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## Chapter 3

# Poverty Alleviation and Support for the Disadvantaged

## Preamble

The Commission on Poverty (CoP) will continue to consider policies and measures to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion, as well as to promote social mobility. Four Task Forces have been established under the CoP to focus on different areas of work, which include supporting the underprivileged who have special needs; promoting education, employment training and other measures to enhance upward mobility of young people from grassroots families; making good use of the Community Care Fund (CCF) to plug gaps in the existing system; and taking forward social innovation initiatives funded by the Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund (SIE Fund).

The poor population and poverty rate in 2014 dropped to 960 000 and 14.3% respectively. With both figures hitting a six-year low and the poor population dropping below 1 million for the second year, the poverty initiatives of the current-term Government continue to yield results. Since its full implementation in 2013, the Old Age Living Allowance (OALA) has benefited over 420 000 elderly people and produced notable results in alleviating elderly poverty. The 2014 poverty statistics show that the working poor is still the group that deserves the Government's priority attention. In order to lessen the financial burden on these low-income working families, the Government will introduce the Low-income Working Family Allowance (LIFA) Scheme in May this year to encourage working members of low-income families to stay in active

employment to achieve self-reliance. The allowance will also enhance support for children and young persons in these families.

Retirement protection is highly relevant to the problem of elderly poverty. As Hong Kong turns rapidly into an ageing society, our workforce is anticipated to start declining in a few years' time. In view of the changing demographic structure, the community has to consider ways to provide adequate retirement protection for the elderly with financial needs, whilst maintaining the sustainability of the whole system and taking into account the affordability of the community. "Who foots the bill?" is a question that we cannot evade. The CoP is now conducting a public engagement exercise on how retirement protection can be improved and members of the public are welcome to express their views.

As regards those disadvantaged members of the community who cannot support themselves, we will continue to meet their basic needs through the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, which acts as a safety net of last resort. Regarding those who are capable of work, we will enhance education, training and employment support to enable them to share the benefits of economic growth. To help address intergenerational poverty, we will ensure that children and young people enjoy opportunities to quality education and training irrespective of their background.

We will strengthen the support for persons or families with special needs, including persons with disabilities, mental patients and ex-mentally ill persons, ethnic minorities, children with special needs, victims of domestic violence, and single parents and their families. The aim is to remove the barriers that hold them back from realising their potential. We will continue to develop client-centred, family-focused and community-based services that provide integrated and cross-sectoral support.

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## New Initiatives

*We will:*

### **Community Care Fund**

- Invite the CCF to consider implementing a pilot scheme to provide free cervical cancer vaccination for teenage girls from eligible low-income families. (FHB)
- Invite the CCF to consider implementing the pilot schemes recommended by the Inter-departmental Working Group on Review of the Disability Allowance co-ordinated by the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB):
  - providing living allowance for low-income carers of persons with disabilities; and
  - raising the maximum level of disregarded earnings for disabled CSSA recipients, and providing additional allowance for disabled recipients of Higher Disability Allowance who are engaged in paid jobs subject to the fulfilment of criteria such as working hour requirement and income limit, in order to further encourage persons with disabilities to secure employment. (LWB)
- Invite the CCF to consider implementing a programme to provide a one-off grant for kindergarten students from needy families in the 2016/17 school year to cover their school-related expenses before the implementation of the free quality kindergarten education policy in the 2017/18 school year. (EDB)

- Invite the CCF to consider implementing a two-year pilot scheme, in collaboration with the Hospital Authority (HA) and the Social Welfare Department, based on a medical-social collaboration model to provide dementia care services to the elderly persons with mild or mild to moderate dementia in the community through the District Elderly Community Centres with a view to shortening the waiting time of patients for diagnosis and specialist services of the HA and enhancing the dementia care services in the community. (FHB/LWB)

### **Retirement Protection**

- Collect public views through the six-month public engagement exercise on the way forward for retirement protection conducted by the CoP. The exercise was launched in December 2015 to promote informed discussion of retirement protection issues and to forge community consensus. (CSO)

### **Supporting Families in Need**

- Through the following initiatives, implement the “parental responsibility model” and promote the continuing parental responsibility of divorced/separated parents towards their children, so as to serve the best interests of children:
  - following up the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission Report on Child Custody and Access by conducting public consultation on the related legislative and implementation proposals;

