

Chapter 19

Health

Hong Kong's healthcare system provides comprehensive healthcare services to the community, including a highly subsidised public healthcare safety net that aims to ensure no one is denied medical care due to lack of means. The government takes strides to develop Hong Kong into an international health and medical innovation hub.

The Health Bureau is committed to promoting and protecting public health in Hong Kong, upholding the quality and efficiency of the healthcare system, enhancing the health of all citizens, and ensuring access to medical services is not denied due to lack of means.

The Department of Health is the government's health adviser and public health authority to execute policies and statutory functions. It safeguards the community's health through regulatory functions, and promotional, preventive, curative and rehabilitative services.

The Hospital Authority provides public hospital and related healthcare services. It offers medical treatment and rehabilitation services through hospitals, specialist clinics, general outpatient clinics and outreach services.

Figures at a Glance

Infant mortality rate	2022	1.6 per 1,000 registered live births	
Maternal mortality ratio	2022	3.0 per 100,000 registered live births	
Life expectancy at birth	2023	82.5* (Male)	87.9* (Female)
	2046 (<i>projected</i>)	86.4 (Male)	91.8 (Female)

* Provisional figures

Hong Kong has an excellent healthcare system supported by a highly professional team of workers. The infant mortality rate in 2022 was among the lowest in the world.

The government's recurrent funding for health has risen by about 44 per cent over the past five years, from \$72.5 billion in 2018 to \$104.4 billion in 2023. It accounted for 19 per cent of the government's recurrent expenditure in 2023.

Hong Kong's Domestic Health Accounts¹ show total health expenditure increased from 5.9 per cent to 8.5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product from 2011-12 to 2021-22. Over the same period, public health expenditure (\$145.1 billion in 2021-22, or 5.1 per cent of GDP) rose from 49 per cent to 60 per cent of total health expenditure.

Treatment-oriented secondary and tertiary health care, especially public hospital services, account for the majority of healthcare services and spending. In 2021-22, the total current health expenditure was roughly 30 per cent on primary health care (\$70.2 billion) and 70 per cent on secondary and tertiary health care (\$157.2 billion). Owing to heavily subsidised public hospital services, 77 per cent of public health expenditure was spent on secondary and tertiary health care (\$101.1 billion) and 23 per cent on primary health care (\$29.5 billion).

¹ A series of accounts compiled over the years in accordance with the International Classification for Health Accounts Framework developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development to keep track of Hong Kong's health spending and to allow for international comparison.

Healthcare Reform

The government is undertaking a number of initiatives to enhance the quality and long-term sustainability of the healthcare system.

Primary Healthcare Reform

Facing the pressures of an ageing population and the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, the government is implementing the *Primary Healthcare Blueprint* which sets out the direction for reform in order to establish a prevention-oriented, community-based and family-centric primary healthcare system. The aim is to improve the overall health status of the population, provide accessible and coherent healthcare services, and establish a sustainable healthcare system. As recommended in the blueprint, the government will focus on positioning primary healthcare as a priority, by establishing the Primary Healthcare Commission to oversee primary healthcare service delivery, standard setting, quality assurance and training of professionals.

Manpower Planning and Professional Development

The government is taking steps to meet long-term manpower demand and foster professional development by increasing the number of local subsidised healthcare training places and attracting more qualified non-locally trained healthcare professionals.

Developing International Health and Medical Innovation Hub

To develop Hong Kong into an international health and medical innovation hub and support the development of clinical trials in the city, the government is enhancing the drug and medical device regulatory regime, with the long-term objective of establishing an internationally recognised authority that registers medical products under the primary evaluation approach which directly approves applications for registration of medical products based on clinical trial data.

Electronic Health Infrastructure Development

As announced in the 2023 Policy Address, the eHealth+ development will transform the current electronic health record sharing system into a comprehensive healthcare information infrastructure that integrates data sharing, service support and healthcare journey management.

Primary Health Care

Primary health care is the first step in the healthcare process. It covers a wide range of services, including health promotion and disease prevention, general outpatient and allied health services, and special services for people in specific age groups who do not need immediate hospital attention.

General outpatient and allied health services are provided mainly by the private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In 2022-23, private Western clinics handled about 23 million outpatient visits. NGOs operate community clinics, and many also organise health

promotion and educational activities. Some NGOs provide health assessments for the elderly and medical check-ups for women.

The public sector provides primary health care mainly through the Department of Health and Hospital Authority. The authority operates 74 general outpatient clinics, including community health centres, used mainly by the elderly, low-income families and chronic disease patients. In 2023, about 1.77 million people used these services, with 6.12 million attendances recorded.

District Health Centres

District Health Centres (DHCs) or DHC Expresses operated by NGOs with government funding have been set up across all 18 districts to promote medical-social collaboration, public-private partnership and district-based services. The services focus on preventive primary health care, including health promotion, health assessment, screening and managing chronic diseases, and community rehabilitation. As at end-December, about 205,600 citizens have become members of DHCs or DHC Expresses.

Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme

The Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme was launched in November for Hong Kong residents aged 45 or above with no known medical history of diabetes mellitus or hypertension to receive government-subsidised screening for these two diseases and subsequent medical follow-up. As at end-December, around 14,400 citizens had joined the scheme.

Family Health

There are 31 maternal and child health centres and three women's health centres under the Department of Health that provide immunisation, parenting, health and developmental surveillance, and breastfeeding support for children from birth to five years of age and women aged 64 or below. Antenatal, postnatal, family planning and cervical screening services as well as health education are also offered for women. Around 14,000 expectant mothers and 31,000 newborn babies attended such centres in 2023.

Student Health

There are 13 student health service centres and four special assessment centres under the Department of Health that provide health screening and individual counselling to primary and secondary students. Services include physical examinations; screenings for health problems related to growth, nutrition, vision, hearing, scoliosis, psychosocial health and behaviour; individual counselling; health education and vaccination. In the 2022-23 school year, about 233,000 primary students and 97,000 secondary students attended the services.

Eight school dental clinics provide preventive dental services, including annual check-ups and basic care. In 2022-23, about 313,500, or 94 per cent, of all primary students participated in such services. For special schools, students with disabilities can use these services until age 18.

Elderly Health

Eighteen elderly health centres provide primary health care to people aged 65 and above, including assessment, treatment, education and counselling, and 18 visiting health teams

conduct health promotion activities for the elderly and provide training to carers. In 2023, there were about 35,000 enrolments and 143,000 attendances for health assessment and medical consultation, as well as some 338,000 attendances at promotional activities organised by the Elderly Health Service.

Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme

The Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme provides subsidies to the elderly to receive private primary care in the community that best suits their needs. The annual voucher for each eligible person is currently \$2,000, with a maximum accumulation limit of \$8,000. The government rolled out measures to enhance the scheme in 2023, which included extended coverage to four healthcare professions under the Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions; shared use of vouchers between spouses; and a three-year pilot reward scheme to encourage elderly people to use the vouchers to receive designated primary healthcare services. In the same year, the scheme's coverage was extended to the offsite community health centre of the University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen Hospital. The government also announced that it would in 2024 extend the coverage of the vouchers to seven qualified medical institutions in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA), comprising five providing integrated medical services and two dental institutions.

By end-December, over 1.6 million elderly residents had used the vouchers, accounting for about 98 per cent of the eligible population.

Community Outreach Health Care

Community outreach health care aims to reduce reliance on inpatient services and help patients recover in the community. In 2023, the Hospital Authority conducted 2.12 million home visits and outreach care services for, among others, the elderly and people with mental illness. As at 31 December, around 85 per cent of those receiving community nursing services were elderly. Community geriatric assessment teams visit residential care homes for the elderly regularly to provide medical and nursing care to frail residents who are unable to attend specialist outpatient clinics. These teams also train carers at the homes to care for their residents. The Patient Support Call Centre provides support to high-risk elderly patients discharged from public hospitals, offering advice on disease management and care support, and arranging referrals to appropriate services for patients in need.

Oral Health

The Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care, tasked to review and advise on the strategy for oral health and dental care, public dental services and dental manpower, issued its interim report in December, affirming the overall goal of dental services to enhance the oral health of the community and recommending the strategies of prevention, early identification and timely intervention in line with the *Primary Healthcare Blueprint*.

Educational activities include the Brighter Smiles for the New Generation for pre-school children and the Bright Smiles Mobile Classroom for primary students, while the annual Love Teeth Campaign encourages good dental habits. Eleven government dental clinics provide emergency services in pain relief and tooth extraction, while seven public hospitals offer

specialist oral health care services. The government also monitors the level of fluoridation in public drinking water to reduce dental decay.

Under the Outreach Dental Care Programme for the Elderly, teams set up by NGOs receive government subsidies to provide free on-site oral check-ups for elderly people and oral care training to caregivers in residential care homes, day care centres and similar facilities. Free dental treatment will be provided on-site or at a dental clinic if necessary. The Healthy Teeth Collaboration programme provides free oral check-ups, dental treatment and oral health education for adults with intellectual disabilities aged 18 or above through NGO dental clinics. The Special Oral Care Service provides dental service for pre-school children under six years old with intellectual disabilities at the Hong Kong Children's Hospital, and provides on-site dental check-ups and oral health education for eligible children at special child care centres.

Mental Health

The government adopts an integrated approach in promoting mental health, encompassing prevention, early identification, timely intervention and rehabilitation. Cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary support and care services are available through collaboration among government bodies and other relevant organisations including the Health Bureau, Labour and Welfare Bureau, Education Bureau, Hospital Authority, Social Welfare Department and Department of Health.

The Hospital Authority is a major medical service provider for people with mental disorders. Its psychiatric services include inpatient facilities, day hospitals, specialist outpatient clinics and community outreach. In 2022-23, about 296,900 people received treatment and support through these services.

