

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Welfare Priorities for 2008-09

In the past few years, the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau had conducted annual consultation sessions and invited the sector to give views on the welfare priorities for the coming year. Those were good occasions for the Government and the sector to share views on the issues of concern and the areas of priorities, which we hope, the Government would take into consideration in their annual planning for new initiatives and allocation of resources. With the creation of the Labour and Welfare Bureau, we look forward to more partnership and communication on not only the annual welfare priorities, but also more in-depth review of social needs as well as long and medium term social welfare planning.

This year, we have again collected views of the sector on the welfare priorities for the coming year through Council's governance structure. Reference is made to the Chief Executive Election Platform Policy Blueprint, especially the study of long term social welfare plan and the strategies to support for support for children and families of underprivileged groups. The issues identified are those which we hope to be addressed in the coming fiscal year (2008-09) and do not represent all the service needs and gaps.

As in past years, our recommendations are not limited to those relating to welfare, as most welfare issues, cannot be effectively tackled from the welfare perspective alone, and inter-disciplinary collaboration and cross-bureaux coordination are essential. We hope that the Labour and Welfare Bureau will take the lead to solicit for the support of concerned government bodies and each of them can contribute in their specific policy areas and create synergy through better interface, coordination and collaboration.

A summary of our key issues of concern and priority issues are listed as below, followed by more detailed discussion in the ensuing paper:

Key Issues of Concern

Integrated and Forward-looking Welfare Plan

- R1 the Government to adopt a participative approach and start working with the sector on an integrated and forward looking welfare plan

Maintaining the Sustainability and Effective Implementation of Lump Sum Grant

- R2 to provide NGOs with the actual allocation according to the agreed benchmark as spelled out in the LSG Manual and activate the Lump Sum Grant Steering Committee to review the implementation of this subvention mode

Supporting the Unemployed

- R3 to involve stakeholders in the review of employment assistance policy and service
- R4 to try out a pilot project in selected districts to examine how the “one-stop shop” concept could be put into practice and adopt a case management approach in providing services to long-term CSSA recipients who are not successful in finding jobs through IEAP
- R5 to propose a systematic training for workers working with unemployed CSSA recipients and other unemployed persons

Supporting Children and Family

- R6 to provide social work support in pre-school services to reach out to the children and their parents and to organize parent education, mutual support groups and other supportive services
- R7 to strengthen secondary prevention and provide regional specialized family education for high risk groups
- R8 to provide additional ordinary residential places to meet high service demand

Enhancing the Recovery and Re-integration of People with Mental Health Problems

R9 to adopt an age-specific perspective in considering the policy and services for the mentally ill

R10 to set up Special Youth Mental Health Projects attached to mainstream services in selected districts to provide special 'back to school' and 'back to work' programmes

R11 to consider integrating existing community support services for the mentally ill and provide district-based multi-disciplinary services to reach out to those with mental health problems

Addressing Nurse Shortage Issue

R12 to address nurse shortage problem

Priority Issues

Preparing for the Aging Community

R13 SCAMO to provide information for service planning and projection

R14 to provide appropriate manpower and facilities to cater for the higher care needs required in day care centres

R15 to strengthen casework manpower of District Elderly Community Centres

Strengthening Community Support

R16 to explore the feasibility of setting up specialized Housing Social Service Team within the Housing Department to provide professional advice and guidance to families with housing problems

R17 to set up Community Networking Team in needy areas to strengthen neighbourhood support and mutual aid

Promoting Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities

R18 to provide recurrent funding support to effective project-based community support services

R19 to continue the special grant for training & support of carers and strengthen the development of self help organizations

R20 to increase pre-school places for children with disabilities or developmental delay

R21 to set a target to clear the waiting list of residential service and to facilitate the development of self-financed homes

R22 to enhance employment of people with disabilities by supporting the development of social enterprises, introducing tax exemption for the private sector and setting out an indicator on a manageable employment rate of PwDs

R23 to introduce feasible and effective strategy for introduction of concessionary fare for PwDs

R24 to strengthen integrated education and extend it to secondary schools

Key Issues of Concern

1. Integrated and Forward-looking Welfare Plan

1.1 The sector, for a number of years, has urged the Government to put in place an integrated and forward-looking welfare plan and we are glad to note that the Chief Executive, in his election policy blueprint, has committed to ‘**study the long-term social welfare development plan for Hong Kong through the Social Welfare Advisory Committee and the participation of the social welfare sector**’.

