

Executive Summary

Direct Investigation Report

Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly

Introduction

The Government's current elderly care policy is to promote "ageing in place as the core, institutional care as backup". Introduced in September 2013, the Pilot Scheme on Community Care Service Voucher for the Elderly ("the Pilot Scheme") supports frail elderly persons to age in place under the "money-following-the-user" mode. With its second and third phases entered upon in October 2016 and October 2020 respectively, the Pilot Scheme has been in operation for about a decade. Based on their individual needs, holders of community care service vouchers ("CCS vouchers") can receive day care service and home care service offered by service providers recognised by the Social Welfare Department ("SWD").

2. The Government has continued to review the Pilot Scheme and take enhancement measures, which include increasing the number of CCS vouchers, adopting more flexible service modes and enlisting more organisations to provide services. Meanwhile, there are public views that some elderly persons have insufficient knowledge of the Pilot Scheme while some have never used the services with the vouchers they received. Government data show that between 2013/14 and 2020/21, the total quota of CCS vouchers increased from 1,200 to 8,000. Nevertheless, as at 2020/21, more than 20% of the total number of elderly persons receiving vouchers over the years had left the Pilot Scheme without ever using the services. Moreover, the scheme was still at the try-out stage despite long years of operation.

3. In view of the above, The Ombudsman launched this direct investigation to examine the operational arrangements for the Pilot Scheme, including its service planning, the workflow of processing applications, measures to assist elderly persons to select service providers, monitoring of service quality and utilisation rates, as well as promotion and publicity efforts for the services, and to make recommendations to the Government for improvement where necessary.

Our Findings

Applying for and Using CCS Vouchers

4. Elderly persons eligible for CCS vouchers must have been assessed and recommended for community care services ("CCS") or residential care services ("RCS") under the Standardised Care Need Assessment Mechanism for Elderly

Services¹, and are waitlisted for subsidised CCS and/or RCS on the Central Waiting List for Subsidised Long Term Care (“LTC”) Services (“Central Waiting List”) without having received any kind of such services.

5. As at December 2022, the monthly floor and ceiling values of CCS vouchers were \$4,210 and \$10,070 respectively. Subject to their individual needs, elderly persons can purchase any service packages offered by recognised service providers (“RSPs”) that are priced between the floor and ceiling voucher values. Subject to the voucher values, RSPs offer services to elderly persons on a monthly basis and apply to the Government for reimbursement of the actual costs. CCS voucher values are adjusted annually based on the Composite Consumer Price Index.

6. CCS are purchased in the mode of co-payment by voucher holders under the “affordable users pay” principle. Elderly persons who can afford less will receive more Government subsidies. The service package values include the amount of co-payment to be made by elderly users. SWD will determine the co-payment category of elderly persons by assessing their financial condition taking into account the household income of the elderly persons and their residing family members and with reference to the quarterly Median Monthly Domestic Household Income released by the Census and Statistics Department. There are six categories of co-payment ranging from 5% to 40% of the service package values.

7. Under the Pilot Scheme, there are three service delivery modes, namely day care centre service (centre-based mode), home care service (home-based mode) and centre-based and home-based service (mixed mode). The scope of services offered to CCS voucher holders includes rehabilitation exercise, nursing care, meal service, personal care, residential respite service, speech therapy service, etc. Voucher holders may switch RSPs depending on their needs without SWD’s approval. Currently, there are about 250 RSPs operated by non-governmental organisations receiving Government subventions, non-profit-making organisations/social enterprises and private organisations having experience in providing care services for the elderly.

8. The Chief Executive has stated in the 2022 Policy Address that the Pilot Scheme will be regularised in the third quarter of 2023 and the number of beneficiaries will increase by 50% in phases, from 8,000 at present to 12,000 in 2025/26. The coverage of the Pilot Scheme will also be expanded to include rental of assistive technology products.

