

Community Care Fund Programme
“Provision of Special Subsidy to Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities for Renting Respiratory Support Medical Equipment” and
“Provision of Special Subsidy to Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities for Purchasing Medical Consumables Related to Respiratory Support Medical Equipment”
Evaluation Report

Background

The Community Care Fund (CCF) has launched two assistance programmes, namely “Provision of Special Subsidy to Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities for Renting Respiratory Support Medical Equipment” (“RSME-Renting Programme”) and “Provision of Special Subsidy to Persons with Severe Physical Disabilities for Purchasing Medical Consumables Related to Respiratory Support Medical Equipment” (“RSME-Consumables Purchase Programme”), to provide a monthly special subsidy of not more than \$2,500 and \$2,000 respectively, for a maximum of 12 months to persons living in the community who are receiving Higher Disability Allowance (HDA) under the Social Security Allowance Scheme and have met the household financial requirement, so as to support them in renting necessary RSMEs and purchasing RSME-related medical consumables.

Implementation of Assistance Programmes

2. The two programmes are administered by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). The “RSME-Renting Programme” was first launched by SWD in January 2013 with details of the programme announced and publicised¹. Based on the record of the Computerised Social Security System (CSSS), invitation letters were sent to about 3 700 HDA recipients aged below 60² to invite those who are eligible to the programme to make application. In September 2013, the “RSME-Consumables Purchase Programme” was launched while the application period of the “RSME-Renting Programme” was extended. Invitation letters were sent to about 17 700 HDA recipients³ for inviting the

¹ Publicity efforts included press release, distribution of programme leaflets via SWD’s District Social Welfare Offices and the Home Affairs Department’s District Offices, and uploading all relevant information onto the SWD Homepage.

² The “RSME-Renting Programme” was targeted at HDA recipients who were aged below 60 when it was first launched. The age limit was lifted when the programme was extended in September 2013.

³ On the specified date of the two programmes (i.e. 30 June 2013), there were about 17 700 HDA recipients, including the beneficiaries of “RSME-Renting Programme”. Invitation letters were also sent to these beneficiaries for inviting them to apply for the “RSME-Consumables Purchase Programme”.

eligible persons to make application. The application period for the two programmes ended on 31 December 2013. The subsidy was released quarterly through the beneficiaries' bank accounts for receiving HDA. The first batch of beneficiaries has been receiving subsidy with effect from end March 2013.

Evaluation

3. The evaluation on the effectiveness of the two programmes commenced in January 2014 and was completed in February 2014. Considering that the two programmes were similar in nature and had the same target beneficiaries, while the calculation of the subsidies of the two programmes is correlated, the evaluation on the two programmes was thus held and consolidated into one report so as to offer a more comprehensive picture for comparison and analysis. The effectiveness of the two programmes was mainly evaluated through analysing the number of beneficiaries, the amount of subsidy disbursed, how the subsidies were used by the beneficiaries, as well as feedback from the beneficiaries and other relevant parties. The data was collected through the application forms submitted by the applicants, surveys conducted with the beneficiaries and the invitees who have not submitted application (the invitees), and from the public enquiries received. Besides, in conducting the evaluation on the two programmes, SWD had also made reference to other programmes under the CCF on the methodology used and experience gained.

Analysis of Evaluation Results

(a) Statistical Data on Application and Profile of Beneficiaries

4. SWD has received applications⁴ for both or either one of the two programmes from a total of 209 persons. There were 186 and 128 applications for the "RSME-Renting Programme" and the "RSME-Consumables Purchase Programme" respectively and, among them, 105 applicants had applied for both programmes. Since one applicant could apply for the two programmes concurrently, to better reflect the conditions of the applicants, the data of the applicants of the two programmes were consolidated for compiling the statistics and making analysis, while some of the application figures will be listed separately. The application figures concerned⁵ were as follows:

⁴ To ensure all the eligible persons could submit application, SWD had sent invitations to all HDA recipients. However, with no knowledge of their need for RSMEs and household financial condition, it was difficult to estimate the number of applications.

