

Assistance Programme under Community Care Fund Evaluation Report on Special Care Subsidy for the Severely Disabled

Background

Community Care Fund (CCF) has been established since early 2011 to provide assistance to people facing economic difficulties, in particular those who fall outside the social safety net or those within the safety net but have special circumstances that are not covered. In addition, the CCF can take forward measures on a pilot basis to help the Government identify those that can be considered for incorporation into the Government's regular assistance and service programmes.

2. Ex-Steering Committee on the CCF endorsed at its meeting on 20 April 2011 to launch this assistance programme in 2011-12 with a view to providing a monthly special care subsidy of \$2,000 for not more than 12 months to the severely disabled persons from low income families who aged below 60, living in the community and receiving Higher Disability Allowance (HDA) under the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme as at 31 July 2011, so as to render necessary support to them.

3. The programme, with budget of \$94.38 million (including subsidy of \$91.2 million and the administrative cost of \$3.18 million), is administered by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and estimated to benefit no more than 3 800 disabled persons.

Implementation of Assistance Programme

4. SWD announced the details of this programme and started publicity¹ in September 2011. Based on the information from Computerised Social Security System (CSSS), SWD sent invitation letters to about 3 900 HDA recipients² for inviting the eligible persons to submit the application on or before 30 November 2011. To allow more eligible persons to be benefited

¹ Besides distributing the programme leaflets via District Social Welfare Offices and the Home Affairs Department, SWD has also uploaded all relevant information onto SWD website.

² It is unable to send the invitation letters to the eligible persons only as SWD had no available data on the household income of the HDA recipients.

from the programme, the application period was subsequently extended till 31 March 2012.

5. The CCF team of SWD was responsible for vetting the applications. There were 1 643 applications received and the subsidy, i.e. \$2,000 per month, has been released quarterly to the beneficiaries since December 2011. The subsidy was released to the beneficiaries through their bank accounts for receiving HDA and SWD has disbursed about \$32 million of subsidy as at December 2012.

Result of Analysis

6. SWD has analysed the collected information and data for the evaluation as follows.

(a) Statistical Data on Application

7. SWD issued invitation letters to about 3 900 HDA recipients and received a total of 1 643 applications (42.1%), of which 1 436 applications (87.4%) were eligible and 198 applications (12.1%) were ineligible for reason of failing to pass the income test. Besides, there were 9 applicants passed away during the vetting process.³ Beneficiaries aged between 51 and 59 accounted for 482 (33.5%), the highest among other aged groups, followed by those aged 21 to 30 at 235 (16.4%). There are 108 persons (7.5%) aged 10 or below. The statistical data are at Appendix I.

(b) Survey on Beneficiaries

8. SWD has conducted an opinion survey on 73 randomly selected beneficiaries (5.1% of the total) to understand their family condition, daily caring needs, use of subsidy and comments on this programme.

(i) Family Condition

9. In this survey, beneficiaries living with family members accounted for 87.7% of the total (64 persons). Among them, 84.4% (54 persons) were living with 1 to 3 family members. There were 26 of them living with

³ If the applicants concerned were vetted eligible, the special subsidy entitled would be regarded as their estate for handling.

siblings, which accounted for 40.6% of the beneficiaries living with family members and, among them, 11 were living with non-adult siblings (17.2% of interviewees living with family members). Majority of the beneficiaries (66 persons, about 90.4%) had monthly household income less than \$15,000 whereas the others (7 persons, about 9.6%) had monthly household income between \$15,000 and \$25,000. Please refer to Appendix II(a) for details.

(ii) Use of Subsidy and Daily Caring

10. Interviewees mainly used the subsidy for medical consultation (71.2%), family daily expenses (64.4%) and drug expenses (50.7%). Using the subsidy for nutrition food, medical consumables and equipment, however, were relatively less (34.2%, 28.8% and 26.0% respectively). Besides, most of the interviewees needed the carer's support for their daily life (56 persons, 76.7%) and the main carers were mostly their family members / relatives / friends living with them (43 persons, accounted for 76.8% of interviewees who needed carer's support for their daily living). Relevant information is at Appendix II(b).