9. Having examined the work of SWD, we have the following comments and recommendations.

¹ When applying for LTC services, elderly persons are required to undergo the Standardised Care Need Assessment by recognised assessors (including social workers, nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, etc.). When the LTC needs of the elderly are ascertained, they will be matched with appropriate LTC services. CCS and RCS are two major types of subsidised LTC services.

The Pilot Scheme Has Been in Operation and under Review for Years

10. SWD first adopted the “money-following-the-user” mode in the Pilot Scheme, aiming to enhance services through market competition among RSPs. From the perspective of public finance, the principles of “money-following-the-user”, “affordable users pay” and “co-payment” can help achieve financial sustainability of CCS. It has been almost a decade since the implementation of the Pilot Scheme. SWD explained that the market was not yet developed when the Pilot Scheme was initially introduced and there were not many RSPs. SWD had spent time to review the scheme and adopted various enhancement measures at different phases in order to explore how best to utilise the new mode and to enhance the scheme progressively.

11. In our opinion, as the operation of the Pilot Scheme is essentially different from that of traditional subsidised services, both the market and elderly persons needed time to understand and familiarise themselves with it. For the first and second phases of the Pilot Scheme, the Sau Po Centre on Ageing of The University of Hong Kong had indeed offered multiple views and suggestions, which were taken on board by SWD in formulating enhancement measures for the next phase of the scheme. Some of the measures such as extending the eligibility of RSPs to include private organisations, increasing the supply and diversity of services, expanding the coverage of the scheme from eight districts to all 18 districts throughout the territory and strengthening local collaboration could not be achieved immediately. Hence, we find it understandable for SWD to have taken a relatively long period of time to test the measures and operation of the Pilot Scheme for enhancement.

A Multi-pronged Approach Is Needed to Improve the Utilisation Rate

12. SWD’s statistics showed that the utilisation rate, calculated as the percentage of the number of voucher holders actively using the services over the quota of vouchers, was around 60% in Phase 2 of the Pilot Scheme, and that in Phase 3 increased from 59% in 2020/21 to 78% in 2021/22 and further to 86% as at the end of December 2022. The utilisation rate has been gradually improving, which should be attributable to the fact that since Phase 3, SWD has started to invite all eligible elderly persons on the Central Waiting List to apply for CCS vouchers and to issue more vouchers than the quota under the scheme. While the quota for Phase 3 was set at 8,000, there were 10,046 valid vouchers issued by SWD as at the end of December 2022, of which 6,851 were being used by participants to purchase services offered by RSPs. SWD’s proactive steps to send invitation letters to eligible elderly persons and issue CCS vouchers have been effective in lifting the utilisation rates, thus better utilising the voucher quota. We find SWD’s practice worthy of recognition.

13. On the other hand, our investigation revealed that many elderly persons waitlisted for LTC services on the Central Waiting List actually applied for CCS vouchers to meet potential needs before they were granted traditional subsidised services. In fact, this is in line with SWD’s positioning of CCS vouchers as an additional option for elderly persons waitlisted for services on the Central Waiting List to receive

assistance with the CCS vouchers issued when necessary.

14. As SWD pointed out, RSPs apply for reimbursement of subsidies on an accountable basis under the Pilot Scheme. Unused CCS vouchers, therefore, will not waste public money or occupy resources of RSPs. We understand that unused CCS vouchers will not obstruct the turnover of vouchers or SWD's issuance of vouchers to elderly persons in need as long as the voucher holders do not outnumber the voucher quota. Nevertheless, for maintaining and even improving the utilisation rate of CCS vouchers, we consider that SWD should continue with its endeavours to encourage eligible elderly persons newly added to the Central Waiting List to apply for CCS vouchers, and regularly (e.g. once every year) approach those voucher holders who have not used the vouchers received. This would facilitate SWD's collation of information for analysis and identification of potential areas for service improvement, while enabling the Department to re-examine the elderly persons' service needs in collaboration with the responsible workers, so as to help them better utilise the vouchers, including choosing suitable RSPs or service packages.

15. We also recommend that SWD obtain from RSPs the waiting list for their services, approach other RSPs and the voucher holders on the list and attempt to make matching suggestions so that those elderly persons can receive necessary services as soon as possible.