1.2 With the formation of a new Government Bureau responsible for labour and welfare affairs, it is important for the Government and the SWAC, to clearly spell out and re-confirm the values and missions of social welfare, which will serve as important guiding principles for the future development of welfare. We believe that social welfare in Hong Kong serves an important **social development mission**, including:

- **social investment:** promoting human and social capital, fostering self reliance, resilience, mutual help, family and neighbourhood support, and maximization of potentials
- **social inclusion:** enhancing equal opportunities as well as social and economic participation for people of different backgrounds and abilities, promoting community harmony and cohesion
- **social protection:** providing safety net with springboard effect, providing care and support for those in need to live in dignity, early prevention and intervention of social problems

1.3 We are glad to note that the Government plans to engage the sector in the welfare planning process. A **participative approach** is very important as the sector is the frontline service providers who have first hand information on community needs, service gaps and opportunities. In fact, we may draw reference to the participative model adopted by the Government in the recent Review of Rehabilitation Programme Plan, with the following key features:

- **partnership with NGOs:**
 - formation of review working group with good participation of NGO service operators and users
 - accepting the sector’s nomination of NGO and user group representatives to the review working group

- **multi-disciplinary collaboration:**
 - engaging relevant Government bodies and concerned professionals in the review process
- **community involvement:**
 - adopting a transparent approach and uploading working group agenda, minutes and discussion papers on the Bureau's website
 - organizing a series of consultation meetings at different stages of the review process

Recommendations

R1 We hope that the Government will **start working with the sector on an integrated and forward looking welfare plan in 2007**, and adopt a **participative approach** in the process.

The welfare plan should clearly spell out the **values, missions and strategic directions** of social welfare in Hong Kong, and include a **critical analysis of community needs, roles and responsibilities of Government, individual and family, and the community at large, as well as the long term and medium term goals**. Such welfare plan should reflect the consensus within the community and act as an important reference for manpower, resources and premises planning.

Key issues to address in the welfare plan include strategies to promote active aging and provide long term care, strengthening of family & community solidarity, promoting healthy development of children & young people and fostering social inclusion.

2. Maintaining the Sustainability and Effective Implementation of Lump Sum Grant

- 2.1 The NGO sector is very concerned with the knock-on effects of the proposed new starting salaries for civil service recruits. We note that the Government agreed to provide upward adjustment to the subventions for NGOs with reference to the revision of the mid point of the pay scale for new services allocated after April 2000. However, such adjustment is inadequate to facilitate agencies to provide a reasonable pay to their staff comparable to that of their counterparts in the civil service.
- 2.2 The benchmark for the LSG of each NGO is determined on the basis of the mid point salaries of the recognized staff establishment for services as at 31 March 2000.

However, the actual allocation to NGOs had deviated from the agreed benchmark as a result of the efficiency savings in the past few years. Moreover, the service operation cost was further affected when the subvention for personal emoluments for some new services were calculated according to entry point or market rate. Under such great financial constraints, NGOs had no choice, but cut down the salary of staff. The increase in the civil service pay would further widen the salary gap between the Government and the NGO sector, thus greatly affecting staff morale and would result in high staff turnover and wastage. This would, at the end, affect service quality and output.

