

For information
16 November 2020

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE
OVERVIEW OF MEDICAL AND DENTAL BENEFITS
FOR CIVIL SERVANTS, PENSIONERS AND ELIGIBLE PERSONS

PURPOSE

This paper provides Members with the latest overview of the provision of medical and dental benefits (hereafter referred to as “civil service medical benefits”) for civil service eligible persons (CSEPs)¹.

BACKGROUND

2. The Government, as the employer of civil servants, has a contractual obligation to provide civil service medical benefits. The scope of the benefits is set out in the Civil Service Regulations, Civil Service Bureau Circulars and Circular Memoranda. Those provisions form part of the terms and conditions of employment of civil servants.

ENHANCED SERVICES

3. In recent years, with the support of the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority (HA), we have enhanced the provision of medical and dental services for some 560 000 CSEPs on various fronts. The relevant measures are set out in paragraphs 4 to 14 below.

(a) *Families Clinic Services*

4. Currently, DH provides general out-patient services for CSEPs through six Families Clinics, two of which are on Hong Kong Island, one in Kowloon and three

¹ Civil service eligible persons consist of –

- (a) monthly paid civil servants and their eligible dependants;
- (b) retired civil servants living in Hong Kong and in receipt of a pension or an annual allowance and their eligible dependants living in Hong Kong;
- (c) eligible dependants of civil servants killed on duty and living in Hong Kong;
- (d) eligible dependants living in Hong Kong and in receipt of a pension under the Widows and Orphans Pension Scheme or the Surviving Spouses’ and Children’s Pension Scheme following the death of civil servants while in service or after retirement; and
- (e) other persons who are eligible for civil service medical benefits by way of their terms of appointment.

in the New Territories. We have also started the planning work for the seventh Families Clinic in Tseung Kwan O and the eighth Families Clinic in Kwun Tong.

5. Apart from providing general out-patient services for CSEPs, Families Clinics also provide the following services –

- (i) In view of the importance of healthy diet in preventing and treating certain diseases, the scope of services in Families Clinics has been expanded to cover dietitian services since 2013, providing individual and group dietary counselling and organising health talks;
- (ii) To improve CSEPs' abilities in coping with pressure, Families Clinics have been providing clinical psychological services since 2016, offering individual counselling, as well as organising health talks to enhance mental health education;
- (iii) Since March 2020, a multi-disciplinary team including experienced nursing and allied health professionals (comprising optometrist, physiotherapist, dietitian and clinical psychologist) has been set up in Families Clinics to deliver a systemic health care programme called the Integrated Care Programme (hereafter referred to as "ICP") for patients with diabetes mellitus (DM). ICP is an evidence-based programme which seeks to improve the quality of care for DM patients by providing them with appropriate care and health education (including physical examination, health assessment, counselling, relevant treatment services, and health talks on visual health, mental health, physiotherapy and nutritious diet). It aims to prevent and identify complications early with a view to better controlling the disease progression, so as to reduce utilisation of specialist out-patient services and accident and emergency departments as well as hospitalisation; and
- (iv) To reduce improper drug use by patients of chronic diseases and enhance drug use safety, Families Clinics launched a Stable Drug Use pilot programme in March 2020 where patients with stable chronic diseases will be arranged to meet the pharmacist who will seek an understanding of the patients' drug-use situation to ensure that they will take their drugs properly and safely, and then dispense the drugs to them. Participating patients will also be arranged to receive counselling from nurses and/or dietitians as necessary. We expect that the pilot programme will reduce the need for patients with chronic diseases to receive follow-up consultations with doctors, thus releasing the consultation slots for other CSEPs in need.

(b) Enhancement of Priority Discs Arrangement for Civil Servants

6. Besides the Families Clinics, CSEPs may also visit the General Outpatient Clinics (GOPCs) under the management of the HA free of charge. Through its GOPCs, the HA provides general out-patient services to the general public, including CSEPs. Of the 73 GOPCs currently under the HA, 65 of them have reserved a number of priority discs for serving civil servants so as to enable them to receive medical treatment with the use of priority discs and return to work, if considered fit, as early as possible to maintain normal workforce. To enhance the priority discs arrangement in the GOPCs and having regard to the utilisation of priority discs in various GOPCs, the HA has redistributed the priority discs from clinics with lower demand to those with higher demand with a view to better utilising the priority discs resources and enabling serving civil servants to receive appropriate medical services. In the past five years, the HA has already conducted three rounds of redistribution. We will continue to closely monitor the utilisation of priority discs together with the HA and plan to redistribute the priority discs of another six GOPCs starting from April 2021 to further enhance the priority discs arrangement.