16. Moreover, SWD indicated that it is exploring the feasibility of allowing voucher holders to purchase services from more than one RSP concurrently to allow more flexibility under the Pilot Scheme. The measure is expected to be implemented in the third quarter of 2023. We recommend that SWD expedite its study and test for early implementation so that elderly persons can enjoy services under the scheme more flexibly, thereby improving the utilisation rate of CCS vouchers.

Supply of Centre-based Services Should be Increased

17. According to SWD's information, RSPs offered a total of 12,689 home care service (home-based services) places in the third phase of the Pilot Scheme as at the end of December 2022. While there were a total of 4,712 elderly persons using home-based services and the mixed mode of centre-based and home-based services offered by RSPs in their respective districts, 4,323 elderly persons were waitlisted for home-based services on the Central Waiting List. We assume that the sum of these two types of elderly (i.e. 9,035 persons) represents the aggregate demand for home-based services. At present, the capacity of home-based services can abundantly accommodate the needs of voucher users and those on the waiting list.

18. As regards the local supply and demand, some districts had excessive demand for home-based services from elderly persons using the services provided by RSPs in their respective districts and those residing in the districts and waitlisted for such services. Those districts were the Central and Western District, Islands District, Wong Tai Sin District, Sha Tin District, the North District and Yuen Long District. On the

contrary, Wan Chai District, Sham Shui Po District, Kowloon City District and Yau Tsim Wong District appeared to have surplus supply of home-based services (each with over 500 places more than needed). Nevertheless, as many RSPs offer cross-district home-based services to elderly persons from various districts and RSPs cannot charge users extra cost for travelling to the districts they are allowed to serve, using cross-district services does not incur extra transportation and time costs for elderly users. We believe that the demand and supply of home-based services can maintain a balance among districts given service places of RSPs of different districts can flexibly complement one another.

19. As at the end of December 2022, 4,191 places for day care centre services (centre-based services) were provided under the Pilot Scheme. While there were 3,518 users of centre-based services and mixed mode of home-based and centre-based services, 1,771 persons were waitlisted for centre-based services on the Central Waiting List, making up a total of 5,289 elderly persons in need of centre-based services. SWD explained that a place for centre-based services could be used by more than one voucher holder in different time slots or on different days. That means the total number of service places might not be insufficient to meet the demand. In the absence of detailed information on the utilisation status of each service place, we could not comment on the actual situation of demand and supply of service places. Considering only the total number of users, there is still a surplus of service places for the time being.

20. As regards the demand and supply of centre-based services at district level, there was a deficit of service places in six districts out of the 18 districts over the territory, namely the Eastern District, the Southern District, Wong Tai Sin District, Sha Tin District, Islands District and Yuen Long District, assuming that one service place could accommodate 1.5 elderly persons. This shows that the supply of centre-based service places of those districts could not meet the demand of voucher holders using services of RSPs of those districts and elderly persons waitlisted for such services in those districts. This observation is generally in line with SWD's data on the number of voucher holders in various districts using cross-district centre-based services. On the other hand, in Sham Shui Po District, Yau Tsim Mong District, Kowloon City District and Kwai Tsing District, the supply of relevant services is relatively sufficient.

21. We understand that there are more constraints in transport arrangements and premises for day care centres. For example, RSPs must provide an indoor area of 5.25 square metres for each place of centre-based services. Hence, only a few RSPs could offer cross-district centre-based services. The centre-based service supply of traditional subsidised services is subject to similar constraints. As such, it is more difficult to balance the demand and supply of centre-based services at district level.

22. SWD regularly examines the adequacy of CCS voucher services in various districts and provides updates on local service availability in sharing sessions and briefings for RSPs. Besides, SWD encourages organisations to offer more services and extend their service modes in districts with a larger elderly population or greater service demand. In view of the insufficiency of centre-based service places in a number of

districts, coupled with the Government's initiative to regularise the Pilot Scheme and increase the quota progressively, we recommend that SWD continue to regularly provide up-to-date statistics and information about the supply and demand of CCS voucher services in each district to existing and potential RSPs. SWD should also invite more organisations to offer services or extend the modes and coverage of services in districts with keen demand so that more centre-based service places can be provided to address the needs of local or cross-district elderly users.