Recommendations

R2 While the Government sees the need to revise civil servants' starting salaries to attract, retain and motivate staff, the same applies to NGO. **We earnestly urge the Government to provide NGOs with the actual allocation according to the agreed benchmark as spelled out in the LSG Manual.** This would provide the necessary resources for NGOs to increase staff salary with reference to their performance and the Government pay scale. **Allocation benchmarked at mid point salary should also be provided for new and revamped services so as to provide the buffer and flexibility for staff deployment and gradual maturation of the staff force.**

The LSG funding mode has been applied for more than 7 years, we consider it necessary to reactivate Lump Sum Grant Steering Committee to review the implementation of the system and to address obstacles and difficulties encountered in the process.

3. Supporting the Unemployed

3.1 Poverty is a recognized social problem in Hong Kong and gainful employment is also recognized as an effective way to help an individual / family to grow out of poverty. Mr. Donald Tsang has pledged in his election platform to strengthen employment services and training for youth, the middle-aged and the handicapped.

3.2 Starting from July 1, 2007, the policy areas of welfare and labour have been merged into one bureau. This institutional arrangement may facilitate a coordinated approach on services to the unemployed. At the same time, the Commission on Poverty (CoP) recommended a "one-stop shop" model in the provision of

employment assistance to the able-bodied unemployed and strengthening inter-departmental coordination at the district level.

- 3.3 It is recommended that stakeholders be involved to ensure that the design and operation of the “one-stop shop” model could assist the needy with appropriate income support and employment assistance for achieving self-reliance and ultimately grow out of poverty. Pilot projects could be implemented in selected districts for “difficult-to-employ” or long-term CSSA recipients. At the same time, streamlining of existing employment support programmes at district level could be implemented first.
- 3.4 For frontline workers to discharge their duties effectively to help the unemployed, there needs systematic training. At the moment, most of the frontline workers are without or with little training on career counseling and planning. Such training is therefore recommended.
- 3.5 Intensive Employment Assistance Programme (IEAP) has been offered for some time to the able-bodied CSSA recipients. Many existing projects (Batch 2 and 3) will be terminated by September this year and the last batch (Batch 4) will end by Sept. 2008. In the past years, IEAPs had proved its effect in helping the CSSA recipients to find employment and leave CSSA or change to receive low income CSSA. The future of IEAPs especially in light of the aforementioned institutional arrangement is worthy of examination and service operators would like to discuss the subject with government.

Recommendations

- R3** The merging of labour and welfare policy areas will have impact on the policy and service provision on employment assistance programmes. It is recommended that stakeholders (NGOs and self help groups etc.) be involved in the process of policy review and formulation, including the future of the IEAPs, and the interface with future “one-stop shop” model.
- R4** A pilot project should be tried out in selected districts to examine how the “one-stop shop” concept could be put into practice. It is suggested that the pilot project should adopt a case management approach to provide services to long-term CSSA recipients who are not successful in finding jobs through IEAP. The case manager will (i) conduct an assessment for participants on their employability, social readiness and training needs etc., (ii) work out a career development plan with them, (iii) make appropriate referrals for counseling / re-training courses / job-seeking employment support services and financial assistance etc., and (iv)

follow up for a longer period of time, say 2 years.

- R5** A systematic training for workers working with unemployed CSSA recipients and other unemployed persons is recommended. The course will cover career planning and development with focus on theories of career counseling, assessment tools and practical skills, understanding the labour market and working with the employers.

4. Supporting Children and Family

- 4.1 Family is the cornerstone of a society and Hong Kong families are facing a lot of challenges and stress. Employment and financial instability, long working hours, crowded living environment, lack of support network are some of the common problems which local families are facing.
- 4.2 We are glad to note that the Chief Executive has set up a steering group to consider the setting up of a high level Family Commission which will map out the policy direction and strategies to promote the well being of Hong Kong families, and the Government has also pledged to strengthen the support for families and enhance family functioning. The followings are some areas which we think more efforts and resources can be invested.

