social security schemes and various welfare services) in 2022-23 has increased by 71 per cent over the past five years, from \$65.3 billion in 2017-18 to \$111.8 billion in 2022-23. The magnitude of the increase is the greatest among different terms of Government.

Since 2020, Hong Kong has been facing unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 epidemic. On top of recurrent cash measures, the Government introduced various one-off counter-cyclical measures to stabilise the economy and employment situation while alleviating the financial hardship of the grassroots. According to statistics released in November last year, the size of the poor population in 2020, after taking into account all cash and public rental housing benefits, was reduced substantially from the pre-intervention 1.65 million to 0.55 million, lifting some 1.1 million persons out of poverty and reducing the poverty rate by 15.7 percentage points. The poverty alleviation impact was very notable.

Mrs Lam said, "The CoP is an important partner of the Government in driving work in support of the underprivileged. Apart from providing valuable advice to the Government, the CoP has also allocated funding through the Community Care Fund (CCF) and the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund (SIE Fund) to support measures to plug existing gaps or launch pilot measures, fully demonstrating the collaboration between the community, business sector and the Government, as well as public participation.

"I served as the chairman of the CoP in my capacity as the Chief Secretary for Administration (CS) under the previous term of Government for many years, and sincerely collaborated with Members and various non-government organisations. It is my pleasure to be able to personally chair the last CoP meeting of this term of Government. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the CoP for their contributions."

At the meeting, Members were comprehensively briefed on the poverty

alleviation policies and measures undertaken by the current-term Government in different major areas, including social security, employment support, unemployment assistance, and support for targeted groups. Details are set out at the Annex. In addition, the CoP was also briefed by relevant government departments on the latest progress of the following items:

(i) Since July 2017, the CCF introduced 23 new assistance programmes. The financial commitment of the CCF increased by 193 per cent to around \$20.8 billion. 1.23 million persons had benefitted, registering a cumulative increase of 80 per cent; and

(ii) Since July 2017, the number of projects funded by the SIE Fund has increased by 319 (close to 300 per cent), with the total amount of funding involved increasing by \$260 million (over 500 per cent) and the number of beneficiaries increasing by 260 000 (over 700 per cent). The SIE Fund also implemented two flagship projects, namely the Food Support Service IT Platform "FOOD-CO" and the Gerontechnology Platform, as well as the first Pay-for-Success project in Hong Kong to support non-Chinese speaking students to learn Chinese in kindergartens.

At the meeting, the Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) also briefed Members on the latest findings of the survey on persons with disabilities (PwD). In 2020, there were around 534 200 PwD in Hong Kong (excluding persons with intellectual disabilities). The overall prevalence rate of PwD was 7.1 per cent. The Office of the Government Economist and the C&SD will compile the Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report on Disability 2020 based on the findings of the survey on PwD and analyse the poverty situation of PwD residing in domestic households with the poverty line analytical framework set by the CoP. The report is estimated to be published in the second half of 2022.

Members affirmed the overall achievements in the poverty alleviation work of the current-term Government, and hoped that the next term of Government would continue to care for the needs of the grassroots and address the issue of poverty. Mrs Lam sincerely thanked the CoP for actively participating in poverty alleviation work in the past, and providing constructive advice and recommendations to ensure that the Government's policies and measures could better meet the needs of different groups.

The CS is the chairman of the CoP. In view of the vacancy of the office of CS, today's meeting was chaired by the CE.



Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 0.00am today (May 18), a total of 641 patients who tested positive for COVID-19 are currently hospitalised for treatment, including 70 new patients. Among the patients staying in isolation facilities, 109 patients are in isolation wards, of which 18 are new patients. Twenty-one patients are in second-tier isolation wards and 50 patients are in the North Lantau Hospital Hong Kong Infection Control Centre. The rest of the confirmed patients are hospitalised or readmitted due to other medical reasons. Those patients have recovered and are non-infectious, and therefore do not need to be treated in isolation facilities. Among the hospitalised patients, 11 of them are in critical condition and 13 are in serious condition, of which three critical patients are receiving intensive care. There were 107 patients who have recovered, including 82 patients who have been discharged. In addition, four patients who passed away in public hospitals were reported.

In the fifth wave of the epidemic, there are 49 529 patients who have recovered so far, including 49 110 patients who have been discharged. And since early 2020, there are 61 909 patients who have recovered, including 61 490 patients who have been discharged.

The Hospital Authority will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

CHP investigates additional SARS-CoV-2 virus cases by nucleic acid tests and rapid antigen tests as well as one imported case earlier involving Omicron mutant strain sub-lineage BA.4

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 18) announced the latest epidemic situation of COVID-19. As of 0.00am, May 18, the CHP was investigating 127 additional cases that tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus by nucleic acid tests (46 confirmed cases, 60 asymptomatic cases and 21 cases with pending case status) in the past 24 hours. Separately, 202 additional positive cases through rapid antigen tests (RATs) (98 symptomatic cases and 104 asymptomatic cases) were reported. Hong Kong has recorded a total of 760 808 and 448 589 cases that have tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RATs respectively for the SARS-CoV-2 virus so far.

