

## **The Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Address**

### **10 People-oriented Initiatives**

#### **Progress Report**

1. To give teachers and students a more comfortable teaching and learning environment in hot weather, it was announced in the Policy Address last year to provide a recurrent Air-conditioning Grant for all public sector schools starting from the 2018/19 school year. The Grant has been implemented and the expenditure involved exceeds \$370 million per year. Air-conditioning system installation works have also been commenced at over 100 public sector schools in phases.
2. In the Policy Address last year, we announced that we will provide more assistance to patients with uncommon diseases, including subsidies for patients for specific drug treatments according to individual patients' special clinical needs, and for eligible patients to participate in compassionate drug programmes run by individual pharmaceutical companies. Regarding spinal muscular atrophy (SMA), the Chief Executive penned a letter to the chief executive officer of the relevant pharmaceutical company last year emphasising that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government cares for these patients and urging the company to consider introducing the drug in Hong Kong. The response from the company was positive. Follow-up work was carried out by the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) and the Hospital Authority (HA) and an Expanded Access Programme with the pharmaceutical company was launched by the HA earlier this year. The company provided the drug free of charge to suitable SMA patients before the registration procedure of the drug in Hong Kong had been completed. So far, six patients have started drug treatments. A group of experts has also completed assessment on three other patients and treatments will commence when they are in suitable clinical conditions.

In addition, following expedited work by the Hong Kong Pharmacy and Poisons Board, the registration procedure of the drug has been completed. We will ensure that the patients who have been receiving free medication under the Expanded Access Programme will continue to receive subsidy for medication after the registration of the drug.

Apart from SMA, the coverage of the Community Care Fund (CCF) Ultra-expensive Drugs Programme has also been expanded to provide more assistance to patients with uncommon diseases, whereby subsidies for specific drug treatments are available to patients according to their special clinical needs in individual cases. In addition, the HA has increased the frequency of the prioritisation exercise for including self-financed drugs in the safety net from once to twice a year, starting from this year, so as to shorten the lead time for introducing suitable new drugs to the safety net.

The HA has commissioned a consultancy study to review comprehensively the current financial assessment mechanism under the Samaritan Fund and the CCF

Medical Assistance Programmes. Improvement measures will be announced in due course.

3. In response to public views on the Low-income Working Family Allowance (LIFA) Scheme, it was announced in the Policy Address last year to put forward a host of improvement measures and rename the LIFA Scheme as the Working Family Allowance (WFA) Scheme. We rolled out the new scheme in April this year and implemented the improvement measures, including extending the Scheme to cover singletons, allowing household members to aggregate working hours for assessing the allowance, relaxing the income limits and increasing all rates of allowance. About 45 000 applications were received within the first six month of the Scheme, of which more than 16 000 were new applications by people who had not applied for the LIFA Scheme before. The Government will continue to promote the WFA Scheme to help eligible households to make application using a multi-pronged approach.
  
4. Some parents have expressed concern that although they have the financial means to meet the long-term living expenses of their children with special needs, they are still worried about the care for their children after their death, as their children, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, lack the ability to take care of themselves. These parents wish to manage their wealth under a trust to better ensure, after their death, the long term sustainability of the care plan they have prepared for their children while they are alive. However, most of these parents are unable to afford the high cost of setting up a private trust. To address their needs, it was announced in the Policy Address last year that the Government would take the lead in setting up a Special Needs Trust, with the Director of Social Welfare as the trustee, to provide reliable and affordable trust services. The Labour and Welfare Bureau is in the process of finalising with stakeholders the detailed arrangements for the Special Needs Trust. The Social Welfare Department will set up a dedicated office at the end of this year to conduct briefings for stakeholders and handle enquiries by interested parents. The Special Needs Trust service is expected to be launched in the first quarter of next year as scheduled, so that parents in need can rest assured that their children with intellectual or other disabilities will receive proper care through the use of the assets they leave behind after their departure.
  