4.3 Holistic Care of Pre-school Children

- The ages 0 to 6 are a critical developmental stage. Many overseas experiences indicate that adequate support for the family and children at this early stage yields the best result. This is a critical stage to foster family bonding and develop sense of security and self esteem. However, today's families are facing a lot of challenges and stress:
 - The number of children in single parent family has increased by over 70%, from 59,300 in 1996 to 101,700 in 2005
 - 49.8% of the families have both parents in the workforce
 - Over 200,000 parents have to work long hours, i.e. over 60 hours per week
 - Increase in the number of split families, especially with the increase in cross-border activities
 - Alarming increase in domestic violence cases
- A recent survey conducted by the Council among NGOs operating pre-school service indicates that 24.2% of the children have sometimes/ frequently

demonstrated emotional difficulties (such as being unstable, aggressive or withdrawn).

- The Government has earlier launched the Comprehensive Child Development Scheme (CCDS) to provide early identification at the Mother-Child Health Clinic. It is proposed that this type of early identification service can be further developed and expanded in the form of outreaching social work service in preschool.

Recommendation

R6 In line with the Chief Executive's plan to 'allocate more resources for school social workers' as spelled out in his election policy blueprint, we recommend to provide **stationing social work service in childcare centres and kindergarten to 'provide the service where the clients are'**. The service not only provides counseling service for those in need, but also reaches out to the families and organizes mutual help networks for parents, support groups, parent education and provide early identification and intervention for families with special needs and problems. Early intervention and support often prevents deterioration of problems which incur a much higher social cost.

3.4 Secondary Prevention of Family Tragedy - Family Education Service for High Risk Groups

- A recent study indicated that the prevalence rates for spouse and child abuse are 10% and 6% respectively. The reported numbers of child abuse and spouse abuse are increasing in the past five years. However, the reported number of cases only represents 2% of the total abused population. We appreciate that the Government has increased the budget of \$31 millions in the provision of tertiary prevention service, including the crisis intervention service for domestic and sexual violence, the Family and Child Protection Units, refuge for women, and clinical psychologist service. However, there is still a **service gap in secondary prevention for the high risk group**.
- According to the Government's paper on Family Education Initiatives, the new initiatives of family education focus on primary prevention level, targeting the general population of the society. Statistics and frontline experience also indicate that owing to competing service demand, IFSCs have put more emphasis on remedial casework service. The service outputs of IFSCs show that the number of cases is increasing in the last two years, while the efforts on group and programme are decreasing.

- Research findings indicate that high-risk groups of domestic violence include those suffering from separation and divorce, custody dispute, addiction problems (gambling, alcoholism and substance abuse), poverty, unemployment, and those with weak social support (e.g., new migrants), as well as family with previous history of using violence (e.g. parents use corporal punishment / violence against children and violence against partners).
- Family education is an important programme in reinforcing family harmony and solidarity. Other than publicity, promotion of family values, attitude, or general parenting programmes, there should be specialized programmes for the high-risk population, which work in partnership with mainstream services, such as IFSC and schools and outreach to potential clients at targeted contact points, such as family court.

Recommendation

R7 It is proposed that resources be allocated for launching specialized supportive Family Education Service by region. Recruitment networks are to be built up with various contact points for the high-risk groups, for example, the family court for referring divorced couples and parents in custody disputes; social security units for referring unemployed parents; social service units with network with service clients or members who are new migrants, drug-users, family members who use violence / corporal punishment.

3.5 Providing Residential Service for Children in Need

- Residential childcare services are provided for children and young persons under the age of 21 who cannot be adequately cared for by their families because of various reasons such as behavioral, emotional ore relationship problems, or family crises arising from illness, death and desertion. In the past few years, the waiting list for residential services for children with special needs have been growing:

service year	Foster care	Small group home	Children's home	Boys' home	Girls' home	Boys' and girls' hostels	Total
Sept 2004	71	125	32	65	1	39	<u>333</u>
Sept 2005	0	219	64	75	20	30	<u>408</u>
Sept 2006	16	256	48	134	88	50	<u>592</u>

- The young people assessed to require residential service often have different pressing needs, and delay or mismatch in services often result in worsening of the

case situation. During the year 2006/07, there were at least 156 cases on the waiting list who have to take up short-term emergency placement (131 capacity territory wide in total) and such arrangement put pressure on both systems (i.e. emergency places and ordinary places) and fails to provide more stable placement for the troubled child.