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- implementing a two-year pilot project on children contact service to facilitate divorced/separated parents in co-parenting and in establishing and maintaining satisfactory communication and contact with their children; and
  - providing “dedicated help service” to handle public enquiries and requests for assistance during the initial one to two years after the legislative proposals have come into effect. (LWB)

### **Enhancing Support for Victims of Domestic Violence**

- Help victims of domestic violence and families in need to tide them over and to alleviate their distress through:
  - increasing the number of places and manpower of refuge centres for women and the Family Crisis Support Centre; and
  - providing additional manpower for refuge centres for women and the Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre (CEASE Crisis Centre) to enhance the support for children staying temporarily at these centres. (LWB)

### **Enhancing Services for Persons with Disabilities and Persons with Mental Illness**

- Provide bus service for the Day Activity Centres cum Hostels for Severely Mentally Handicapped Persons and Community Rehabilitation Day Centres. (LWB)
- Strengthen the employment support of the Labour Department (LD) for job seekers with disabilities by engaging a non-governmental organisation (NGO) under a pilot scheme to help job seekers with disabilities in need of counselling service. (LWB)

- Provide a medical social services unit in the new Tin Shui Wai Hospital to provide patients and their families with suitable psycho-social intervention and assistance. (LWB)
- Implement various recommendations of the Inter-departmental Working Group on Review of the Disability Allowance co-ordinated by the LWB. (LWB)
- Explore the feasibility of setting up a public trust for persons with intellectual disabilities. (LWB)

### **Supporting Children with Special Needs and their Parents**

- Establish a new Child Assessment Centre to maintain the performance pledge of providing early assessment and professional diagnosis for children with developmental problems within six months in the face of the increasing demand. (FHB)
- Further enhance support for children with special needs and their parents through:
  - increasing the training hours per month under the training subsidy programme for children on the waiting list for special child care centres;
  - waiving the fees of special child care centres and providing non-means-tested training subsidy for children on the waiting list for these centres to go in line with the implementation of the free quality kindergarten education policy in the 2017/18 school year; and

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- conducting a comprehensive review of the two-year pilot scheme, to help determine the mode of operation if and when the scheme is regularised to provide on-site rehabilitation services for children with special needs who are studying in ordinary kindergartens or kindergarten-cum-child care centres. (LWB)
  - Further enhance the School-based Educational Psychology Service by progressively improving the ratio of educational psychologist to schools to 1:4 from the 2016/17 school year for public sector primary and secondary schools with a large number of students with special educational needs (SEN). (EDB)

## **Community Involvement**

- Build mutual help networks among residents of public housing estates in various districts in the coming years through the Community Investment and Inclusion Fund to strengthen the care and support for elderly singletons and elderly couples. (LWB)

## On-going Initiatives

*We are:*

### **Work of the Commission on Poverty**

(a) CoP

- Updating the poverty line annually to monitor Hong Kong's poverty situation on an on-going basis and provide scientific data for policy formulation and effectiveness evaluation. (CSO)
- Reviewing the existing policies and exploring new measures, as well as fostering cross-sectoral collaboration in promoting poverty alleviation through its Task Forces to prevent and ease poverty. (CSO)

(b) CCF Task Force

- Implementing a number of assistance programmes under the CCF. The programmes rolled out in 2015-16 include:
  - providing a one-off special subsidy for students on full grant under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme before the launch of the LIFA Scheme;
  - implementing a pilot programme to provide a grant for ordinary schools with relatively more students with SEN and financial needs to arrange designated SEN co-ordinators;



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- enhancing the academic expenses grant for post-secondary students with SEN and financial needs;
  - providing a one-off subsidy again for CSSA households living in rented private housing and paying a rent which exceeds the maximum rent allowance under the CSSA Scheme; and
  - providing a living subsidy for the third time for low-income households not living in public housing and not receiving CSSA. (CSO)
- Expanding the Elderly Dental Assistance Programme from September 2015 to cover elders who are OALA recipients by phases, starting with those aged 80 or above in the first phase. (CSO)
  - Regularising the CCF programme of providing extra travel subsidy for needy special school students in the 2015/16 school year. The CCF will continue to draw up more new pilot programmes in collaboration with the other Task Forces under the CoP to further assist the disadvantaged and low-income families. (CSO)

