

WOMEN'S COMMISSION

The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

Purpose

This paper provides information on measures under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme related to single parents, family carers and children, and new arrivals to Hong Kong.

The CSSA Scheme

2. The CSSA Scheme provides a safety net for those who cannot support themselves financially. It is designed to bring their income up to a prescribed level to meet their basic needs. The Scheme is non-contributory and means-tested.

Special Needs for Single Parents, Family Carers and Children

3. The CSSA Scheme, whilst seeking to meet the basic needs of those who cannot support themselves financially, takes special care of single parents, family carers and children through the provision of higher standard rates, supplements and various special grants.

Single Parents and Family Carers

- (a) The standard rates for single parents and family carers range from \$1,590 to \$1,990, which are respectively \$275 to \$360 higher than those for other able-bodied adults.
- (b) A monthly supplement of \$255 is payable to single parent families to recognize the special difficulties which single parents face in bringing up a family.

Children

- (a) The existing standard rates for CSSA able-bodied children range from \$1,455 to \$2,200 per month, which are respectively \$140 to \$370 higher than those for able-bodied adults. The standard rates

for CSSA disabled children are even higher, ranging from \$2,550 to \$4,740 per month, which are respectively \$560 to \$730 higher than those for disabled adults.

- (b) CSSA children attending schools are entitled to a full range of special grants to meet their educational expenses. These grants cover –
 - (i) school fees (actual fees, or a maximum of full-day kindergarten fee of \$25,400 per year or half-day kindergarten fee of \$16,000 per year);
 - (ii) meal allowance of \$220 per month for full-time students who have to take lunch away from home;
 - (iii) actual expenses of fares to and from school;
 - (iv) examination fees for the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination and Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination; and
 - (v) a flat-rate grant for each school year, which ranges from \$1,245 to \$3,810 and will be paid before the start of a school year to cover expenses of books, stationery, school uniforms, etc.

4. CSSA families can flexibly deploy their CSSA monthly payments to procure goods and services according to their own circumstances and needs. At present, the average CSSA monthly payment for a 2-, 3-, and 4-person CSSA family without any income is \$6,357, \$8,409 and \$9,920 respectively. An example of how the amount of CSSA payable to a single parent family is assessed is at **Annex**.

5. On top of CSSA payments, all CSSA recipients are given free medical services in public hospitals and clinics. Furthermore, the Government has devoted a lot of resources in public housing and education.

The Enhanced New Dawn (ND) Project

6. The ND Project was in operation from April 2006 to September 2007 to help single parents and child carers, who were on the CSSA Scheme and with their youngest child aged 12 to 14, build up their capacities for self-help, integrate into the community and move towards self-reliance through engagement in paid employment. The Project was later extended for 30 months to March 2010 and re-titled as the Enhanced ND Project.

7. Taking up of paid jobs is not mandatory for single parents and child carers on the CSSA Scheme with their youngest child aged below 12. For CSSA recipients whose youngest children are aged 12 to 14, they are required to join the Enhanced ND Project to actively seek paid employment with working hours of not less than 32 per month. When their youngest child reaches the age of 15, these recipients will need to enroll in the Support for Self-reliance (SFS) Scheme to find full-time jobs entailing not less than 120 working hours and earning not less than \$1,630 per month. The Enhanced ND Project therefore also serves as a buffer for single parents and child carers before they join the SFS Scheme.

8. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) has commissioned non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to operate 20 projects across the territory to provide personalised employment assistance for helping participants of the Enhanced ND Project. The NGOs will further provide intensive employment assistance services, including basic skills and skills upgrading training, to equip those participants with no or limited work experience.

9. As at the end of February 2009, a total of 6 274 participants have participated in the Enhanced ND Project. Of these, 1 468 participants have secured paid jobs, with 437 and 1 031 taking up full-time and part-time paid employment respectively. The success rate is about 23.4%. The participants who have successfully secured employment mainly work as cleaners, services workers, shop sales, domestic helpers and in other elementary occupations. The average monthly working hours is 195 for full-time employment and 61 for part-time employment. The average monthly wage is \$4,900 for full-time employment and \$1,600 for part-time employment. Similar to other categories of CSSA recipients, the monthly earnings of participants of the Enhanced ND Project can be partially disregarded up to a maximum of \$2,500 so that these participants will be financially better off than those totally reliant on CSSA.