- The sector is very concerned that despite the growing need, the provision of small group home places has dropped from 936 to 840 since April 2005. There has been discussion on whether the waiting list can be absorbed by foster care service, but the reality reflects that children with more emotional and behavioral problems may not be suitable for foster homes. Moreover, recruitment of foster families is also difficult. With the development of day foster care, the sector is concerned that it may create more demand for foster families, thus making residential placement more difficult.

Recommendation

R8 It is of urgent need for the Government to provide additional ordinary residential places, especially small group home and boys' home, to meet the high demand for the service. The service demand and provision should continue be closely monitored by the existing Residential Child Care Services Development Committee under the SWD with participation of the sector

4. Enhancing the Recovery and Re-integration of People with Mental Health Problems

- According to the Hospital Authority's figures, the attendance of its psychiatric outpatient clinics increased by 12% from 543, 443 in 2003/04 to 605,955 in 2005/06. The sector also noted an increasing trend in the cases with mood disorder such as anxiety disorder, panic disorder, bipolar disorder, psychosomatic disorder and phobia.
- The percentage increase for young people under 18 is even higher (16%) with 29,496 attendance in 2005-06, comparing to 25,456 in 2003/04. Moreover, the Hospital Authority also estimated an increase of 700 young people suffering from mental illness each year. Apart from that young people are facing with more pressure, some of the mental health problems are a result of drug taking.
- The sector is concerned that except for early psychosis, there is the lack of age specific prevention and rehabilitation services for people with mental illness. The existing service programme and service setting do not cater to the specific needs of the young people. Improved coordination among the helping professionals is required to facilitate the recovery process, for example, the students suffering from mental illness

may require more flexibility for them to stay in the school system.

Recommendations

- R9** An **age-specific perspective** is suggested to be adopted in considering the policy and services for the mentally ill. A sub-committee on mental health is suggested to set up under the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee, with participation of relevant disciplines and stakeholders to effectively tackle the issues of community mental health.
- R10** To facilitate young people with mental illness to be re-integrated into the community, it is suggested that **Special Youth Mental Health Projects be set up and attached to mainstream youth services** in selected districts, to work in collaboration with the medical sector, and to provide case management service and community integration programmes, such as ‘back to work’ and ‘back to school’ support, mutual support groups, and parent support groups. These teams can also act as a ‘consultant’ and provide training and consultation to teachers and social workers to step up their awareness and skills in early identification and referral, and helping young people in the recovery process.
- R11** With the increasing number of people suffering from mental illness, especially **mood disorders**, it is suggested to consider with the participation of the sector, integrating current MI community support services and **district based multi-disciplinary services** to provide outreaching and referral services, para-medical support, counseling and therapeutic work, community education, and networking services. It is suggested to strengthen the support to people with mental illness by linking up the service with family doctors, management of public housing estates as well as schools and other professionals;

5. Addressing Nurse Shortage Issue

Nurse shortage is a grave issue for both the elderly and rehabilitation sector. Such manpower shortage will be further aggravated with the aging population and the growing demand for long term care. Our current survey within elderly service reveals that:

type	Shortage as at May 2007	Projected additional shortage in 2008/09	Projected additional shortage in 2009/10
Enrolled nurse	539	139	160
Registered nurse	54	37	38

The above shortage is worked out with reference to the no. of elderly people served in elderly residential and community services and the nursing manpower ratio established in 1998 Five Year Plan Review.

At the same time, the rehabilitation sector also recorded a current shortage of 112 enrolled nurses (including 15 psychiatric enrolled nurses), making a total shortage of over 650.

In response to the sector's request, the Government has provided training for 110 ENs who will graduate in 2008. However, even if there is no wastage among these newly trained nurses, there is still a high projected shortage which requires urgent attention. In fact, recruitment and retention of nurse in residential homes and home based care is a growing challenge because of unfavorable employment conditions, such as the limited promotion prospect and uncompetitive wages.

