

Chapter 3 PUBLIC RESPONSES TO HEALTHCARE REFORM IN GENERAL

3.1 To address the need to change the healthcare system for sustainability, we have proposed an inter-linked package of reform proposals to the existing healthcare services structure as well as on supplementary financing arrangements aiming to make our community healthier and to address the challenges to our healthcare system. Members of the public have expressed forward-looking and constructive views on the reform proposals. This chapter summarises the responses received on healthcare reform in general. Responses to specific reform proposals are set out in the subsequent chapters.

Awareness of the Public Consultation on Healthcare Reform

3.2 With the launch of an intensive publicity campaign on the healthcare reform, the public were generally aware of the first-stage consultation exercise. In Survey 2, when respondents were asked about their awareness of the consultation exercise, 76.3% of respondents were aware of the consultation.

The Need to Reform

3.3 The public generally shared the view that there would be an increasing healthcare need resulting from the rapidly ageing population. Many noted that there was an increasing demand for services in our healthcare system, in particular the public healthcare system. Recognizing such trend, some respondents shared the concerns that the existing service capacity as well as service structures of the entire healthcare system would not be able to cope with the growing needs, let alone providing better healthcare services for the community in the coming decades on a sustainable basis.

3.4 With significant public-private imbalance in our healthcare system, some expressed concerns that the public healthcare system would not be sustainable in view of the increasing healthcare needs and rising medical costs. They suggested that the continued growth in services demand could lead to deterioration of the service quality of the highly-subsidized public healthcare services. Some were in particular concerned about the lengthening of waiting time for public services. Some worried that the elderly, chronic disease patients as well as the under-privileged groups would be affected most as a result.

3.5 Foreseeing the probable adverse outcomes, respondents generally felt that maintaining status quo would not be conducive to the sustainable development of our healthcare system and able to cope with the future needs of the population. They shared the view that a comprehensive reform in our healthcare system was needed to meet the impending challenges and to address, or at least lessen, the potential problems that might arise in the future. They also considered reform was essential to ensuring that adequate healthcare protection could continue to be accessible to them in the future and their future generations.

3.6 The majority of the respondents agreed that there was an imminent need to reform the current healthcare system in order to ensure the healthcare system can continue to provide quality healthcare services and meet the challenges arising from the increasing needs of the community. Many respondents considered that the capacity and quality of healthcare services at present would already call for immediate actions to improve. Most respondents shared the view that quality healthcare service was important to people's living standard and the society should always place priority in ensuring quality healthcare services to be provided to the community as a whole.

3.7 With great importance attached to the sustainability and quality of healthcare services, some further suggested that early action should be taken to address the healthcare issues arising from ageing population. They believed that if no action was taken now, the standard of healthcare services would be adversely affected sooner rather than later. Some respondents also considered that it would be easier and better to act before the situations worsen. They advocated that the Government should work out the details of the reform proposals in consultation with stakeholders, with a view to building consensus and implementing them as early as possible.

3.8 In Survey 1, about 66% of respondents agreed that we must reform the healthcare system now whereas about 11% of respondents disagreed.

3.9 Focus Group 1⁴ also found that most of the participants acknowledged that problems exist in our healthcare system and nearly all participants believed that reform should be carried out.

The Vision for Reform

3.10 Respondents in general endorsed the vision of the reform was to achieve a healthcare system that improved the state of health and quality of life of our people and provides healthcare protection for every member of the community. To realize the vision, respondents supported that we should move towards the following four directions -

(a) Provide Better Care for the Community

3.11 The public supported that the reform should aim at providing better care for the community. Many agreed that we should add to our existing hospital-oriented and curative-focused services and put more emphasis on primary and preventive care with a view to addressing chronic diseases and reducing future hospitalization of the population. With increasing number of the elderly, many shared the view that our healthcare system could not cope with the increasing demand if we continue to concentrate our resources on curative services and hospitals. They recognized the need to change the healthcare strategy by putting more emphasis on lifelong and holistic care to the community as a whole in order to reduce the future need for curative and in-patients services. Health promotion was one of the areas which we have received overwhelming support from the public. It showed that

⁴ Please refer to Appendix V for the details of the focus group discussion.

the community had general support to the promotion and development of preventive care in the healthcare system.

(b) Provide More Choices of Quality Services

3.12 The community generally welcomed more choices of quality services from both the public and private sectors within the healthcare system. Noticing the over-reliance on the public healthcare system, especially on in-patient services, many respondents were in favour of changes to the existing situation so that they could be provided with more options. Some respondents believed that the reform of the existing service delivery structures could help promote healthy competition amongst different healthcare service providers which would ultimately benefit the patients for better service quality as well as more cost-effective services.

(c) Provide Healthcare Protection and Peace of Mind

3.13 Many respondents embraced the long established policy that no one should be denied adequate healthcare through lack of means. They agreed that the public healthcare system should continue to serve as an essential safety net for the population as a whole, especially those who could not afford to pay for their own healthcare. Respondents have shown interests in how to improve the existing system so that the community as a whole could afford lifelong healthcare protection.

(d) Promote Partnership for Health

3.14 The enthusiastic feedbacks during the consultations indicated that respondents recognized in general the importance of shared responsibility for health in achieving better health for the population and ensuring the sustainability of our healthcare system. However, opinions varied as to the respective roles of the Government and individuals in healthcare, especially in how healthcare should be financed. These largely reflected differences in societal values in the community. It also demonstrated the importance of building ownership in the community on the long term development of our healthcare system with a view to ensuring its sustainability.

Summary

3.15 The public generally agreed there was an imminent need for us to reform the existing healthcare system. To achieve the vision for our future healthcare, they recognized the need for comprehensive reform to the healthcare system, including the existing service structure as well as the financing arrangements of the healthcare system. They also recognized that undertaking the inter-connected proposals for reform to the healthcare system as a whole was essential for the system to meet the impending challenges posed by the ageing population and rising healthcare costs. There was a broad consensus that, without reform, the existing capacity and quality of healthcare services would not be sustainable.

3.16 The public in general supported the Government to carry out reforms which had already reached broad consensus in the community. In the process of carrying out our reform measures, the public would also like us to preserve the current strengths and advantages of our healthcare system. The majority of respondents would also like to move forward and to act immediately. For reform initiatives which had clear public support, respondents would like the Government to work with the stakeholders to start implementing them. For reform initiatives on which there were divergent views in the community, there would be a need to continue deliberations with a view to forging a consensus.