- (c) Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund Task Force
- Implementing the capacity building programmes and providing funding support under innovative programmes through appointed intermediaries, and engaging a new intermediary to implement the flagship project on food support with a view to setting up information infrastructure and network for more effective operation of the stakeholders involved in the food support service. (CSO)
  - Fostering the development of social innovation ecosystem, encouraging cross-sector collaboration and addressing social needs in innovative ways so as to bring benefits to the community, including promoting the implementation of “Creating Shared Values” concept in Hong Kong, which encourages businesses to deliver social impact while gaining profits. Conducting an evaluation study of the SIE Fund to assess the effectiveness of the initiatives of the Task Force in achieving the Fund’s objectives. Exploring the possibility of applying the “Collective Impact” concept in Hong Kong on a trial basis with a view to integrating efforts of various sectors to address the increasingly complex social problems in a collaborative manner. Continuing the effort to interact with different stakeholders through various channels to study and understand the opportunities and challenges in pursuing social innovation. (CSO)

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(d) Special Needs Groups Task Force

- Continuing to monitor the progress and effectiveness of implementing the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework and the Applied Learning Chinese Language Course for ethnic minority students in secondary and primary schools, and conducting a thematic study on the poverty situation of the ethnic minorities. (CSO)
- Following up the poverty situation report on persons with disabilities released in 2014, and continuing to explore specific measures to promote the employment of persons with disabilities and facilitate their integration into the community. (CSO)
- Reviewing the existing policies and measures which support other underprivileged groups with special needs (including students with SEN, single-parent families and new arrivals). (CSO)

(e) Youth Education, Employment and Training Task Force

- Strengthening the development and promotion of vocational training, and exploring ways to enhance the Pilot Training and Support Scheme by studying overseas experience. (CSO)
- Exploring the follow-up actions to be taken in the light of the analysis of the study on earnings mobility situation of post-secondary graduates from grassroots families conducted by the Government Economist and the Census and Statistics Department. (CSO)

- Conducting major community involvement activities, promoting cross-sectoral collaboration, encouraging young people from grassroots families to join mentorship programmes and providing them with career aspiration coaching service and training opportunities. (CSO)

## **Poverty Alleviation**

### (a) Helping Low-income Families

- Introducing the LIFA in May 2016 to encourage employment and strengthen the support for the next generation. (LWB)
- Continuing with a comprehensive review of the Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme. (LWB)

### (b) Enhancing Upward Mobility

- Continuing to implement projects under the Child Development Fund to promote the long-term development of children from a disadvantaged background. (LWB)
- Implementing various student financial assistance schemes to ensure that no students in Hong Kong will be denied access to education due to a lack of means. (EDB)
- Continuing to implement the following CCF programmes which have been incorporated into the Government's regular assistance programme:
  - Enhancement of financial assistance for needy students pursuing eligible programmes below the sub-degree level;

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- Provision of free lunch at schools for primary students receiving full grant assistance under the Student Financial Assistance Schemes through the whole-day schools;
  - Enhancement of the flat-rate grant for primary and secondary students under the School Textbook Assistance Scheme; and
  - Provision of extra travel subsidy for needy students of special schools. (EDB)
- Providing a subsidy of up to HK\$15,000 starting from the 2014/15 academic year for needy students pursuing full-time locally-accredited undergraduate or sub-degree programmes and receiving student financial assistance. The subsidy serves as an incentive for them to participate in exchange programmes outside Hong Kong. (EDB)
- (c) Social Security and Retirement Protection
- Reviewing the OALA to ascertain, among other things, whether the asset limits should be relaxed. (LWB)
  - Exploring the feasibility of extending the OALA to Guangdong, having regard to the operating experience gained from the implementation of the Guangdong Scheme. (LWB)
  - Continuing to implement the Integrated Employment Assistance Programme for Self-reliance and engaging NGOs to provide employment assistance services for employable able-bodied CSSA recipients. This will enhance their employability, and help and encourage them to secure employment and achieve self-reliance. (LWB)