Recommendation

R12 To meet the serious demand and to ensure sufficient supply of nurses, we urge the Government to take immediate action to address the problem and continue the training of ENs and make it a regular training programme. As it takes years to train up a professional, better manpower planning basing on the elderly population projection is essential. This also applies to other professionals required for Long Term Care.

Priority Items

6. Preparing for the Aging Community

6.1 Our aging population poses a number of challenges and opportunities for Hong Kong. In 2005, those aged 65 or above represents around 12.5% of HK's population. By the year 2013, the number will increase by around 140,000 (i.e. from 836,400 to 978,000) and the number of old-old (those aged 85 and above) will increase by around 50,000. The old-old group is often the most vulnerable to various kinds of chronic illness and will require long term care. On the other hand, the vast majority of the seniors is still healthy and active and is important human resources for the society.

6.2 We support the Government's strategic directions of 'Active Aging', 'Aging in Place' and 'Continuum of Care'. It is of vital importance that the Government to engage the sector and stakeholders to devise a long and medium elderly programme plan to meet the upcoming challenges and opportunities. For 2008-2009, apart from addressing the demand for residential care services, more efforts can be placed in improving the community support and implementing the concept of 'aging in place'.

6.3 Community Support Service

Some current issues and problems in the community support service observed are:

- **Inadequate information on the demand for community support services**
- **Rigidity in service provision**
 - for example, clients using day care centre service (D/E) are not entitled to home care service; this ends up with some elders having to travel to D/E daily while those supported by EHCCS/IHCST have to stay at home without any social interactions
- **Increased frailty of clients which is beyond the manpower and facilities of the existing D/E**
 - According to the statistics collected as at March 31, 2007,
 - On average, the utilization of the centres is 140% of its capacity and the manpower and facilities are very stretched.
 - The proportion of service users who are chair bound/ bed bound is 14% on average. These elderly require continuous and intensive personal and nursing care.
 - On top of that, over 60% of the centres have one-third or more of their

members suffering from dementia. It is essential that the centre to have enough space and manpower to cater to this special needs group.

- According to the Consultancy Study on the Review of D/E, M/E, S/E and Integration of Elderly Services in year 2000, the manpower and premises of D/E are designed for serving frail elderly in need of general personal care and limited nursing care, and those elderly should not be bed-ridden. **The present manpower and premises cannot fully cater to the needs of these clients, not even providing them with enough space to lie down for a rest or a Multi-sensory Treatment Room for elderly with dementia.**

Recommendations

R13 The SCAMO is at present conducting assessment for elderly in need of residential and community support services. **Information** on the client's care needs, service demand by district, as well as the time required from assessment to placement, is suggested to **be made available for service planning and projection.**

R14 The concept of 'Continuum of Care' should be upheld in community support service so that seamless care can be provided to elderly according to their care needs. **It is important to review the present case mix and the manpower and facilities should be strengthened to provide the appropriate level of care for elders with different degrees of frailty and with special needs.** The **schedule of accommodation of D/E** should also be improved so that more space and facilities can be provided for those in need.

6.4 Providing Casework Support for Elderly in Need

Many elderly are facing various difficulties such as weakening of physical and mental health, isolation, and family problem. Frontline workers also observe more serious problems of elder abuse, of which the existing reported figure may only be a tip of the iceberg. The demand on casework support is expected to further increase with the strengthening of outreaching service to the isolated elderly. The average caseload of DECC has increased to 160 in December 2006, which is much beyond the agreed optimum capacity of 100 cases per centre. The situation is worst in some regions, such as NT East and NT West, where the caseload was over 170.

Recommendation

R15 Resources are required to strengthen casework manpower of DECC. With the continuous growing elderly population, DECCs will not be able to cope with the increasing demand with their resources being constant.