The Advisory Committee on Mental Health advises the government on mental health policies and follows up on recommendations in the *Mental Health Review Report*. The committee implements the Shall We Talk mental health promotion and public education initiative, with various activities to enhance mental health awareness and encourage the public to seek help. As part of the initiative, the Mental Health Workplace Charter aims to promote a mental health-friendly workplace.

The government launched the 18111 – Mental Health Support Hotline in December to provide one-stop, round-the-clock support for people with mental health needs, rendering them immediate mental health support and referral services.

Secondary, Tertiary and Specialised Health Care

As at end-2023, the city had 30,636 public hospital beds, comprising 24,325 general beds, 1,961 infirmary beds, 3,675 beds for the mentally ill and 675 for the mentally disabled. There were 5,294 private hospital beds, comprising 4,955 inpatient beds and 339 day beds, and 852 in institutions run by the Correctional Services Department. There were 4.9 beds per 1,000 population².

² Consisting of all beds in the Hospital Authority's hospitals, private hospitals and correctional institutions.

Public Hospital Services

Public hospitals spent \$58.2 billion on inpatient services in 2022-23 and discharged 1.91 million inpatients and day inpatients in 2023.

The Hospital Authority's specialist outpatient clinics arrange appointments for new patients based on the urgency of their clinical conditions, to ensure those with acute conditions receive priority. Patients in a stable condition are referred to family medicine and general outpatient clinics, or to private general practitioners for follow-up. In 2023, the specialist outpatient clinics recorded 8.29 million attendances.

To enhance service quality and patient experience, the authority has introduced telehealth services in different outpatient, day patient, inpatient and outreach services so that suitable patients can receive services without leaving home. A medication delivery service enables patients to have their medications delivered to their homes or designated addresses.

Allied Health Service

Allied health professionals working under the Hospital Authority include audiologists, clinical psychologists, dietitians, occupational therapists, optometrists, orthoptists, physiotherapists, podiatrists, prosthetists and orthotists, speech therapists and medical social workers. They provide rehabilitative and extended care to help patients to reintegrate into society. In 2023, authority's allied health outpatient departments recorded 3.22 million attendances.

Accident and Emergency Services

Eighteen public hospitals provide accident and emergency services, delivering a high standard of service for critically ill or injured people and victims of disasters.

Patients are classified under five categories according to their clinical conditions: critical cases come under Category 1, emergency cases under Category 2, urgent cases under Category 3, semi-urgent cases under Category 4, and non-urgent cases under Category 5. This triage system ensures patients with more urgent needs receive prompt treatment. In 2023, all Category 1 patients received immediate treatment, over 95 per cent of Category 2 patients were treated within 15 minutes, and most Category 3 patients were treated within 30 minutes.

Accident and emergency services spent some \$4.2 billion in 2022-23 and handled 2.02 million visits by 1.25 million people in 2023, an average of about 5,500 attendances per day. Category 4 and 5 patients accounted for more than 56 per cent of attendances, straining the capacity to cope with higher priority cases.

Medical Charges and Waivers

Fees for public hospital and clinic services are heavily subsidised by the government at an average level of over 97 per cent. Public medical fees³ paid by individual patients vary widely. In 2023, around 80 per cent of patients paid less than \$1,000 while the top 5 per cent paid over \$2,600.

³ Public medical fees do not include self-financed items.

Under the existing medical fee waiver mechanism, the Hospital Authority grants waivers to needy groups including Comprehensive Social Security Assistance recipients, low-income patients, Old Age Living Allowance recipients aged 75 or above, the chronically ill and elderly patients with financial difficulties.

Private Hospital Services

Private hospitals complement the public sector by providing a range of specialist and hospital services. There were 14 private hospitals providing 5,294 hospital beds as at end-December. In 2022, the private hospitals served 307,420 inpatients, representing 16 per cent of the city's total. Spending on private inpatient services amounted to \$24 billion in 2021-22, accounting for 31 per cent of overall expenditure on public and private inpatient services.

Public-private Partnership Programmes

The government has launched various clinical public-private partnership programmes through the Hospital Authority. Services include cataract surgery, haemodialysis, colon assessment, radiological investigation, glaucoma treatment, trauma operation, breast cancer surgery and radiation therapy.

The authority's General Outpatient Clinic Public-private Partnership Programme subsidises clinically stable patients with hypertension and/or diabetes mellitus under the care of its general outpatient clinics to opt for primary care from the private sector. Under the programme, a co-care service model for designated specialties enables clinically stable patients under the authority's specialist outpatient clinics to receive healthcare services from the private sector. As at end-December, over 660 service providers and 55,000 patients had participated in the programme.

Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme

The Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme aims to regulate the quality of individual indemnity hospital insurance products and improve market transparency, providing consumers with greater confidence in health insurance and private healthcare services, thereby alleviating pressure on the public healthcare system. As of end-2023, the number of scheme policies is around 1,313,000.