5. To improve labour rights and interest, it was proposed in the Policy Address last year to increase the statutory paternity leave from three days to five days and commence a study on extending the duration of the 10-week statutory maternity leave. The legislative amendments on paternity leave are pending passage by the Legislative Council, and the Government will announce the outcome and recommendations of the review on statutory maternity leave in due course.

6. As an employer, the Government will take the lead in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities in order to foster an inclusive society. It was announced in the Policy Address last year the increase of internship places to allow more young persons with disabilities to gain hands-on work experience through placements in the Government, thereby strengthening their competitiveness before they enter the work force. Placements have been arranged for around 100 students with disabilities in various government departments this year, doubling the average number in previous years.
  
7. The Government seeks to provide ethnic minorities with equal opportunities and facilitate their integration into our community. With a view to increasing government job opportunities for ethnic minorities, it was announced in the Policy Address last year that the Civil Service Bureau would co-ordinate a comprehensive review of the entry requirements relating to Chinese proficiency for all grades of the civil service. The review was completed in February this year and the Government has increased the total number of grades that have lowered or will lower their Chinese language proficiency requirements by 22 to 53. The Government will also tap into the pool of talents possessing knowledge in languages and cultures of non-ethnic Chinese, with a view to facilitating the provision of public services for these communities. The Police Force, the Immigration Department and the Social Welfare Department have continued to employ Police Community Liaison Assistants, interpreters and Welfare Support and Liaison Assistants respectively to strengthen communication with non-ethnic Chinese residents. We will monitor the recruitment of these grades and step up our efforts in promoting suitable civil service job opportunities to ethnic minorities to encourage them to join the Government.
  
8. It was announced in the Policy Address last year that based on the Government's new thinking on governance focused on bringing benefits and convenience to the public, resources would be made available for building new public markets to offer a wider choice of fresh provisions. In this connection, the Government will also consider adopting new approaches to the design, construction and operation of these markets. Studies have been completed on site selection for public markets in Tin Shui Wai and Tung Chung Town Centre and will announce the locations later. In addition, a total of \$2 billion has been reserved in the Budget this year for implementing the Market Modernisation Programme, which has been launched with the overhaul of Aberdeen Market as the pioneering project.
  
9. It was announced in the Policy Address last year that the Government would set up a Countryside Conservation Office (CCO) to co-ordinate conservation projects that promote the sustainable development of remote countryside, and earmark \$1 billion for relevant conservation and revitalisation works. The CCO has been established under the Environmental Protection Department. A total of \$500 million, that is half

of the reserve set aside, will be dedicated to funding relevant conservation efforts, as well as supporting non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and villagers to organise diverse and innovative conservation activities or projects based on an interactive and co-operative approach. The remaining provision of \$500 million will be earmarked for minor improvement works in remote countryside, with priority given to areas with conservation value. As a priority, the CCO will enhance countryside revitalisation in Lai Chi Wo, as well as ecological conservation in Sha Lo Tung, and will keep under review the implementation of these initiatives and their effectiveness from time to time, with the aim of extending the initiatives progressively to other remote countryside areas.

10. The progress of extending network coverage by fixed network operators (FNOs) to villages in remote locations in the New Territories and the outlying islands has been slow and unsatisfactory due to the high costs of network installation and the small number of subscribers. In view of this, it was proposed in the Policy Address last year that the Government would take the lead to provide FNOs with financial incentives in the form of subsidies to encourage the extension of fibre-based networks to villages in remote locations. The plan covers about 300 villages that are currently without high-speed broadband network coverage and is expected to benefit nearly 170 000 villagers. In the district consultations completed in the first half of this year, the Government secured the support of the nine District Councils in the New Territories and Islands districts and listened to the views of 27 Rural Committees. We also briefed various FNOs about the funding scheme, and funding of \$770 million was approved by the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in July this year. The Government is currently preparing the details of the tender for the plan and intends to invite tenders in the first half of next year.