(c) Dental Services

7. There are currently 40 General Dental Clinics (GDCs) under the DH providing dental benefits for CSEPs. In early 2020, the DH set up a GDC with 16 dental surgeries in the newly constructed West Kowloon Government Offices in Yau Ma Tei. Among these dental surgeries, six have come into operation, and the remaining ones will also commence operation by phases. Upon the full commissioning of these additional general dental surgeries, the DH will have a total of close to 260 general dental surgeries for the exclusive use by CSEPs.

8. As regards specialised dental services, the Government has also been putting in resources continuously to enhance service capacity and reduce the waiting time of CSEPs for specialised dental services. In 2018-19, a total of five new specialised dental surgeries commenced operation for enhancing the orthodontic and prosthodontic services. The DH plans to expand the Victoria Road Dental Clinic with three additional dental surgeries for periodontal service, and set up three prosthodontic dental surgeries at the Sheung Kwai Chung Prosthodontic Clinic in the coming few years. With the full operation of these 11 specialised dental surgeries, it is expected that an additional capacity of 18 000 attendances will be provided each year.

9. In addition, to further enhance the dental services for CSEPs, the DH has created more Dental Hygienist posts by phases starting from 2019-20. The duties of the additional manpower will focus mainly on the provision of oral cleansing treatment and oral care education for patients with a view to fostering good habits of dental care and hygiene among CSEPs.

(d) Reimbursement of Medical Expenses

10. In 2019-20, the DH approved about 101 600 applications for reimbursement of medical expenses from CSEPs², involving a cost of some \$860 million. As compared with 2018-19, the number of applications approved has increased by approximately 2.9%, with an increase of approximately 13.4% in reimbursement expenditure. Around 87.1% of the total reimbursement expenditure was covered by the direct payment arrangement, which has increased by approximately 3.5 percentage points compared to the 83.6% in 2018-19.

11. To meet an anticipated increase in the demand for the reimbursement of medical expenses, the provision under the Original Estimate earmarked for reimbursing medical expenses to CSEPs in 2020-21 has been increased to \$1.3544 billion.

(e) Dedicated Imaging Services

12. The Government set up an Imaging Centre at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in 2011 to provide dedicated general Computed Tomography, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and ultrasound scanning services for CSEPs to reduce their waiting time for such services at HA hospitals. We extended the service hours of MRI service and introduced mammographic service at the Imaging Centre in January and March 2019 respectively to further enhance the imaging services for CSEPs.

CHINESE MEDICINE SERVICES

13. The pilot scheme on Civil Service Chinese Medicine Clinics (CSCMCs) was launched in March 2020. CSCMCs were set up at two Chinese Medicine Clinic cum Training and Research Centres located respectively in the Pamela Youde Nethersole Eastern Hospital in Eastern District and the Yan Chai Hospital in Tsuen Wan District to provide free Chinese medicine general out-patient consultation and acupuncture services to CSEPs. The annual service quota is around 63 000.

14. Since the launch of the pilot scheme, the response from CSEPs has been very enthusiastic. We will closely monitor the utilisation of the clinics and have been collecting feedback on the pilot scheme from clients by questionnaire since

² In case the relevant drugs, equipment and services are prescribed by the attending HA or DH doctor on medical grounds but are not available in HA or DH, CSEPs may apply to DH for reimbursement of the relevant medical expenses. If drugs on HA's self-financed items list and some specified self-financed equipment or services are prescribed by the attending HA doctor on medical grounds and such items are available in HA, the CSEP also will not be required to make any payment out-of-pocket. DH will, upon receipt of application from the CSEP, arrange for direct payment of the relevant medical expenses to HA in accordance with the direct payment arrangement.

August 2020. When reviewing the arrangements for the pilot scheme in the first quarter of next year, we will carefully consider, among others, the operational experience of the pilot scheme, feedback from and demand of clients, as well as financial implications. We will, at the same time, actively explore increasing the service capacity so as to enhance civil service medical benefits.

WAY FORWARD

15. Within the parameters of the existing or new medical facilities, we will continue to work closely with the DH and HA to further enhance the medical benefits for CSEPs.

16. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Civil Service Bureau
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