Genomic Medicine

The Hong Kong Genome Institute implements the Hong Kong Genome Project, aiming to sequence 40,000 to 50,000 genomes. The pilot phase focused on patients with undiagnosed disorders and hereditary cancers, and their family members. The main phase, launched in 2022, extended the scope to include cases related to genomics and precision health. The sequencing results may help the diagnosis or clinical management of participants, and the resulting genomics database will facilitate relevant scientific research.

Organ Donation and Transplant

The Health Bureau, Department of Health and Hospital Authority work with community partners to promote organ donation. By end-2023, the Centralised Organ Donation Register had recorded more than 367,000 registrations. The number of patients waiting for kidney, liver,

heart and lung transplants stood at 2,429, 81, 76 and 21 respectively. During the year, there were 41 kidney, 17 liver, 8 heart, two double-lung and 253 cornea donations from the deceased in public hospitals.

The Human Organ Transplant Ordinance regulates the transplant of human organs and import of human organs for transplant purposes, and prohibits commercial dealings in human organs intended for transplant. Approval from the statutory Human Organ Transplant Board is required for the transplant of human organs between living persons who are not genetically related or a couple whose marriage has subsisted for not more than three years. In 2023, the board received six applications for organ transplants between living non-related persons and Hong Kong imported 51 human organs for transplant purposes.

The Hospital Authority performs organ matching regularly on renal patients and their relatives who have joined the Paired Kidney Donation Programme.

Other Specialist Services

Specialist facilities under the Department of Health include 18 methadone clinics, 17 chest clinics, eight social hygiene clinics, four dermatological clinics, two integrated treatment centres, four centres and clinics providing services related to clinical genetics⁴, seven child assessment centres and two travel health centres. These facilities recorded around 1.8 million attendances in 2023.

End-of-life Care

In December, the government introduced the Advance Decision on Life-sustaining Treatment Bill to set the legislative framework for advance medical directives and do-not-attempt cardiopulmonary resuscitation orders. Subsidiary legislative amendments were also tabled to facilitate the choice of dying in place for terminally ill patients living in residential care homes.

Chinese Medicine

Flagship Infrastructure

The government is constructing the Chinese Medicine Hospital of Hong Kong, the first of its kind, promoting service development, education and training, innovation and research. The hospital is expected to begin services, in phases, from end-2025.

The Government Chinese Medicines Testing Institute specialises in testing and scientific research of Chinese medicines aiming to set internationally recognised reference standards. The temporary institute has published research results on the Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office website. The permanent institute is expected to be commissioned in phases starting from 2025.

⁴ The clinics and services of the Clinical Genetic Service of the Department of Health transferred to the Hospital Authority with effect from 1 July.

Chinese Medicine Services

At the district level, 18 Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres promote the development of Chinese medicine through services, training and research, under a collaboration model involving the Hospital Authority, NGOs and local universities. The government subsidised Chinese medicine outpatient annual quota has been increased from 600,000 to 800,000 since 1 October, representing an increase of over 30 per cent in service capacity compared with the previous year. Services cover general consultation, acupuncture service and bone setting/*tui na* services. There were about 1.68 million⁵ attendances in 2023.

The Integrated Chinese-Western Medicine pilot programme under the Hospital Authority – which had provided treatment at designated hospitals to inpatients of selected disease areas, such as stroke care, musculoskeletal pain management and cancer palliative care – was regularised in early 2023, expanding the services to more public hospitals and other disease areas. The integrated Chinese-western medicine stroke care service was also expanded to cover all seven hospital clusters and a cancer care pilot programme was launched in two hospitals.

Private Chinese medicine clinics record about 14 million attendances each year.

Development Initiatives

The functions of the Chinese Medicine Unit, under the Health Bureau, were enhanced in 2023-24, in conjunction with the creation of the post of Commissioner for Chinese Medicine Development to strengthen policy coordination work. The unit began a stakeholder engagement exercise in September to formulate the *Chinese Medicine Development Blueprint* in collaboration with the Chinese medicine sector.

The Chinese Medicine Development Fund provides support for nurturing talent, quality enhancement, public education and research and innovation, with over 7,450 funding applications approved since its launch in 2019. The Financial Secretary announced an additional injection of \$500 million into the fund in the 2023-24 Budget.

The first edition of the Hong Kong Chinese Medicine Talent Short-term Training Programme, co-organised by the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Health Bureau, was conducted in November, to nurture talent for the development of Chinese medicine and the Chinese Medicine Hospital of Hong Kong.

Public Health and Disease Prevention

The Department of Health is the public health authority responsible for public health, health promotion and disease prevention.

⁵ Attendances include regular services at Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres such as government subsidised and non-government subsidised Chinese medicine outpatient services, designated Chinese medicine services for civil service eligible persons and a time-limited service for Covid-19.

Smoking and Health

Hong Kong's tobacco control policy aims to discourage smoking, contain the proliferation of tobacco use and minimise the impact from passive smoking through legislation, publicity, education, enforcement, smoking cessation and taxation.