(iii) Comment on this programme

11. All the interviewees agreed that this programme could render the necessary support to them and were satisfied with the arrangement of this programme. Over half of the interviewees (40 persons, about 54.8%) had no comments on this programme, while some interviewees suggested extending the subsidising period (20 persons, about 27.4%), increasing the amount of subsidy (7 persons, about 9.6%) and a few of the interviewees also expressed their comments on the targeted beneficiaries (2 persons, about 2.7%), application procedures (2 persons, about 2.7%) and arrangement for release of subsidy (1 person, about 1.4%). The relevant details are at Appendix II(c).

(c) Survey on Invitees who have not submitted Application

12. SWD also conducted a survey to 36 randomly chosen invitees who had not submitted applications (accounted for 1.6% of the total) to explore their reasons of not submitting application and their comments on this assistance programme. It was noted that 20 interviewees (55.6%) did not submit applications as they could not meet the eligibility criteria and 14 interviewees (38.9%) revealed no need for the subsidy. There were 2 interviewees (5.5%) claiming that they had not received the invitation letters, though their correspondence addresses were verified correct and no non-delivery mails were

found. SWD, however, mailed the relevant documents to them again to facilitate their submission of applications. Among the 36 interviewees, 25 of them offered no comments on the programme. Other interviewees suggested relaxing the income limit and expressed that this programme had a positive impact to the beneficiaries. The relevant data is at Appendix III.

(d) Public Enquiries

13. In the course of implementing this programme, SWD has set up an enquiry hotline to provide support and information regarding the programme to the concerned public. From November 2011 till present, SWD received about 1 200 enquiries on the programme, the majority of which are concerned about eligibility criteria, completion of application forms, application progress and arrangement for release of subsidy. The details are at Appendix IV

Conclusion

14. From the result of the survey, all the beneficiaries agreed that they could be benefited from this programme. The survey also revealed that most of the beneficiaries were living with their family members. As the main carers of some beneficiaries were their family members / relatives / friends, these carers might not be able to earn a living and this programme could provide certain financial support to them. Besides, the beneficiaries mainly used the subsidy for medical consultation, drugs and family daily expenses which showed that the special care subsidy of this programme had achieved its purpose.

15. SWD issued invitation letters to all HDA recipients through the CSSS for ensuring that all the eligible persons could be informed of this programme and be invited for submitting applications. As mentioned in paragraph 7 and 12 above, about 42.1% of HDA recipients submitted applications, among which 12.1% were ineligible and majority was due to failing the income test. The other invitees did not submit the applications because they did not fulfill the eligibility criteria nor had need for subsidy.

16. The set up of enquiry hotline had effectively provided immediate and necessary support to the applicants in the course of application process. Given that a significant number of enquiries were concerned about the application progress and arrangement for release of subsidy, certain arrangements such as to inform the applicants through the programme briefs and CCF website about the

expected processing time for the applications and release of subsidy may be considered in order to better address their concerns.

17. The beneficiaries mainly used the subsidy for medical consultation, drugs and daily household expenses, which showed that these aspects were their common needs. At present, severely disabled persons can apply for medical fee waiver through existing mechanism if they cannot afford the charge for public medical services due to financial difficulty. They can also apply for financial assistance from Samaritan Fund for medical items or drugs which have to be purchased by their own resources. Furthermore, the severely disabled persons who are not from low income family⁴ could apply for HDA under the SSA Scheme and receive the monthly allowance without means-tested to meet their special need due to the disability. The amount of HDA will adjust annually with reference to the inflation rate reflected by the Social Security Assistance Index of Prices (SSAIP). These measures provide a long-term protection to the severely disabled persons on their basic needs for medical consultation, drugs and family daily expenses.

18. The income limit set for the first round of applications for this programme was based on 75% of the Median Monthly Domestic Household Income (MMDHI) from the Report on General Household Survey published by Census and Statistics Department. The family members living with the applicant, however, shall mean father, mother, son, daughter, husband and wife who are living together with the applicant in Hong Kong (including legally recognised adoptive parents / children and illegitimate children with proof of parentage). These criteria are basically in line with several other CCF assistance programmes, but considering the heavier financial burden for the severely disabled persons than the others, the eligibility criteria may have room to relax.

19. Taking into account the result of the above surveys and the views from various stakeholders, SWD had proposed extending this programme till the end of 2013 and the proposal was endorsed by ex-Steering Committee on the CCF. To allow more severely disabled persons to be benefited, the income limit set for the extended programme was based on 100% of MMDHI from the Report on General Household Survey published by Census and Statistics Department, and the definition of “family members living with the applicant” was also relaxed to cover siblings aged below 18, or aged 18 – 25 receiving

⁴ Severely disabled with financial difficulties could apply for Comprehensive Social Security Allowance to meet their basic needs.

full-time education or disabled adult siblings, who were living with the applicant.