The aforementioned newly reported cases consist of 31 imported cases (19 cases and 12 cases tested positive by nucleic acid tests and RATs respectively). The CHP is continuing with epidemiological investigations on the cases. Please refer to the "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for more information.

Meanwhile, whole genome sequencing analysis by the DH's Public Health Laboratory Services Branch confirmed that an earlier imported case was found to carry the sub-lineage BA.4 under the Omicron mutant strain. It involves a 29-year-old female who arrived in Hong Kong from the United Kingdom on May 8 and tested positive during compulsory quarantine at a designated quarantine hotel. Together with the above new case, Hong Kong has recorded eight imported sub-lineage BA.4 cases in total so far. No cases of the sub-lineage have been found in the local community so far, and the CHP will continue to closely monitor the latest developments.

In addition, as of 0.00am, May 18, a total of 9 152 death cases that had tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus during the fifth wave (since December 31, 2021) were recorded, with 9 074 and 75 deaths reported from the Hospital Authority and public mortuaries respectively as well as three deaths reported from the Chinese University of Hong Kong Medical Centre. Hong Kong has so far recorded a total of 9 365 death cases that have tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Furthermore, among the earlier cases by nucleic acid tests reported, there were cases (including pending cases) changed to confirmed, asymptomatic or re-positive cases. As at yesterday (May 17), the total number of confirmed cases was 331 748, while the figures for asymptomatic cases, re-positive cases and pending/unknown cases recorded since January 1 were 198 375, 23 and

230 535 respectively.

The spokesman for the CHP stressed that as the local situation of COVID-19 infection is still severe, the CHP strongly appeals to the community to continue to comply with social distancing measures, avoid going out and refrain from participating in unnecessary or crowded activities or gatherings. This would lower the risk of infection and prevent the virus from spreading in the community.

The spokesman reminded that COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective in preventing severe cases and deaths from the SARS-CoV-2 virus. They can provide effective protection to those vaccinated in preventing serious complications and even death after infection. People who have yet to receive vaccination, especially senior citizens, chronic patients and other immunocompromised persons who face a higher chance of death after COVID-19 infection, should get vaccinated as early as possible for self-protection and to reduce the risk of falling seriously ill and death should they get infected.

[Update on monitoring COVID-19 vaccination](#)

In the preceding week till 11.59pm on May 15, the Department of Health (DH) received 28 reports (Note 1) of adverse events following COVID-19 immunisation. No death case was reported by the Hospital Authority (HA) involving individuals who had received vaccines within 14 days before they passed away and had potential association with vaccination.

As at 8pm on May 15, around 16.45 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines had been administered for members of the public. Around 6.67 million people had received at least one dose of vaccine, including 93.1 per cent of the population aged 12 or above. The DH received 7 484 reports of adverse events (0.05 per cent of the total vaccine doses administered). Among the death cases concerning persons who had been vaccinated, including 103 cases (Note 2) with vaccination within 14 days before they passed away (0.0006 per cent of the total vaccine doses administered), none of the death cases was associated with vaccination.

As at May 15, the Expert Committee on Clinical Events Assessment Following COVID-19 Immunisation had concluded that 61 death cases had no causal relationship with vaccination, and preliminarily considered that 11 cases were not associated with vaccination. Thirty-one cases are still pending further information for assessment. The Expert Committee considered that there is no unusual pattern identified so far, and will continue to closely monitor the relevant situation and collect data for assessment.

According to information from the HA, during the period from April 18 to May 15, the ratio of death cases out of those without a vaccination record was 258.6 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of death cases for those with a vaccination record was 29.8 cases for every 100 000 people. Out of those without a vaccination record, the ratio of death cases with acute stroke or acute myocardial infarction was 9.4 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of death cases under the same category for those with a vaccination record was 1.7 cases for every 100 000 people. Furthermore, the ratio of miscarriage cases out of those without a vaccination record was 142.2 cases for every 100 000 people, whereas the ratio of miscarriage cases for those who had a vaccination record was 10.2 cases for every 100 000 people. Based on the statistical analysis of the above figures, there is no evidence that vaccination increases the risk of death or miscarriage for recipients. The relevant reference statistics will be uploaded to the thematic website for the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.

The majority of non-death cases of adverse events received so far are relatively minor cases. The relevant details can be found in the "Report on the Safety Monitoring of COVID-19 Vaccines in Hong Kong" (www.drugoffice.gov.hk/eps/do/en/doc/Safety_Monitoring_of_COVID-19_Vaccines_in_Hong_Kong.pdf).