The Smoking (Public Health) Ordinance stipulates statutory no-smoking areas, regulates the packaging and labelling of tobacco products, and prohibits advertising and promoting such products. During the year, the Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office conducted over 27,300 inspections, issued 48 summonses and 10,261 fixed penalty notices for smoking offences.

To curb cigarette consumption, the government increased tobacco duty by \$0.60 per stick in February and launched the Vibrant, Healthy and Tobacco-free Hong Kong public consultation from July to September, covering major next-phase tobacco control.

The Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health, an independent statutory body, advises the government on smoking, passive smoking and health matters, and publicises the hazards of smoking. The council also conducts publicity, education and community involvement campaigns, and receives enquiries and suggestions from the public on smoking and health matters.

Health Promotion

The Department of Health formulates and implements strategies and measures to promote healthy eating, regular physical activity and mental health to target groups at different settings. It also updates information and health advice on infectious diseases and produces materials in various languages to raise awareness among ethnic minorities of how to prevent communicable diseases and adopt a healthy lifestyle.

The department works closely with Healthy Cities projects, NGOs and other community partners to carry out health promotion activities, disseminate health information, alert the public to health threats and facilitate implementation of preventive measures.

Disease Prevention and Control

The Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health works with local and international counterparts to prevent and control diseases in Hong Kong. It works on three principles: real-time surveillance, rapid intervention and responsive risk communication. The centre keeps track of communicable diseases and issues surveillance reports and laboratory data reports regularly. It works with the district councils to disseminate health information and guidelines, alert the public to health threats, and facilitate prompt implementation of preventive measures.

Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases

The Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance specifies 53 statutory notifiable infectious diseases in Hong Kong. During the year, about 261,500 cases were reported. The Centre for Health Protection reviews and updates its strategies for coping with major outbreaks of infectious diseases, ensuring both the government and community are prepared.

The government is implementing various aspects under the Hong Kong Strategy and Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (2023-2027), which sets out response strategies to the threat of antimicrobial resistance.

The government is also implementing the Hong Kong Viral Hepatitis Action Plan 2020-2024, which sets out strategies and priorities to meet the World Health Organisation's (WHO) target of eliminating the threat posed by viral hepatitis by 2030.

To prevent and control the spread of infectious and other serious diseases into or out of Hong Kong, the Port Health Division, under the Department of Health, enforces health quarantine measures according to the International Health Regulations and the Prevention and Control of Disease Ordinance.

By the end of the first quarter of 2023, most of the emergency regulations to tackle Covid-19 had expired and, with the lifting of the mandatory mask-wearing requirement from 1 March, all social distancing measures were lifted and society resumed normalcy. Free vaccines continued to be offered to eligible members of the public by the government, with additional boosters made available to high-risk groups.

The government will enhance the local capacity in surveillance, early warning and prevention and control of infectious diseases; strengthen the joint disease prevention and control as well as manpower training with the Mainland authorities; and promote international cooperation in scientific research in areas such as vaccines.

Vaccination

The Hong Kong Childhood Immunisation Programme protects children against vaccine-preventable diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis B, poliomyelitis, tetanus, pertussis, measles, diphtheria, mumps, rubella, chickenpox, pneumococcal disease and human papillomavirus (for school girls of suitable grades). Pertussis vaccinations are provided for women between 26 and 34 weeks of pregnancy, as part of routine antenatal care at maternal and child health centres.

The Government Vaccination Programme and the Vaccination Subsidy Scheme provide free or subsidised seasonal influenza vaccinations respectively, from around October each year, to eligible groups, including children and those aged 50 or above. The vaccinations are provided through kindergartens and child care centres, primary and secondary schools, public hospitals and clinics, residential care homes for the elderly and for persons with disabilities, residential child care centres and designated institutions serving people with intellectual disabilities.

HIV Testing, Counselling and Education

The Department of Health's Red Ribbon Centre works with community partners to enhance awareness and prevention of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and to promote the care and acceptance of people with HIV. In 2023, the centre organised 51 activities for 86,510 participants.

The department also launched the HIV Testing Service website on 20 November. In addition to existing features to make reservations for the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) Counselling and Testing Service and providing information on AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, the website also provides an enhanced function for ordering HIV self-test kits and offers an overview of HIV/AIDS information in six languages. The department also provides a multilingual AIDS hotline where appointments for the testing service can be booked. In 2023, around 1,304 appointments for HIV testing were arranged.

Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases

Non-communicable diseases including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes mellitus together accounted for about 45 per cent of all registered deaths in 2022.

The government is implementing its action plan, *Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong*, which sets out nine targets to be achieved by 2025 and a portfolio of initiatives to reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases.

The Hong Kong Cancer Strategy aims to reduce the cancer burden in the local population and improve the quality of life and survivorship of cancer patients. The government promotes a healthy lifestyle as the primary preventive strategy, which includes no smoking, avoiding alcohol consumption, eating a balanced diet and engaging in regular physical activity.

