

Information Brief on “Trust Fund for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome”

Background

The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in Hong Kong from March to June 2003 has brought along financial hardship to the dependent family members of the deceased SARS patients, to some recovered SARS patients suffering from longer term effects, attributable to SARS (including the effects of medication, if any), which may result in some degree of physical or psychological dysfunction, as well as some “suspected” SARS patients treated with steroids¹ suffering from longer term effects, attributable to the effects of steroids received (if any), which may result in some degree of physical dysfunction.

A Trust Fund for SARS (Trust Fund) is therefore set up under the Director of Social Welfare Incorporated Ordinance to provide, on compassionate grounds, special ex-gratia assistance to eligible applicants. The purview of the Fund would be confined to those patients, who are Hong Kong residents, clinically diagnosed as having SARS during the outbreak in Hong Kong from March to June 2003. The assistance is special and ex-gratia in nature, on a without admission of liability basis and is to be administered by the Director of Social Welfare in consultation with an independent Committee.

The Trust Fund for SARS would not accept new application with effect from 1 January 2006, unless the Hospital Authority has tentatively confirmed that there is medical indication that the potential applicant is likely to be suffering from SARS-related dysfunction(s).

Trust Fund Details

I. Special ex-gratia relief payment for families with deceased SARS patients.

Eligibility Criteria for Beneficiaries		Amount
A.	1. Surviving dependent child(ren):	
	a. Each child aged below 18 at the time of death of the deceased SARS patient.	\$500,000
	b. Each child aged between 18 and below 21 who is in full time studies at the time of death of the deceased SARS patient.	\$300,000
	2. Surviving spouses (Spouses who were lawfully married before the death of the deceased SARS patient)	\$200,000
	3. Each surviving dependent parent (Parents who were living with the deceased SARS patient and had been relying solely on him/her for financial support)	\$300,000

¹ “Suspected” patients treated with steroids refer to those who were clinically diagnosed as having SARS on admission, treated with steroids as medication for SARS, but turned out subsequently not to have SARS.

B	4. Other families not eligible for any of the above (On a family basis and reference would be made by the Committee on Trust Fund for SARS to financial dependency and any other special considerations.)	\$100,000
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II. Special ex-gratia financial assistance for the recovered SARS patients and the “suspected” SARS patients treated with steroids.

The assistance comprises two main aspects –

- (i) Medical expenditure assistance
 - There must exist some degree of relevant dysfunction as confirmed by a medical officer designated by the Hospital Authority.
 - No financial eligibility test would be imposed.
 - This includes in-patient and out-patient services in public hospitals/clinics, drugs, essential medical/rehabilitation equipment and treatment, including diagnostical procedures, not normally available in public hospitals/clinics or are chargeable by the Hospital Authority (to be certified and prescribed to be essential by public hospitals/clinics), as well as any other special exceptional medical expenditure to be recommended by the Committee on Trust Fund for SARS on a discretionary basis.

- (ii) Monthly financial assistance
 - There must exist some degree of relevant dysfunction as confirmed by a medical officer designated by the Hospital Authority.
 - Facing a loss or reduction in income or increase in expenditure relating to SARS infection / treatment, on the basis of a social worker’s assessment.
 - Meeting the prescribed asset limits.

Operation of the Trust Fund

- A Committee chaired by a non-official and comprising a balanced mix of non-official members and some official members has been set up to advise the Administration on the operation of and applications for assistance from the Trust Fund.
- A Review Committee chaired by a non-official has also been set up.
- Recipients of the special ex-gratia assistance are required to make reimbursement (the special ex-gratia assistance or common law damages, whichever is the lower) to the Fund, in case they succeed in obtaining common law damages subsequently.
- For applicants who are receiving or applying for the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), the special ex-gratia assistance received would be counted in the income and asset tests of CSSA.

Enquiries and Application Forms

For enquiries or getting application forms, applicants may contact the Social Welfare Department (through the hotline 28925562 or fax number 28936903) or approach the relevant Medical Social Services Unit/ Integrated Family Service Centre (see Annex) during office hours. Relevant information may also be downloaded at the websites of the Labour and Welfare Bureau (<http://www.lwb.gov.hk>), Social Welfare Department (<http://www.swd.gov.hk/>), Hospital Authority (<http://www.ha.org.hk>), or Department of Health (<http://www.dh.gov.hk/>).

Labour and Welfare Bureau

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