⁵ The evaluation commenced in January 2014, the then figures were applied accordingly.

| | Only applied for “RSME-Renting Programme” | Only applied for “RSME-Consumables Purchase Programme” | Applied for both programmes | Total no. of persons |
|--|---|--|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| No. of applications received | 81 | 23 | 105 | 209 |
| No. of applications vetted ⁶ | 54 | 18 | 84 | 156 |
| No. of pending applications ⁷ | 27 | 5 | 21 | 53 |
| No. of applications with subsidy granted | 25 | 5 | 30 | 60 |

5. As at January 2014, 60 applicants had received the subsidy (the beneficiaries)⁸. The average monthly subsidy per beneficiary who only applied for the “RSME-Renting Programme”, only applied for the “RSME-Consumables Purchase Programme” and applied for both programmes was \$2,480, \$1,900 and \$2,969.7 respectively. Among the applications having vetted, 4 applicants were not eligible for the “RSME-Renting Programme” because most of them were not renting RSMEs; there were also 4 applicants who were not eligible for the “RSME-Consumables Purchase Programme” as most of them applied for both programmes, but there was no balance of subsidy left after deducting the remaining balance of subsidy granted under the “RSME-Renting Programme”⁹.

6. Among the 60 beneficiaries, those aged between 51 and 60 was the highest in number (18%), followed by the age group of 71 to 80 and 10 or below (both at 15%). On household size¹⁰, beneficiaries were mainly of 2-person and 4-person household (30% and 28% respectively), followed by 3-person household (22%).

7. Up to 90% of the beneficiaries acquired their RSMEs by renting, while

⁶ The number of applications vetted included those with subsidy granted.

⁷ These applications were pending mainly because the applicants have not yet submitted all the information required for the programmes.

⁸ Subsidy to the remaining eligible applicants would be released subsequently.

⁹ Those who have applied for both programmes may, after having paid the actual monthly rent of respiratory support medical equipment, use the remaining balance of subsidy, if any, granted under the “RSME-Renting Programme” for purchasing relevant medical consumables. Therefore, the actual subsidy to which these beneficiaries are entitled under the “RSME-Consumables Purchase Programme” is calculated by the subsidy rate based on their monthly household income deducting the remaining balance of subsidy granted under the “RSME-Renting Programme”.

¹⁰ Household size refers to the applicant and all the family members living with him/her in Hong Kong.

the remainder either purchased or rented and purchased at the same time. The most common type of RSME used was oxygen concentrator, followed by BIPAP machine. The rent for RSMEs varied, ranging from about \$200 to \$1,300 per month, depending on the type of RSMEs. On average, the beneficiaries spent \$850 per month on renting RSMEs¹¹. Besides, 67% of the beneficiaries only needed one type of RSME while 27% required two types.

(b) Survey on the Beneficiaries

8. SWD conducted a telephone survey on 55 beneficiaries¹² to understand their use of RSMEs, use of subsidy and how their daily life was being taken care of, as well as their opinions on the programmes.

(i) Use of RSME

9. Up to 60% of the interviewees had been using RSMEs for 3 years or above, while 24% had been using RSMEs for 1 to 2 years. The RSME-related expenses of most interviewees (58%) were borne by the family members living with them, while 38% of the interviewees needed to bear the related cost on their own. Moreover, their monthly expense on purchasing RSME-related consumables was mostly at the level of \$1,001 to \$1,500 (49%), followed by \$1,000 or below (27%); tubing was the most common related consumables that the interviewees needed, followed by nasal cannula.

(ii) Use of Subsidy and Care on Daily Living

10. Most of the interviewees reflected that there was no surplus of subsidy after deducting the cost of renting RSMEs and / or purchasing related consumables. There were only 3 interviewees who had surplus of subsidy. All of them had spent the surplus on the daily expense of the family, and one of them had also spent the surplus on other medical equipment / consumables and another one had used the surplus for medical consultation / drug fee.

11. For care on daily living, 71% of the interviewees needed to be taken care of by others. Most of them indicated that their main carers were family

¹¹ This refers to the total cost for renting RSME divided by the number of beneficiaries under the “RSME-Renting Programme”.

¹² There were 5, among the 60 beneficiaries, who could not be invited for the telephone survey as they had passed away before the survey conducted.

members / relatives / friends living together, and agreed that the two programmes could relieve the pressure of their family members / relatives / friends in providing the related RSMEs and consumables.

(iii) **Opinion on the Programmes**

12. All the interviewees agreed that the two programmes rendered appropriate support to their need on the related RSMEs and consumables and they were all satisfied with the operational arrangement of the programmes. 76% of the interviewees had no further comments on the two programmes, while 18% expressed their wish for extending the subsidy period or incorporating the programmes into regular service, and the remainder (3 interviewees in total) had respectively reflected their opinions on raising the amount of subsidy, releasing the subsidy on a monthly basis and relaxing the scope of medical consumables.

(c) Survey on the Invitees

13. In order to understand their reasons for not submitting applications and their opinions on the two programmes, SWD conducted a telephone survey on 36 randomly selected invitees who had not submitted applications. All the 36 invitees indicated that they did not submit application because they were not using RSMEs and they all gave no comments on the programmes.