- Striving to secure the early enactment of the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes (Amendment) Bill 2015 to launch a fee-controlled and highly standardised Default Investment Strategy (i.e. the “core fund”) which is based on a long-term investment strategy to balance investment risk and return, with the aim of facilitating the choice of fund by Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) scheme members and achieving more substantial reduction in MPF fees. (FSTB)

## Supporting the Disadvantaged

### (a) Supporting Families in Need

- Increasing in phases the number of residential child care places to enhance support and protection for children and families in need. (LWB)
- Combating domestic violence through enhancing the provision of preventive, supportive and specialised services for victims and families in need, as well as making publicity and public education efforts. Counselling and psycho-educational services are also provided for batterers to change their abusive attitude and behaviour. (LWB)
- Monitoring the implementation of the Domestic and Cohabitation Relationships Violence Ordinance. (LWB)
- Providing support services for victims of sexual violence. (LWB)

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(b) Enhancing Services for Persons with Disabilities and Persons with Mental Illness

- Promoting the spirit and core values enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, the rehabilitation sector and the public at large. (LWB)
- Launching a pilot project to strengthen the support for persons with autism and their parents/carers. (LWB)
- Improving rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities by providing additional day, residential and pre-school places. (LWB)
- Launching a pilot scheme through NGOs operating subvented pre-school rehabilitation services to provide on-site rehabilitation services for children with special needs who are studying in ordinary kindergartens or kindergarten-cum-child care centres. (LWB)
- Providing support for parents and relatives/carers of persons with disabilities and ex-mentally ill persons, including children or young persons with special needs, through subvented Parents/Relatives Resource Centres. (LWB)
- Providing subsidy for pre-school children from low-income families to obtain self-financing rehabilitation services run by NGOs while they are wait-listing for subvented services so as to facilitate their learning and development. (LWB)
- Providing home care services for persons with severe disabilities on a territory-wide basis. (LWB)

- Providing subsidy for needy persons with severe physical disabilities who live in the community and require constant care to cover their expenses for renting medical equipment and purchase of medical consumables. One-stop support services (including casework counselling, occupational therapy/physiotherapy, nursing care service and financial support service) co-ordinated and arranged by case managers in accordance with the needs of these persons are provided to enable them to continue living in the community and integrate into society. (LWB)
- Continuing to implement the case management service in District Support Centres for Persons with Disabilities. (LWB)
- Continuing to provide funding for the Financial Support Scheme for Self-help Organisations for Persons with Disabilities/Chronic Illnesses to enhance the support for the operation and development of self-help organisations. (LWB)
- Providing sign language interpretation services for persons with hearing impairment through Multi-service Centres for Hearing Impaired Persons and relevant Social and Recreational Centres for the Disabled. (LWB)
- Strengthening the support for athletes with disabilities by means of the \$200 million injected into the Hong Kong Paralympians Fund. (LWB/HAB)
- Continuing to provide short-term day and residential care services for persons with disabilities to relieve the stress of their families/carers. (LWB)



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- Implementing the Bought Place Scheme for private residential care homes for persons with disabilities to:
    - upgrade the service standards of private residential care homes for persons with disabilities;
    - help the market develop more service options for persons with disabilities; and
    - increase the supply of subsidised residential care places. (LWB)
  - Enhancing care and support services for ageing service users in rehabilitation service units. (LWB)
  - Providing one-stop district-based community support services through Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness for ex-mentally ill persons, persons with suspected mental health problems, their families/carers and local residents. (LWB)
  - Promoting the employment of persons with disabilities by:
    - (i) providing allowance for employers under the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme to encourage employers to employ persons with disabilities and provide them with on-the-job training and support; and (ii) increasing job attachment allowance and wage subsidy under the On the Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities and the Sunnyway — On the Job Training Programme for Young People with Disabilities to provide job attachment opportunities for persons with disabilities;