Exemption from participating in the Enhanced ND Project

10. Exemption from joining the Enhanced ND Project is allowed where justified. Up to end February 2009, a total of 10 440 single parents and child carers on CSSA have been exempted mainly for the following reasons -

- (a) have to take care of vulnerable family members such as disabled, senile or in ill-health;
- (b) already engaged in paid employment with monthly working hours of 32 or more;
- (c) being recently bereaved;

- (d) have special problems based on the social worker's assessment; and
- (e) aged over 59 years and five months or medically certified to be unfit to work.

The Seven-year Residence Requirement under CSSA

11. Hong Kong residents aged below 18 are exempted from the residence requirements under the CSSA Scheme. For adult applicants, to be eligible for CSSA, he must -

- (a) have been a Hong Kong resident for at least seven years (i.e. the seven-year residence requirement); and
- (b) have resided in Hong Kong continuously for at least one year immediately before the date of application.

12. The seven-year residence requirement provides a rational basis on which our public resources are allocated, help to sustain a non-contributory social security system with an increasing demand, and strike a balance between the interests of various sectors of the community. This requirement aims to encourage new arrivals who can work to be self-reliant rather than relying on welfare assistance. It underlines the need for potential immigrants to plan carefully and ensure that they have sufficient means to be self-supporting before settling in Hong Kong.

13. Nevertheless, in exceptional circumstances, the Director of Social Welfare (DSW) can exercise discretion to grant CSSA to a person who does not meet the seven-year residence requirement. Between 1 January 2004 and 31 March 2009, discretion was exercised on 5 315 applications in which the applicants did not meet the requirement.

14. To determine whether discretion should be exercised to waive the seven-year residence requirement, DSW will take into account all relevant factors of the case to establish whether there is genuine hardship. Each case is considered on its own merits. The main factors that will be taken into consideration include –

- (a) the applicant's means of livelihood after arrival;
- (b) the cause of present hardship;
- (c) resources available and other possible sources of assistance in Hong Kong;

- (d) whether other forms of assistance are available; and
 - (e) the possibility of the applicant returning to his place of origin.
15. Where an applicant works to support his family members, discretion will normally be exercised to waive the seven-year residence requirement in consideration of his efforts to become self-supporting.
16. Whether a CSSA application is approved or rejected, the applicant will be informed in writing of the result of his application as well as his right to lodge an appeal with the Social Security Appeal Board (SSAB) if he is not satisfied with the decision of SWD. The SSAB is an independent body whose members are all non-officials appointed by the Chief Executive.
17. CSSA is not the only source of assistance available for those in need including new arrivals. When there are proven needs, and subject to meeting the respective eligibility criteria, other forms of assistance are available. These include employment support services, emergency relief, temporary cash grants from charitable trust funds, medical waivers, child care services and assistance in kind.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
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Annex
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Example of CSSA Payable to a Single Parent Family

A 3-member family comprises a female single parent who does not take up any paid work, and two children studying F.1 and F.3 respectively. Both children are full-day secondary school students and need to take lunch away from home. Monthly expenses of the family include a rent of \$3,330, water/sewage charges and fares to and from school of \$300 for the two children. The amount of monthly assistance payable to this family is -

	(\$)
✧ Standard rates (for a single parent and 2 able-bodied children)	5,065 ^a
✧ Single parent supplement	255
✧ Special grants for	
➤ rent	3,330
➤ water/sewage charges	29.40
➤ meal allowance for the students	440 ^b
➤ traveling expenses to and from school	300
➤ grants for school related expense (\$3,810 per student per school year)	635 ^c
= Monthly Average Assistance Payable	10,054
	<i>(rounded up to the nearest dollar)</i>

- Note:
- a. $\$1,795 + (\$1,635 \times 2) = \$5,065$
 - b. $\$220 \times 2 = \440
 - c. $(\$3,810 \text{ per school year} \times 2) / 12 \text{ months} = \$ 635$