23. For analysing the demand and supply at district level, this Office has requested SWD to provide statistics on the number of active voucher holders residing in each district. SWD explained that such analysis should not rely on one single factor such as the difference between the number of active voucher users living in each district and the service places provided in that district. Currently, SWD takes into account a number of factors when analysing the local demand and supply of services. These factors include the size of the elderly population, the median household income, the number of inactive voucher holders (categorised by the address of voucher holders), the number of voucher holders using service provided in a district (including elderly persons living in that district and those coming from other districts), the utilisation rates of RSPs' services and changes in the rates of each district.

24. We accept SWD's view that whether the supply of services could meet the demand should not be judged by one single factor like the number of active voucher holders residing in a district but using services in other districts. We also find it reasonable for the Department to have used the aforesaid data and information to examine the local demand and supply of services. Nevertheless, we consider that the number of active voucher holders residing in each district should reflect more directly the local demand for CCS voucher services. As a matter of fact, the number of inactive voucher holders of each district (categorised by the address of voucher holders) could only reflect the local demand indirectly because most of the inactive voucher holders do not have immediate needs for such services. Moreover, the number of voucher holders using services provided in a district (including elderly persons residing in that district and those coming from other districts) has its limitation because that number of voucher holders is unlikely to exceed the service places offered by RSPs in the district, making it hard to reflect any excessive demand for service places. If SWD considers that the above two pieces of data could reflect the local demand for services, then the number of active voucher holders residing in each district (including elderly persons using local services and those using cross-district services) should be regarded as even more significant in reflecting the local demand. We recommend that SWD incorporate such data in the analysis of the demand and supply of services at district level for a more comprehensive result.

Elderly Persons without Carers Should Be Given More Assistance

25. There are views that elderly persons may not understand the complicated operation of the Pilot Scheme. Hence, they do not know how to use the vouchers received, or they would purchase or use the wrong services. They may also be lured to

purchase unnecessary services by co-payment. As a result, some suggest that SWD introduce a case management system to the Pilot Scheme and assign an independent case manager to follow up on the care needs of each voucher holder, and assist the elderly persons and their carers to identify suitable RSPs and service packages. This Office has also received similar views from members of the public.

26. According to the existing arrangement of the Pilot Scheme, the RSPs selected by the voucher holders have to follow up on their care needs and arrange suitable services for them. RSPs should formulate an individual care plan (“ICP”) for a voucher holder and devise a service package based on the wish of the elderly person and sign a service package agreement with him/her under the supervision of professionals (i.e. enrolled/registered nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists or registered social workers). After starting the service, RSPs should also review the care needs of the elderly person at regular intervals (at least once every six months) so as to modify the services.

27. SWD requires that RSPs must respect the choice and will of voucher holders in the aforesaid process. SWD has also set out guidelines on how RSPs should formulate and implement ICPs for voucher holders. When conducting service monitoring visits at the premises of RSPs, SWD’s staff will randomly check the ICPs of voucher holders, review their reports and service records to ascertain whether the RSPs have provided services and completed the ICPs as agreed.

28. Moreover, SWD set up a Centralised Team in the second phase of the Pilot Scheme to support voucher holders in collaboration with responsible workers². SWD considered that compared with other external organisations, the Centralised Team, being familiar with the operation of the Pilot Scheme, should be able to support voucher holders and responsible workers in a more direct and focused manner. Voucher holders and carers can approach responsible workers or the Centralised Team for assistance, which includes answering their enquiries, helping them to decide whether they should apply for CCS vouchers, selecting RSPs and service packages that best suit their needs, and helping elderly persons to switch RSPs where necessary.