"Given the high transmissibility of the Omicron mutant strain, members of the public must still stay vigilant even if the epidemic situation has subsided a little recently. Deaths and severe cases involving children and elderly persons, who are our focus of protection in vaccination, have been recorded in the fifth wave of the epidemic. For elderly persons, the COVID-19 vaccination rate for the elderly aged 80 or above in Hong Kong is only around 66 per cent at present, meaning that around 34 per cent of the elderly in that age group are in a dangerous situation, which is alarming. According to preliminary data analysis, out of the cases reported in the fifth wave, the proportion of death and critical/serious condition is highest in those aged 80 or above, which increases exponentially from age 60, and most of the deceased cases are unvaccinated persons. As compared to the Hong Kong overall population, those who have received three doses of vaccine account for a much lower proportion among reported cases, and an extremely low proportion among the hospitalised critical/serious and deceased cases. This demonstrates the effectiveness of three doses of vaccine in preventing infection, serious illness and fatality from COVID-19. Even with just the first dose of vaccine, the risk of death can be significantly reduced. The latest research data from the University of Hong Kong also shows that receiving three doses of either the Comirnaty or CoronaVac vaccine is highly effective for preventing severe cases and deaths with over 90 per cent effectiveness. Members of the public who are currently eligible for a third dose should get the third dose as soon as possible. Furthermore, in response to the latest advice from experts, we have started the administration of the fourth vaccine dose for persons aged 60 or above who have received three doses of the Comirnaty or the CoronaVac vaccine. They may receive the fourth dose at least three months after their last dose. Members of the public who are eligible for a fourth dose should get it as soon as possible to further enhance protection. On the other hand, the minimum age for receiving the CoronaVac vaccine has been lowered to 3

years old, while the minimum age for receiving the Comirnaty vaccine is 5 years old. We call on parents to arrange vaccination for their children as early as possible for better protection," a Government spokesman said.

Note 1: Provisional figures. In the preceding week till 11.59pm on May 15, the DH received three reports of suspected myocarditis or pericarditis involving adolescents in the age group of 3 to 15. The cases involved a male aged 11 and two males aged 15. They experienced chest pains within two to four days after receiving the Comirnaty vaccine. Their conditions are stable.

Note 2: In the preceding week till 11.59pm on May 15, the DH received two death reports involving individuals who had received COVID-19 vaccination within 14 days before passing away. The cases involved two females aged 71 and 92 respectively. There is no clinical evidence that the incidents arose from vaccination.

[Housing Authority joins forces with estate management services contractors to fight virus together \(with photos\)](#)

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Housing Authority:

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) announced today (May 18) the winners of the Estate Management Services Contractors Awards (EMSC Awards) 2021. Seventeen new awards have been introduced this year to commend the frontline cleansing and security operatives who have made contributions in combating the epidemic in public housing estates.

"The HA has made concerted efforts and adopted many flexible and appropriate measures with services contractors to implement anti-epidemic operations in public housing estates, thereby safeguarding the health of our residents while striving to deliver quality estate management services. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges and an overwhelming workload to estate management staff. The full commitment of the services contractors to support us in different aspects is greatly appreciated," a spokesman for the HA said.

"Despite the deteriorating epidemic situation and the extremely high risk of infection, frontline staff responded promptly and took immediate actions to provide support to residents in need, especially for those subject to home quarantine or home isolation orders, as well as to reinforce cleansing and disinfection in housing estates. The HA has introduced new awards this year to commend the frontline cleansing and security operatives who have shown a strong sense of commitment to performing duties

persistently, even in challenging situations. Hong Kong will win the battle against the epidemic if we continue to fight together," the spokesman said.

The COVID-19 outbreak has continued to spread over the past year. Along with the confirmed cases identified in various public housing estates, the HA, together with the services contractors, have borne the brunt. They have fully mobilised their manpower to co-ordinate and participate in anti-epidemic field operations, assist in the enforcement of the intensive "restriction-testing declaration" operations and conduct streaming arrangements for testing in a bid to curb the spread of the virus and cut the transmission chains. The HA has also employed many estate services assistants through services contractors for the provision of assistance to infected residents and those subject to home quarantine or home isolation orders, distribution and collection of specimen packs and anti-epidemic supplies, etc.

The HA organises the EMSC Awards annually in recognition of the outstanding performance of its services contractors and their staff in managing the HA's properties. The estates managed by the winners of the "Best Public Rental Housing Estate (Property Services) (Large Estate)" award this year include Shek Lei (II) Estate, Lower Ngau Tau Kok Estate, Tak Long Estate and Tin Yiu (I) and (II) Estate; while the estates managed by the winners of the "Best Public Rental Housing Estate (Property Services) (Small Estate)" award include Cheung Sha Wan Estate, Cheung Lung Wai Estate and Lung Yat Estate.

A total of 64 awards this year went to 20 services contractors providing property management, cleansing, security and car park operating services. Seven property services managers and 34 frontline staff members were also commended. The full list of awardees can be found in the Annex.

The award winners were selected based on the combined scores given by the assessment panel, the Housing Department's supervisory teams, feedback from the Estate Management Advisory Committees and the results of random surveys conducted among residents. The HA has established a stringent tendering system and an effective contract management mechanism to ensure the delivery of quality and reliable services by services contractors.

Currently, the management of more than half of the HA's public rental housing estates is outsourced to property services contractors, and many major maintenance tasks in the HA estates are being supervised by them. By leveraging the private sector's resources and experience in managing private properties, the HA works to continuously raise the quality of its estate management services and to provide a pleasant living environment for its tenants.