Cancer Screening Programmes

The government provides screening for cervical cancer, colorectal cancer and breast cancer. The Cervical Screening Programme encourages women aged between 25 and 64 who have ever had sex to undergo regular screening while the Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme subsidises asymptomatic residents aged between 50 and 75 to undergo screening. The Breast Cancer Screening Pilot Programme provides screening services for eligible women, aiming to detect breast cancer before symptoms appear for early treatment.

Health Infrastructure Development

Medical Innovation

On 31 October, the Pharmacy and Poisons Board, the current statutory drug regulator of Hong Kong, became an observer of the International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use, an important step for Hong Kong in moving towards the primary evaluation regulatory regime.

Meanwhile, the government established the 1+ mechanism for the registration of new drugs, which came into effect on 1 November. Applications to register new drugs beneficial for treatment of life-threatening or severely debilitating diseases that are supported with local clinical data are required to submit approval from only one reference drug regulatory authority, instead of two originally. The 1+ mechanism can fast-track the introduction of new drugs and strengthen Hong Kong's expertise and capacity for drug evaluation.

The government will establish the Greater Bay Area International Clinical Trial Institute in the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone in 2024 to provide a one-stop clinical trial support platform for medical research institutions.

Public Hospital Development Projects

In 2023, phase 1 of the new hospital complex of Kwong Wah Hospital was officially opened and its phase 2 main works had commenced. The main works for the redevelopment of Grantham Hospital, phase 1 and the redevelopment of Prince of Wales Hospital, phase 2 (stage 1) had also commenced. Other ongoing projects included the main works for phase 1 redevelopment of Queen Mary Hospital, phases 2 and 3 redevelopment of Kwai Chung Hospital, the redevelopment of Our Lady of Maryknoll Hospital, the construction of a new acute hospital at the Kai Tak Development Area and the expansion of United Christian Hospital; the construction of the Hospital Authority Supporting Services Centre and the Community Health Centre cum Social Welfare Facilities at Pak Wo Road in North District; and the preparatory and foundation works for the expansion of North District Hospital and Lai King Building in Princess Margaret Hospital.

Electronic Health Record Sharing System

The territory-wide electronic health record sharing system, eHealth, enables participants to authorise healthcare providers in both public and private sectors to view and share their electronic health records. It aims to encourage public-private partnership, facilitate continuity of care for patients and enhance the efficiency and quality of healthcare services. Through the eHealth mobile application, the public can view their own health records and different health information.

As of end-2023, about 6 million people had registered with eHealth, covering nearly 80 per cent of the population. Over 3,000 healthcare providers, including the Hospital Authority, Department of Health and 13 local private hospitals are registered users. More than 59,000 accounts have also been created for specified healthcare professionals. The eHealth app has been downloaded more than 3.2 million times and over 3.7 billion medical records have been shared on the system.

To better support different healthcare policies, particularly primary health care and cross-boundary collaborations within the GBA, the government announced the five-year plan of eHealth+, which will transform the eHealth system into a comprehensive healthcare information infrastructure that integrates data sharing, service support and healthcare journey management. The government will take forward the development of eHealth+ under the patient-centric principle and four strategic directions, which are named One Digital Health Record, One Care Journey, One Digital Front Door to Empowering Tools and One Health Data Repository. The enhancement of eHealth+ will be implemented in phases.

Health and Medical Research

The Health and Medical Research Fund aims to build research capacity and to encourage, facilitate and support research to inform health policies, improve population health, strengthen the health system, enhance healthcare practices, advance the standard and quality of care, and promote clinical excellence, through evidence-based scientific knowledge derived from local

research in health and medicine. It also provides funding to evidence-based health promotion projects that help people adopt healthier lifestyles.

The Health Bureau is setting up the Population-based Health Dataset to support healthcare policy planning and formulation.

Healthcare Professional Regulation

As at end-2023, 16,180 doctors, 2,876 dentists, 10,592 listed and registered Chinese medicine practitioners, 68,752 registered and enrolled nurses, 4,618 midwives, 3,317 pharmacists, 338 chiropractors, 4,589 physiotherapists, 3,205 occupational therapists, 4,658 medical laboratory technologists, 2,306 optometrists, 2,907 radiographers and 612 dental hygienists were registered in Hong Kong.

The Pilot Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions enhances the society-based registration arrangements for healthcare professions not subject to statutory registration. As at end-2023, the number of voluntary registrants for each profession was 341 for the Hong Kong Institute of Speech Therapists, 64 for the Hong Kong Institute of Audiologists, 129 for the Hong Kong Academy of Accredited Dietitians, 225 for the Hong Kong Association of Educational Psychologists and 423 for the Hong Kong Institute of Clinical Psychologists.

Doctors

To increase the number of doctors in Hong Kong, the government has more than doubled the number of training places for medical students funded by the University Grants Committee from 250 in 2008-09 to 590 in 2022-23.

Degree courses in medicine and surgery are offered at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and the University of Hong Kong (HKU), which admitted 614 medical students to their bachelor's degree programmes in 2023.