29. Currently, there are more than 10,000 voucher holders under the Pilot Scheme. We understand that it requires tremendous manpower and resources to provide individual case management service to such a large number of elderly persons, no matter it is SWD or other organisations that take up the work. Having weighed the pros and cons, SWD decided that the responsibility of assisting voucher holders and following up on their LTC needs should be shared by the Centralised Team, responsible workers and RSPs, instead of assigning an independent third party to offer case management service. SWD must have taken manpower and financial factors into account before making the decision. In our opinion, the crux is whether the current mode can help elderly persons to make good use of CCS vouchers to meet their LTC needs.

² Responsible workers refer to social workers working for the service units under the Government or non-governmental organisations, who are responsible for assisting elderly persons by following up on their registration and allocation of LTC services.

30. The Centralised Team will proactively contact voucher holders on three particular occasions: one month after the elderly person has received but yet to use the vouchers; three months have passed but the elderly person has yet to use the vouchers; and when the elderly person quits the Pilot Scheme. The team will find out why voucher holders do not use the vouchers and offer them assistance where necessary. For example, the team can help the elderly persons to select suitable RSPs and service packages.

31. Each year, the Centralised Team handles thousands of enquiries from voucher holders, carers, responsible workers and RSPs, the majority of which are enquiries about the Pilot Scheme and how to apply for CCS vouchers, with the rest concerning the selection of suitable RSPs and service packages and switching RSPs, etc. The number of enquiries decreased by 42% from 5,311 in 2017 to 3,064 in 2022.

32. Based on the above information, the work of the Centralised Team is different from what case management is generally perceived. Nevertheless, the team's work can indeed help voucher holders or carers to a certain extent to make the best out of the voucher services and assist them in resolving problems with using vouchers, including finding services that best suit their needs. In recent years, the Centralised Team has received fewer enquiries, indicating that elderly persons and stakeholders concerned have become more familiar with the operation and usage of CCS vouchers.

33. On the other hand, there have been fewer complaints against RSPs. SWD received only 18 complaints in the past five years, on average three to four complaints per year. Only nine of them were substantiated or partially substantiated. During the same period, SWD did not receive any complaints about elderly persons not knowing how to use CCS vouchers, purchasing/using wrong services, or being lured into purchasing unnecessary services. This shows that the situation mentioned in the public views may be individual cases only.

34. Nevertheless, many elderly persons in Hong Kong do not have children or carers, and they are in need of greater assistance from SWD or responsible workers when using CCS vouchers. In our opinion, as the Centralised Team has reduced workload on handling enquiries, it should have more capacity to support voucher holders without children or carers. For example, the Centralised Team could telephone them regularly in addition to the three aforesaid occasions to understand how they have been using the vouchers and offer assistance where necessary.

More Random Interviews Should be Arranged during Service Monitoring Visits

35. Each year, SWD carries out service monitoring visits at day care centres under RSPs and the home of users receiving home care services to monitor the service quality of RSPs. During the visits, SWD will examine relevant records, files and facilities, as well as conduct random interviews with users and check their service records, to ensure that RSPs have met all the requirements of SWD. The Department has also formulated internal guidelines on the procedures for conducting service

monitoring visits and a checklist to facilitate staff's discharge of duties and recording of the results. In the past five years, SWD issued only 21 notices of irregularity, on average four notices per year. SWD had handled the cases in accordance with the established procedures and confirmed that the RSPs concerned had rectified the irregularities.

36. Our staff have observed how SWD staff performed service monitoring visits at day care centres and elderly users' home. We reckon that SWD's staff acted in accordance with the Department's guidelines and requirements and carefully examined RSPs' records and provision of services. We consider that SWD's mechanism of service monitoring visits operated smoothly in general and served its purposes.

37. During the service monitoring visits, SWD will randomly interview on the spot one to three users of day care centres or home care services or their carers to gather their feedback on CCS vouchers, service providers and services. In our view, the interviews enable SWD to learn about the experience and views of voucher users as well as their genuine comments on the Pilot Scheme, service providers and services, beyond the paper records kept by RSPs. This will help SWD monitor the service quality of RSPs and even gauge public feedback on the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme.