7. Strengthening Community Support

7.1 Meeting housing needs of family -- Housing social service teams

21 NGO IFSC handled 2,400 cases in 2005-06 and 3,450 cases in 2006-07 with housing needs. It is thus projected that 61 IFSCs (NGOs & SWD) served over 17,000 cases with housing needs in the last two years. These cases require IFSC workers to make recommendation on the application of special housing arrangements, including split tenancy, conditional tenancy, compassionate re-housing, additional tenancy, eviction order and illegal occupancy.

In supporting families to handle the public housing issues, the social workers need to have a good knowledge of the housing policies, practices and procedures. Moreover, good coordination and close collaboration with staff of the Housing Department is the pre-requisite for effectively working with families with housing problems.

Recommendation

R16 Drawing from the experience of the social service teams established by the Buildings Department and the Urban Renewal Authority respectively, it is suggested the concerned Government departments to explore the feasibility of setting up specialized **Housing Social Service Teams (HSSTs)** within the regional housing offices.

The team will be a contracted service of the Housing Department and they can provide first hand support, professional advice and guidance to vulnerable families with problems and needs relating to public housing. The service users are expected to benefit from the prompt one-stop HSST service, in which both the housing, family and other social needs can be effectively handled at the same time. For clients with family and social problems who need more long term follow up, they can be referred to IFSC after the housing needs are dealt with.

7.2 Community Networking Service

Need Analysis

Weakening community cohesion and neighborhood support among Hong Kong society has been a social concern. In the past, neighbours played an important role in mutual aid. However, with increasing community mobility, urban renewal and new town development, we witness more social isolation and the erosion of neighbourhood support. A strong neighborhood support network is one of the key factors in enhancing community resilience and social capital in meeting local community needs for strengthening community harmony.

On the other hand, families in some newly developed districts are now facing various social difficulties, which affect family and community harmony, because of deficient community planning. For example, in the distanced districts of Tung Chung and Tin Shui Wai, residents are more difficult to get employed because of the limited job vacancy in the district and costly travel expenses. These areas have a higher proportion of new arrivals or ethnic minorities who face cultural and language barriers in integrating and participating in the community.

At present, community centre service plays an important role in community networking. However, such service is not available in newly developed areas, which in fact are the most needy areas.

Recommendation

R17 It is recommended to set up Community Networking Service to identify and build up local community networks with the aims of empowering and sustaining community capacity and resilience to tackle family and community problems. The effort aims at facilitating neighborhood interaction and building up community support networks, fostering self-help and mutual-help in addressing local needs. The service is to engage residents' participation in local community development.

Tung Chung, Tin Shui Wai should be accorded with the priority in providing Community-based Networking Service. As these two areas are newly developed towns with a large number of public housing estates. The areas are found with a high population of low-income families, families with young children, ethnic minorities and new migrants, etc. In view of the nuclear family structure and long working hours, social support network is weak among these newly moved in residents that the **Community Networking Service teams** are necessary in

developing their sense of belongings and building up support network in the areas for fostering family resilience.

8. Promoting Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities

- We are glad to note that after 2 years of hard work, the Government and the sector has completed the Review of the Rehabilitation Programme Plan, and the strategic directions, as well as long term and short term goals have been identified. The document will be an important reference for the annual welfare priorities and we propose that regular review of the implementation of the plan be conducted.
- The following recommendations are some highlights of the sector's priority issues for attention.

8.1 Day and Community Support Services for People with Disabilities (PwDs)

Although new resources have been allocated by SWD to enhance support services for PwDs living in the community in recent years, there is the need to continue to strengthen the home care and community support services for people with disabilities, both physical and mental, so as to facilitate them to live much confidently in the community.

Carers of people with disabilities usually face great psychological and financial distress. In February 2006, SWD allocated a special grant of \$9M to around 100 rehabilitation and disability organizations for the purpose of strengthening training and support programmes for carers. However, the subsidy is one-off in nature and has been ceased since December last year.