Non-locally trained doctors can register and practise in Hong Kong after passing the Medical Council of Hong Kong's licensing examination and completing a period of assessment of normally 12 months in an approved hospital. Non-locally trained specialist doctors who have passed the licensing examination and have a specialist qualification comparable to a fellowship of the colleges under the Hong Kong Academy of Medicine can apply for exemption from the assessment period for six months.

During 2023, 77 non-locally trained doctors passed the licensing examination. Non-locally trained doctors may also work in specified institutions on a limited registration basis. The period of limited registration and renewal is not more than three years.

The Medical Registration Ordinance also offers an alternative pathway for non-locally trained doctors to obtain full registration in Hong Kong. The Special Registration Committee, established under the Medical Council, determines a list of recognised medical qualifications of a quality comparable to those provided by the two medical schools in Hong Kong. As at end-2023, the committee had recognised 100 such medical qualifications.

The Hong Kong Academy of Medicine is an independent statutory body which approves, assesses and accredits specialist training within the medical and dental professions. Its 15 colleges conduct training and examinations to award specialist qualifications. The Hospital Authority trains specialist doctors, offering appointments to all qualified medical graduates from CUHK and HKU each year for on-the-job specialist training. In 2023-24, about 440 doctors were recruited for specialist training. Around 300 doctors were awarded specialist qualifications by the academy in 2023.

Dentists

HKU offers degree courses in dentistry, admitting 90 students to its bachelor's degree programme in 2023, while 27 non-locally trained dental graduates passed licensing examinations conducted by the Dental Council of Hong Kong.

To alleviate the shortage of dentists, the government announced that an amendment bill to the Dentists Registration Ordinance would be introduced by mid-2024 to provide new pathways for the admission of qualified non-locally trained dentists to serve in specified institutions.

Chinese Medicine Practitioners

CUHK, Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU) and HKU offer full-time undergraduate degree courses in Chinese medicine. In 2023, 57 full-time local bachelor's degree graduates who passed the licensing examination were registered as Chinese medicine practitioners.

The Hospital Authority implements the Chinese Medicine Practitioner Trainee Programme at the 18 Chinese Medicine Clinics cum Training and Research Centres, which provides 216 training places for Chinese medicine practitioner trainees, including 72 places for the first year of training.

Allied Health Professionals

Caritas Institute of Higher Education (CIHE), Hong Kong Metropolitan University (HKMU), Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) and Tung Wah College (TWC) offer degree programmes for allied health professionals. In 2023, the four institutions admitted a total of 833 students to their degree programmes in physiotherapy, radiography/radiation therapy, occupational therapy, medical laboratory science and optometry. The degree programmes offered by PolyU are publicly funded, while those at CIHE, HKMU and TWC are self-financing and students are eligible for government subsidies. Professional accreditation for the physiotherapy degree programmes offered by TWC was completed in 2022 and that for CIHE and HKMU is in progress.

The Hospital Authority's Institute of Advanced Allied Health Studies devises structured long-term training plans for allied health staff members and runs courses on specialist and multidisciplinary training, and clinical and personal development. These include three years of in-service training for new recruits of allied health grades. In 2023, the institute offered 111 training courses and 17 overseas scholarships.

Nurses

CIHE, CUHK, HKBU, HKMU, HKU, PolyU, TWC and Hong Kong Sanatorium and Hospital (HKSH) provide pre-registration nursing training. They recruited 2,622 students into their nursing degree programmes in 2023. CUHK, HKU and PolyU enrolled another 157 students in their master's degree of nursing programmes.

CIHE, Hong Kong Adventist College, HKSH, St Teresa's Hospital, TWC and Union Hospital provide pre-enrolment nursing training. They recruited 514 pupil nurses into their two-year higher diploma in enrolled nursing (general) programmes in 2023. HKMU enrolled 280 and 58 pupils in its two-year higher diploma in general health and higher diploma in mental health nursing programmes respectively.

Eighteen nurses with professional nursing qualifications obtained outside Hong Kong passed the Nursing Council of Hong Kong's licensing examinations and received practising certificates for registered nurses or enrolled nurses.

Government-subsidised, self-financing undergraduate programmes in nursing offered 1,400 places in 2022-23.

The Hospital Authority's four-year professional diploma in nursing programme provides pre-registration nursing training and enrolled 257 students in the 2023-24 intake. Another 100 pupil nurses were admitted to its two-year pre-enrolment nursing training programme.

The authority's Institute of Advanced Nursing Studies strengthens specialty training for nurses and encourages them to improve professional standards through continuous learning. New graduates undergo simulation training to strengthen their competence and skills in clinical care and medical emergencies.

In view of the shortage of nurses in the public healthcare sector and social welfare sector, the government introduced the Nurses Registration (Amendment) Bill 2023 in December to provide new pathways for admitting non-locally trained nurses to practise in Hong Kong.

Healthcare Professional Training

To tackle future shortages in healthcare professionals, additional government funding was announced in the 2022-23 Budget, which will go toward more subsidies for students to enrol in healthcare postgraduate programmes, more designated places on a subsidy scheme for undergraduate healthcare programmes and waiving clinical practicum training fees paid by tertiary institutions.