- providing subsidy for employers for procurement of assistive devices and/or workplace modifications;
  - providing financial incentive for mentors rendering workplace assistance and guidance to employees with disabilities; and
  - promoting the Talent-Wise Employment Charter and Inclusive Organisations Recognition Scheme to mobilise employers in the territory to actively participate in facilitating the employment of persons with disabilities. (LWB)
- Providing support for businesses funded under the Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprise Project to create more employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. (LWB)
  - Implementing measures to ensure that persons with disabilities will continue to have equal access, like other applicants, to job opportunities in the Government. (CSB)
  - Enhancing transport services for persons with disabilities through improvement to rehasub service. We are also examining ways to further improve the accessibility of transport services for persons with disabilities. (LWB/THB)

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- Continuing to implement the Government Public Transport Fare Concession Scheme for the Elderly and Eligible Persons with Disabilities to enable elderly people aged 65 or above and eligible persons with disabilities aged below 65 to travel on the MTR lines, franchised bus routes, ferry routes and most green minibus routes covered by the scheme anytime at a concessionary fare of \$2 per trip, with a view to building a caring and inclusive society by encouraging these people to participate more in community activities. (LWB)
  - Including sign language into the domain of the Continuing Education Fund (CEF) and accepting applications from course providers for the registration of sign language courses as CEF courses. (LWB)

(c) Services for Ethnic Minorities

- Continuing to implement various measures for the ethnic minorities to facilitate their early integration into the community, including provision of language classes, adaptation courses and youth dedicated programmes for the ethnic minorities through six support service centres and two sub-centres; implementation of the Ambassador Scheme for ethnic minority youths etc.; and continued employment of non-civil service contract staff who are familiar with the cultures and languages of the ethnic minorities to assist in the implementation of the relevant measures. (HAB)
- Implementing measures to ensure that the ethnic minorities will continue to have equal access, like other applicants, to job opportunities in the Government. (CSB)

- Supporting non-Chinese speaking (NCS) students and students with SEN through a youth college under the Vocational Training Council (VTC) to provide them with alternative progression pathways. (EDB)
- Reviewing and implementing various support measures for NCS students, including the implementation of the Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework and related support measures, and provision of Applied Learning Chinese Course (for NCS students) as an alternative recognised qualification for further studies or employment to facilitate their mastery of the Chinese language in a structured manner and their integration into the community; and analysing the preliminary findings of the review. (EDB)
- Continuing with the work of the Police to engage with the ethnic minorities and to promote to them police services and fight crime initiatives. The Police will continue to encourage ethnic minority youths to join the Junior Police Call. (SB)

(d) Supporting Students with SEN

- Supporting students with SEN in the VTC through an annual provision of \$12 million. (EDB)

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- Continuing to provide additional resources, professional support and teacher training to help primary and secondary schools cater for their students with SEN, and expand the School-based Educational Psychology Service to cover all public sector primary and secondary schools by the 2016/17 school year. We also adjust the rates of the Learning Support Grant on an annual basis according to the established mechanism. (EDB)
  - Continuing to implement improvement measures in special schools, including the provision of an additional grant to enhance the support for boarders with complex medical conditions, strengthening of manpower for boarding services, provision of additional teacher assistants for some special schools, and progressive reduction of class size in schools for children with visual impairment and schools for social development. (EDB)

(e) Promoting Digital Inclusion

- Implementing various digital inclusion programmes to help the elderly and the underprivileged groups (including persons with special needs and students from low-income families) use ICT to enhance their opportunities and their integration with society. (ITB)

(f) Strengthening Cross-sectoral Collaboration

- Encouraging further cross-sectoral collaboration through the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged to launch projects that can cater for the various needs of the disadvantaged and benefit more people. A dedicated fund is set aside to provide more after-school learning and support programmes for primary and secondary school students from grassroots families. (LWB)

**Social Welfare Planning and Administration**

- Continuing to identify suitable sites and facilitate the provision of necessary manpower to meet the current and future needs of social welfare services. (LWB)
- Continuing to implement the Special Scheme on Privately Owned Sites for Welfare Uses, under which targeted assistance is provided for participating social welfare organisations during the planning or development process. The scheme aims at providing diversified subvented services and self-financing facilities, in particular elderly and rehabilitation service facilities. (LWB)
- Continuing to study the feasibility of setting up a centralised platform to provide one-stop administrative service to receive, process and approve applications for public benefits, and extending the scope of study to cover social impact assessments. (CSO)