38. We, however, notice that SWD interviewed only one voucher holder of centre-based services in nearly all the service monitoring visits of the past two years. Regarding home-based services, two voucher holders were interviewed in about 20% to 30% of the service monitoring visits. According to SWD, random interviews with voucher holders or carers during the visits is only one of the Department's means of collecting their feedback. When processing the reimbursement of subsidies to RSPs every month, SWD's staff will also proactively contact voucher holders with heavy usage of services to understand their situation. That said, since SWD's service monitoring visits are unannounced and carried out annually, and conducting random interviews with users is an essential part of the process, improving the effectiveness of service monitoring visits should be more conducive to the enhancement of the overall service quality. Hence, we recommend that SWD instruct its staff to conduct random interviews with at least two users or their carers during service monitoring visits for both centre-based services and home-based services, so as to step up its monitoring of the service quality without requiring excessive additional manpower and resources.

39. Currently, SWD does not place any opinion survey forms at the premises of RSPs to allow elderly persons or carers to make identified or anonymous submission of views on CCS vouchers, service providers or services. We, therefore, recommend that SWD introduce this measure to facilitate its monitoring of RSPs' performance.

Reasons for Switching RSPs by Voucher Holders Should Be Examined

40. Under the Pilot Scheme, voucher holders can freely switch RSPs based on their needs without obtaining SWD's approval. This is one of the initiatives making CCS voucher services more flexible than traditional subsidised services. SWD's information showed that between the years of 2017/18 and 2022/23, about 200 to 500

voucher holders switched RSPs each year. SWD, however, has not maintained statistical information on the reasons for their change.

41. Voucher holders may switch RSPs for a number of reasons such as moving home, transportation or personal preference. It may also be due to the service quality of the original RSPs. As RSPs are required to notify SWD of any voucher holders quitting the services or any new enrolments, we find it feasible for SWD to approach the voucher holders concerned upon receiving such notifications in order to understand their reasons for switching RSPs. In case it is due to the service quality of the original RSP, SWD should duly follow up and urge the RSP concerned for improvement.

Updates on Vacancy for Service Places Should Be Regularly Provided on SWD's Elderly Information Website and Its Function Should Be Upgraded

42. At present, elderly persons and carers can use the search engine on SWD's Elderly Information Website to look for suitable RSPs by district and service delivery mode, and get the contact information, the number of service places and vacancy as well as service items of RSPs. By using an exclusive account established by SWD, RSPs are required to update the vacancy for service places on the website at least on a fortnightly basis in case of changes in the availability of services. If RSPs do not update their vacancy for service places, the website system will automatically send an email reminder to alert them to provide updates in a timely manner.

43. During our investigation, we used the search engine on SWD's Elderly Information Website to randomly check information about 10 RSPs and found that the information on the number of service places and vacancy of five of these RSPs were last updated three months to more than two years ago. As regards such long delay in updating the said information, SWD explained that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected the provision of services by some RSPs, and the vacancy for service places had remained unchanged for a long period of time. Accordingly, the RSPs needed not update the relevant information on the website.

44. In our opinion, even if the vacancy for service places had indeed remained unchanged for a long time, the RSPs should still have provided relevant information via the exclusive account according to the time frame set by SWD. The Elderly Information Website would then have shown the time of the latest update, thus avoiding a misunderstanding that the information had expired. We recommend that SWD require RSPs to provide timely updates on the vacancy for service places. SWD should also step up its monitoring of RSPs' compliance with the requirement. As a further measure, SWD should modify the functions of the website so that voucher holders or carers can check the real-time vacancy for service places, saving them the trouble of calling individual RSPs for such information.

45. In this regard, SWD indicated that it is exploring how the information technology system can be improved and the feasibility of developing an electronic platform for providing service and information to applicants or voucher holders more

conveniently. Voucher holders can then process real-time checks on information about their vouchers and service records as well as the vacancy for service places of RSPs. On the other hand, RSPs can also update the vacancy for service places via the electronic platform and submit relevant documents and applications for reimbursement of subsidies to SWD so as to streamline the administrative work. The enhancement measure for the system is expected to be completed in the third quarter of 2023.