(d) Public Enquiries

14. In the course of implementing the programmes, SWD has set up a telephone hotline to provide necessary support and information to the parties concerned. From February 2013 up to now, SWD received 1 060 and 870 enquiries on the “RSME-Renting Programme” and the “RSME- Consumables Purchase Programme” respectively, over half of which were from invitees who did not use RSMEs enquiring whether or not they needed to return the application form, followed by enquiries related to eligibility and completion of application forms. In general, the main concern of public enquiries raised was about eligibility and operational arrangement. There was only one person who suggested to benefit all HDA recipients for the two programmes and not only those who were using RSMEs.

Conclusion

(a) Publicity for the programmes

15. SWD had issued invitation letters to all HDA recipients to ensure that all the potentially eligible persons have knowledge about the programmes details and might make their applications accordingly. Overall, the application rate was low. However, since all the invitees indicated in the survey that they did not submit application because they did not need to use RSMEs, which reflected that HDA recipients using RSMEs only took up a small proportion of the overall HDA recipients. Moreover, the two programmes had adopted relatively relaxed criteria on means test, including prescribing the limit of monthly household income at 150% Median Monthly Domestic Household Income, which should benefit most of the people with financial need. In addition, the arrangement of sending invitation letters to all HDA recipients could directly reach the target beneficiary group, which, together with the other publicity measures, including press release, distributing the programme leaflets via SWD's District Social Welfare Offices and the Home Affairs Department and uploading all relevant information onto the SWD Homepage, shall be able to make the programmes known to all the eligible persons.

(b) Operational Arrangement

16. Though some beneficiaries suggested in the survey that the amount of subsidy of the programmes should be increased, that the subsidy should be released on a monthly basis, and that the programmes should be extended to benefit people using other medical consumables, all the beneficiaries in the survey were satisfied with the operational arrangement of the two programmes. Moreover, the telephone hotline service could effectively provide immediate support and information to the applicants and members of the public, and serve as a platform for members of the public to express opinions on the programmes. As half of the enquiries received were made by invitees who did not need to use RSMEs, but concerned whether they need to reply to the invitation letter of the programmes, it is worth, for the sake of relieving their doubt, indicating in the letter that reply is not required for those not using RSMEs.

17. Besides, a member of the public suggested that the two programmes should benefit all HDA recipients. Nevertheless, since the RSME-related expenses were relatively high, the two programmes were implemented to relieve the additional burden and financial pressure of persons with severe physical disabilities on using related equipment and medical consumables, so as to enable them to continue living in the community before the regularisation of the programmes. The suggestion is not in line with the original purpose of the two programmes to support the persons with severe physical disabilities who need to use RSMEs.

(c) Overall Effectiveness

18. The result of the survey reflected that beneficiaries responded positively to the two programmes, and they agreed that the programmes could relieve their financial pressure by offering appropriate support to them and their family members for the need of related medical equipment and consumables. About 20% of the beneficiaries in the survey supported the extension of the subsidy period of two programmes or incorporating the programmes into regular service. The beneficiaries had a long-term need for RSMEs, and the cost had to be borne by themselves or their family members. While the family members / relatives / friends living with the beneficiaries might take up the role of carer and thus would affect their employment, the two programmes had been duly in place to provide certain financial support to them, thus achieving the original aim of the programmes.

19. As reflected by the number of applications of the two programmes, only a minority of the HDA recipients needed to use RSMEs. Even though most of the beneficiaries in the survey reflected that there was no surplus of subsidy after deducting the cost of renting RSMEs and / or purchasing related consumables, considering their monthly expenses on renting RMSE and / or purchasing related medical consumables as stated in paragraph 7 and 9 above as well as the average amount of subsidy received per capita per month as mentioned in paragraph 5, the amount of subsidy provided by the programmes should be able to meet the needs of most of the beneficiaries. In view that the related subsidies have offered prominent support to the beneficiaries, it is recommended to regularise the two programmes for supporting the continual need of the persons concerned.

20. The Policy Address 2014 announced that the two programmes will be incorporated into regular service of the Government in 2014-15, and SWD plans to launch them in the third quarter of 2014-15. The effectiveness of the two programmes was prominent and the beneficiaries were also satisfied with the operational arrangement. These findings may have reference value in formulating the implementation details of the related regular service and could facilitate the smooth running of the regular service so as to offer more comprehensive support to persons with severe physical disabilities.

21. Moreover, to ensure that the beneficiaries of the two programmes can receive continual support to live in the community, there is a need to extend the programmes in this transitional period to allow the eligible persons to receive the subsidy until the regular service is launched.

Social Welfare Department
February 2014