20. Furthermore, SWD has continuously enhanced and improved the subvented services for the severely disabled persons, such as providing training services to enhance living and caring skills through the District Support Centres, day care services through the service providers concerned and home care services through the Integrated Home Care Services Teams. Moreover, considering that persons with severe physical disabilities and their family members / carers may have stronger need for support, SWD and Hospital Authority are devising a pilot scheme operated in case management model to provide integrated support services to the persons with severe physical disabilities living in the community who are not recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Allowance (CSSA) and need constant attendance, so as to relieve their burden arisen from medical equipment, e.g. respiratory support medical equipment and related rehabilitation equipment etc., consumables and routine care, and allow them to stay in the community. While the feasibility and details of the pilot scheme are still under study, SWD proposed to launch a new assistance programme to provide subsidy for the persons with severe physical disabilities from families with financial difficulties, who are not receiving CSSA and living in the community. Eligible persons with annual household disposable financial resources⁵ of \$100,000 or below will be granted a monthly payment of \$2,500, while a monthly payment of \$2,000 will be granted to those with annual household disposable financial resources of over \$100,000 but not more than \$180,000, so as to meet their need for renting necessary respiratory support medical equipment. Each eligible applicant can receive subsidy for a maximum of 12 months. The proposal was endorsed by ex-Steering Committee on the CCF and was launched at the end of January 2013.

21. The above-mentioned services have already covered the needs of the severely disabled persons in various aspects. If the pilot scheme for integrated support services is launched, the need of persons with severe physical disabilities shall also be fully addressed. Considering all these factors, this programme therefore needs not be incorporated into the regular assistance and service of the Government. Though the subsidy released by this programme was time-limited, it brought extra support to the beneficiaries and their families

⁵ The annual household disposable financial resources, with reference to the assessment criteria of Samaritan Fund for drug cost assistance, is calculated by summing up the annual household disposal income (i.e. annual household gross income less household allowable deductions) and household disposable capital (i.e. household disposable capital less deductible allowance); the amount of deductible allowance is set with reference to the asset limit for applying public housing.

and allowed them more flexibility to use their resources.

22. As the beneficiaries were generally satisfied with the operation of this programme and taking into consideration the relatively small changes and impact for its extension, CCF decided to extend implementation of the programme under the existing operational arrangement.

Social Welfare Department
February 2013

Statistical Data on Application**(a) Reasons for Not Eligible**

Reasons (Note 1)	Number of Cases	%
Household income exceeded the respective limit (Note 2)	185	93.4%
Applicant was not HDA recipient	1	0.5%
Applicant was not living in the community	2	1.0%
Applicant was aged 60 or above	1	0.5%
Others	9	4.6%
- Application withdrawn by the applicant (8)		
- Applicant could not provide the necessary document (1)		
Total	198	100.0%

Note 1: If an applicant has submitted applications in the two application periods and both of the applications were vetted not eligible, the applications are counted two times in the above table.

Note 2: The income limit was set and adjusted according to 75% of the latest MMDHI from the Report on General Household Survey published by Census and Statistics Department.

(b) Age Distribution of Beneficiaries

Age Group	Number of Beneficiaries	%
0 to 10	108	7.5%
11 to 20	214	14.9%
21 to 30	235	16.4%
31 to 40	172	12.0%
41 to 50	225	15.7%
51 to 59	482	33.5%
Total	1 436	100.0%

Survey on Beneficiaries(a) Family Condition of the Beneficiaries

Questions and Comments	No.	%
1. Number of family members living with the beneficiaries:		
- Living alone	9	12.3%
- Living with 1 to 3 family members	54	74.0%
- Living with 4 or more family members	10	13.7%
- Family members living with the beneficiaries who were not included in the definition of this programme ¹ (<u>more than one option can be chosen</u> , Note 1):		
- Grandparents	2	3.1%
- Adult siblings	15	23.4%
- Non-adult siblings	11	17.2%
- Nephew and/or niece	1	1.6%
2. Total monthly income of the beneficiaries and their family members living with them:		
- < \$5,000	28	38.3%
- \$5,000 - < \$10,000	21	28.8%
- \$10,000 - < \$15,000	17	23.3%
- \$15,000 - < \$20,000	4	5.5%
- \$20,000 - < \$25,000	3	4.1%

Note 1: The percentage in this part was calculated based on the 64 beneficiaries living with family members in this survey. As more than one option can be chosen and the options only include the family members living with the beneficiaries who are out of the definition in this programme, the percentage in total for all options may not be equal to 100%.