An additional \$10 billion was set aside to upgrade teaching facilities at CUHK, HKU and PolyU, which will result in about 900 more healthcare training places.

Regulatory Activities

Western Medicines

Western medicines, including advanced therapy products, are regulated in Hong Kong under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance. Acting on the authority of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board, the Department of Health provides support in evaluating and approving applications to register pharmaceutical products and issuing licences to drug manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers. The department takes action against the illegal sale of controlled drugs and enforces regulatory controls on poisons, antibiotics and dangerous drugs for medicinal use.

In 2023, the board approved 3,298 applications to register pharmaceutical products. As at the year end, 14,463 pharmaceutical products were registered.

Chinese Medicines

Chinese medicines are regulated under the Chinese Medicine Ordinance, which requires any person engaged in the retail or wholesale of Chinese herbal medicines or the manufacture or wholesale of proprietary Chinese medicines to obtain a licence.

The Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong is the statutory body that devises and implements regulatory measures for Chinese medicines. All proprietary Chinese medicines must be registered before they can be sold, imported or possessed in Hong Kong. As at end-2023, there were 8,195 licensed Chinese medicine traders, including 21 holding the Certificate for Manufacturer; 2,997 proprietary Chinese medicines with transitional registration status; and 5,114 with a Certificate of Registration of proprietary Chinese medicines.

The Hong Kong Chinese Materia Medica Standards Project aims to ensure the safety and quality of common Chinese herbal medicines. It is supported by local universities and overseas and Mainland experts. As at end-2023, the Department of Health had released reference standards for 330 commonly used Chinese herbal medicines under the project.

The department's Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office, which is designated by the WHO as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Traditional Medicine, helps the WHO formulate policies and strategies and sets regulatory standards for traditional medicine.

Human Reproductive Technology

The Human Reproductive Technology Ordinance regulates the application of human reproductive technologies to ensure the procedures are conducted in a safe and informed manner, and to safeguard the welfare of children born through the technologies.

The Council on Human Reproductive Technology has completed its review and update of its Code of Practice, which sets out the requirements, standards and good practices for embryo researchers and reproductive technology practitioners. The revised code will come into force from 1 January 2024. As at end-2023, the council had issued 40 licences, comprising 18 treatment licences, 19 artificial insemination by husband licences, and three research licences.

Laboratory Services

Public Health Laboratory Services

The Centre for Health Protection conducts laboratory tests on clinical and surveillance specimens and provides clinical diagnostic and public health laboratory services to the public and private sectors for patient care and other public health purposes.

Its laboratories participate in and contribute to various WHO laboratory networks, including influenza, poliomyelitis, measles, rubella, tuberculosis and Covid-19.

Private Medical Laboratories/Diagnostic Centres

Medical laboratories/diagnostic centres provide clinical diagnostic laboratory testing services to manage, prevent and treat diseases and for health assessment. The standard of the medical laboratory service is ensured through the professional regulation of medical laboratory technologists. There were 127 private laboratories in Hong Kong as of end-2023.

Websites

Accredited Registers Scheme for Healthcare Professions: www.ars.gov.hk

Cancer Online Resource Hub: www.cancer.gov.hk

Centralised Organ Donation Register: www.codr.gov.hk/codr

Cervical Screening Programme: www.cervicalscreening.gov.hk

Change for Health: www.change4health.gov.hk

Chinese Medicine Development Fund: www.cmdevfund.hk

Chinese Medicine Regulatory Office: www.cmro.gov.hk

Colorectal Cancer Screening Programme: www.colonscreen.gov.hk

Department of Health: www.dh.gov.hk

District Health Centre: www.dhc.gov.hk

eHealth Record Office: www.eHealth.gov.hk

Health Bureau: www.healthbureau.gov.hk

HIV Testing Service website: www.hivtest.gov.hk

Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health: www.smokefree.hk

Hong Kong Genome Institute: www.hkgo.org

Hong Kong's Domestic Health Accounts: www.healthbureau.gov.hk/statistics/en/dha.htm

Hospital Authority: www.ha.org.hk

Oral Health Education Division: www.toothclub.gov.hk

Organ Donation: www.organdonation.gov.hk

Primary Healthcare Blueprint: www.primaryhealthcare.gov.hk/bp

Chronic Disease Co-care Pilot Scheme: www.primaryhealthcare.gov.hk/cdcc

Red Ribbon Centre: www.rrc.gov.hk

School Dental Care Service: www.schooldental.gov.hk

Shall We Talk initiative: www.shallwetalk.hk/en/

Smoking cessation thematic website: www.livetobaccofree.hk

Tobacco and Alcohol Control Office: www.taco.gov.hk

Travel Health Service: www.travelhealth.gov.hk

Viral Hepatitis Control Office: www.hepatitis.gov.hk

Virtual AIDS Office: www.aids.gov.hk

Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme Office: www.vhis.gov.hk