Make Better Use of Newspaper or Television Interviews for Publicity

46. Since the launch of the Pilot Scheme, SWD has been using various channels to promote CCS voucher services among eligible elderly persons and members of the public and explain the details and key features of the Pilot Scheme, including holding press conferences, publishing press releases and blogs, accepting newspapers and television interviews, releasing information on SWD's website and distributing leaflets and CD-ROMs at district elderly community centres, neighbourhood elderly centres and day care centres for the elderly. SWD has also cited real cases in the newspapers and television interviews to highlight the advantages of CCS vouchers to elderly persons and their carers. Between 2013 and 2022, SWD organised 77 district-based sessions to promote CCS voucher services to responsible workers and provide updates on the Pilot Scheme.

47. That said, we notice that the major publicity means of the Pilot Scheme have been press releases, articles on the Secretary for Labour and Welfare's blog and promotional speeches of government officials when they attended events. There was only one occasion where the Pilot Scheme was publicised through newspaper and television interviews with users and carers. We consider that newspaper and television interviews can reach more audience and help elderly persons and carers better understand the advantages of CCS vouchers (for example, the flexibility that elderly persons can enjoy in arranging services and switching RSPs) through real cases. Hence, this kind of publicity should be more effective. We recommend that SWD consider arranging more newspaper or television interviews with real cases cited to promote voucher services among elderly persons and carers, so as to attract more eligible elderly persons to use such services.

Our Recommendations

48. The Ombudsman has made the following recommendations to SWD:
- (1) continue with its endeavours to encourage eligible elderly persons newly added to the Central Waiting List to apply for CCS vouchers, and regularly (e.g. once every year) approach those voucher holders who have not used the vouchers received in order to identify potential areas for service improvement and re-examine elderly persons' service needs in collaboration with responsible workers and help them choose suitable RSPs or service packages;

- (2) obtain from RSPs the list of elderly persons waiting for their services, approach other RSPs and the voucher holders on the list and attempt to make matching suggestions so that those elderly persons can receive necessary services as soon as possible;
- (3) expedite its study and test on allowing voucher holders to purchase services from more than one RSP concurrently for early implementation so that elderly persons can enjoy services under the scheme more flexibly;
- (4) continue to regularly provide up-to-date statistics and information about the supply and demand of CCS voucher services in each district to existing and potential RSPs, and invite more organisations to offer services or extend the modes and coverage of services in districts with keen demand so that more centre-based service places can be provided to local or cross-district elderly users;
- (5) incorporate the number of active voucher holders residing in each district (including elderly persons using local services and those using cross-district services) in the analysis of the demand and supply of services at district level for a more comprehensive result;
- (6) provide more support to voucher holders without children or carers by, for example, proactively telephoning them on occasions other than the standard contact time points, so as to understand how they have been using the vouchers and offer assistance where necessary;
- (7) instruct its staff to conduct random interviews with at least two users or carers during service monitoring visits for both centre-based services and home-based services, so as to step up the monitoring of the service quality;
- (8) place opinion survey forms at the premises of RSPs to allow elderly persons or carers to make identified or anonymous submission of views on CCS vouchers, service providers or services to SWD;
- (9) upon receiving notification of voucher holders' leaving the original RSPs, approach the voucher holders concerned to understand their reasons for switching RSPs. In case it is due to the service quality of the original RSPs, SWD should duly follow up on the matters;
- (10) require RSPs to provide timely updates on the vacancy for service places and step up the monitoring of their compliance with the requirement. As a further measure, SWD should modify the functions of the Elderly Information Website to allow voucher holders or carers

to check the real-time vacancy for service places, saving them the trouble of calling individual RSPs for such information; and

- (11) consider arranging more newspaper or television interviews with real cases cited to promote voucher services among elderly persons and carers, so as to attract more eligible elderly persons to use such services.

Office of The Ombudsman
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