¹ Family members in this programme refer to father, mother, son, daughter, husband and wife who are living together with the applicant in Hong Kong (including legally recognised adoptive parents/children and illegitimate children with proof of parentage).

(b) Use of Subsidy and Daily Caring Needs of Beneficiaries

Questions and Comments	No.	%
1. How did the beneficiaries use the subsidy? (More than one option can be chosen , Note 1)		
- Family daily expenses	47	64.4%
- Medical consultation	52	71.2%
- Drugs	37	50.7%
- Nutrition food	25	34.2%
- Medical consumables	21	28.8%
- Medical equipment	19	26.0%
- Caring services	11	15.1%
- Hiring carer	10	13.7%
- Others (e.g. residential fee, training fee, transportation fee)	6	8.2%
2. Do the beneficiaries need others to take care of their daily life?		
- Yes	56	76.7%
- No	17	23.3%
3. If it is 'Yes' in Question 2, who is the main carer?		
- Family members / close friends living together	43	76.8%
- Family members / close friends not living together	1	1.8%
- Non-local domestic helper	11	19.6%
- Community Care Services not subsidised by the Government	1	1.8%

Note 1: The percentage of this part was calculated based on all the 73 interviewees. As more than one option could be chosen, the percentage in total for all options may not be equal to 100%.

(c) Comments of Beneficiaires on this Programme

Questions and Comments	No.	%
1. Do you agree that this programme could render necessary support to the beneficiaries?		
- Agree	73	100.0%
- Disagree	0	0.0%
2. Do you have any comments on this programme (More than one option can be chosen , Note 1)		
- No Comment	40	54.8%
- Targeted beneficiaries and Eligibility Criteria	2	2.7%
- Should include the carer (1)		
- Should include the elders aged 60 to 65 (1)		
- Amount of Subsidy	8	11.0%
- Very helpful (1)		
- Amount too low (7)		
- Application Procedures	2	2.7%
- Application was handled efficiently (1)		
- Procedures were quite complicated (1)		
- Arrangement for Release of Subsidy	1	1.4%
- Others	21	28.8%
- Should extend the subsidising period and continuing the programme(20)		
- Very helpful to the severely disabled persons (1)		
3. In general, are you satisfied with the arrangement of this programme?		
- Yes	73	100.0%
- No	0	0.0%

Note 1: The percentage of this part was calculated based on all the 73 interviewees. As more than one option could be chosen, the percentage in total for all options may not be equal to 100%.

Appendix III

Survey on Invitees who have not submitted Applications

(a) Reasons for Not Applying for the Subsidy

Reasons	No.	%
Not meeting the eligibility criteria - Household income exceeded respective limit (19) - Not living in the community (1)	20	55.6%
No subsidy need	14	38.9%
Invitation letter not received or uncertain of receiving the invitation letter (Note 1)	2	5.5%
Total	36	100.0%

Note 1: For interviewees claimed that they had not received the invitation letters or could not ascertain whether they had received the invitation letters, their correspondence addresses were verified correct and there was no non-delivery mail found. However, for their benefits, invitation letters were sent to these invitees again.

(b) Views of Invitees on this Programme

Views	No.	%
No comment	25	69.5%
Relaxing the income limit	8	22.2%
Helpful to the severely disabled persons	3	8.3%

Appendix IV

Number and Natures of Enquiries for this Programme (Note 1)

Nature of Enquiry	Number
Eligibility Criteria	240
Application Procedure	17
Completion of Application Form	210
Supporting Documents for Application	39
Submission and Receipt of Application	148
Progress of Application	304
Arrangement for Release of Subsidy	259
Confirmation of Receipt of Subsidy	51
Others	55
- Update of information	(45)
- About the content of notification letter for the application result	(6)
- Whether or not a new round of assistance will be provided	(4)

Note 1: If an enquiry involved more than one subject nature, each subject would be categorised and summarised in this table.