Recommendations

- R18** There is the need to review the community support programmes for people with disabilities with the involvement of NGOs and to consider **changing the funding mode of those effective programmes from project basis to recurrent basis.**
- R19** The Government should have a long-term plan on support services for carers so as to properly address their needs and difficulties encountered. In view of the effective and significant outcome of the special grant, it is recommended to extend the funding and encourage the rehabilitation and disability organizations to develop more tailor-made programmes for the carers they served. At the same time, the

development of **self-help organizations** of people with disabilities should be strengthened, in terms of subsidy level and stability of funding source;

R20 Pre-school places need to be increased so that children with special needs could obtain pre-school services within 6 months once diagnosed as with disabilities or developmental delay;

8.2 Residential Services for People with Disabilities

There are over 6,000 people with disabilities on the waiting list of various residential services and the average waiting time for different residential places is 4 to 8 years.

Recommendations

R21 A long term plan on the development of subvented residential services for PwDs be formulated by **setting a target of 5 years to clear the waiting list** of residential service and the extra resources are estimated to be \$115.8M per year; It is important to study the overall service needs of the aging PwDs and to implement the **aging-in-place approach** with sufficient manpower to support aged people with mental handicap to continue staying in the same hostel.

It is recommended to enhance the development of alternative residential modes for PwDs including **self-financed homes** by provision of suitable sites and facilitating measures, and to explore with NGOs the residential needs of people with mildly mental handicap; Moreover, it is suggested that the implementation of **Voluntary Registration Scheme of private residential care homes** for PwDs to be reinforced to ensure the service quality, and the drafting process on legislation for residential homes for PwDs be expedited with an aim for completion in 2008.

8.3 Employment of People with Disabilities

According to government's statistics, the unemployment rate of PwDs was 2.4 times of that of the total working population in Hong Kong and taking the unemployment rate of Hong Kong in March 2007 as 4.3%, the unemployment rate of PwDs is projected to be 10.3%. However, the NGOs sector estimated that the unemployment rate of PwDs hits at 30% at the least.

Recommendations

R22 It is recommended to introduce tax exemption for private sector employing PwDs; and the Government is urged to take a lead to set out an indicator on a manageable employment rate of PwDs and to require public bodies to follow suit with reports announced publicly and periodically; and to encourage private sector to set out indicator on employment rate of PwDs;

More **support can be given the social enterprises** operated by PwDs, including outsourcing Government work through restricted tendering. At least one stall in all government buildings be provided for restricted tendering by rehabilitation social enterprises to operate convenience stores or food kiosks; and schools be mobilized to contract out their tuck shops to rehabilitation social enterprises;

8.4 Transport for People with Disabilities

The various public transport facilities are still not fully accessible to PwDs and ongoing improvements should be made, with effective strategies formulated and reasonable time schedule worked out. On the other hand, based on the Council's survey on the needs for barrier-free transport by PwDs, more than 50% of interviewees would prefer staying at home due to the expensive transport fare. There are similar measures on concessionary fare for PwDs in China and overseas to encourage the social participation of PwDs.

Recommendations

R23 Feasible and effective strategy for introduction of **concessionary fare** for PwDs is called for, and it is suggested to **add into the franchise of public transport companies the requirement of full provision of accessible facilities for PwDs**; and to formulate reasonable time schedules of barrier-free transport for the improvement of various barrier-free measures of public transport vehicles.

8.5 Integrated Education

The Government has implemented the "Whole-school Approach to Integrated Education" in primary schools since 2003 and under this new funding model, the schools would be allocated with an extra \$10,000 or \$20,000 per year for enrolling a student with special education needs with an upper limit of \$550,000 in total. Concerns from parents and the schools have been raised toward this new funding model and its ways to support students with special education needs.

Recommendations

R24 To fully implement the concept of integrated education, further improvements are required, including the provision of **training on special education to teachers in ordinary schools**, enhancing the **cooperation between integrated schools and NGOs** and promoting **inclusive culture** in the campus. Moreover, integrated education should be **extended to secondary schools** as well.