

## Fighting the COVID-19 Virus, the Experiences of Hong Kong SAR<sup>1</sup>

Subtitle: Measures and additional considerations needed for people with disabilities in fighting the COVID-19: Roles and Actions of Hong Kong Joint Council for Persons with Disabilities, and its member organizations.

Benny Cheung, former RI Vice President for Asia and Pacific, Chairman of Hong Kong Joint Council for Persons with Disabilities. Joseph Kwok, Vice Chair of RI Social Commission, and Co-Chair of Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation WHO Collaborating Centre for Rehabilitation. We are sharing the special measures being taken by Joint Council, its member organizations, and Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation in fighting COVID-19 outbreak, and additional considerations needed for people with disabilities.

### COVID-19 Hong Kong Statistics Update, as of 4 April 2020

- Hong Kong SAR Government is supported by an expert advisory group comprising world renowned experts, and works in close collaboration with China Central Government, and WHO in fighting the virus;
- Hong Kong SAR is now facing the second wave of COVID-19 outbreak. From late March, there were an average of 50 new cases per day, mainly from inbound travelers and residents who have travelled outside Hong Kong;
- Hong Kong reported 862 confirmed cases, 186 discharged patients, and 4 deaths.

Hong Kong Joint Council for Persons with Disabilities is the coordinating council of NGOs of and for persons with disabilities. It has 140 member organizations, including 35 NGOs of persons with disabilities. Joint Council works closely with governmental bodies in policy advocacy, services planning, implementation and monitoring. It also collaborates with the private sectors, to support persons with disabilities.

### Joint Council works with Government to support service providers in implementing measures to reduce social contact and

<sup>1</sup> Protecting Life Against COVID-19, Rehabilitation International, May 2020, <http://www.ri-global.org/covid-19-disability-resources/>

**for infection control measures, and to give special considerations to persons with disabilities and their families. Key measures include:**

- Reducing scope of services, except the essential services;
- Home care services continue to provide meal, escort, nursing and administration of medicine services;
- Special day services for people with disabilities will remain open by appointment to serve those in special need;
- Service providers are encouraged to provide services online and through non-contact means;
- Social enterprises will continue to pay the salaries of disabled employees through special cash allowances and rental relief from government;
- To implement reinforced cleaning and disinfection guidelines on service premises, facilities and environment;
- Staff members are duly supported with personal protective equipment, including masks and alcohol handrub;
- Staff teams are organized on different shifts and to allow working from home;
- Service operators will be given allowance in meeting government contractual service output, and no reduction in contractual sums;
- Community mobilization: Joint Council and Hong Kong Council of Social Service launched a community mobilization programme, involving charity funds and private sector to fund and source care packs, which contain masks; alcohol handrub and anti-epidemic information. By the end of March, 1.8 million masks, and 240,000 bottles of alcohol handrub were distributed to 400,000 families, including those with members with disabilities, through 1,500 service units of many NGOs.

**Members of Joint Council provide additional targeted information on COVID-19, highlighting information relevant to people with disabilities and their support networks. For example:**

- Direction Association of the Handicapped, an organization of persons with quadriplegia, publishes an anti-epidemic information handbook, highlighting the needs of different disability groups in personal hygiene, cleaning and disinfection of assistive devices.
- Chosen Power, an organization of persons with intellectual challenges, publishes a simplified picture booklet on anti-epidemic information.
- The Jockey Club Autism Support Network launches a special web site to meet the information needs of persons with autism, their carers, and service providers.

## **Since the COVID-19 outbreak, Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSR) has launched caring campaign and special measures to support persons with disabilities:**

1. Delivering anti-epidemic care packs, including masks and handrub jells to persons with disabilities and people with chronic illnesses;
2. Identifying needs and providing counselling support through telephone consultation;
3. Staying connected with service users on WhatsApp and social media, sharing health tips and anti-epidemic guidelines relevant to people with disabilities;
4. Producing homebound physical exercise e-booklet and video relevant to people with disabilities;
5. Providing physiotherapy consultation through telephone;
6. Conducting vocational training courses with lectures and tutorials online through Facebook;
7. Sending out to home-bound persons with disabilities blessings in small gifts together with information and tips on at-home exercise;
8. The social enterprise which runs retails shops on assistive devices and health foods, since mid-February, has sourced worldwide for masks, which are sold to NGOs and health professional bodies at market discount prices. The social enterprise has launched its own brand of masks;
9. Rehabus, a unique service of HKSR on specialized transport for people with disabilities has maintained its services in transporting people with disabilities to hospitals and work with enhanced disinfecting measures for the vehicle compartments.

## **The residential homes of HKSR, which provide specialized care and support for persons with stroke, and elderly with dementia have undertaken the following special measures to fight the virus:**

- Stepping up the daily cleansing and disinfection work;
- Setting up partition on dining tables to prevent cross infection during meal time;
- Ensuring supplies of anti-epidemic materials, including masks, isolation gowns, alcohol handrub jells and alcohol disinfection cotton;
- Posting updated information about epidemic prevention;
- Taking the temperature of the residents twice daily;
- Every day before work, staff are required to take and record body temperature;
- Arranging daily individualized training program for residents;

- Providing video conferencing for residents to connect with families and friends. Supported by local authorities, all residents and staff of HKSR Yee Hong Height in Shenzhen, China, were tested for COVID-19, and all returned negative.

### **With the above special measures, HKSR elderly homes reports the following impacts:**

- No confirmed case was reported in HKSR elderly care homes;
- Residents continue to receive quality care and rehabilitation services;
- All staff members continue to deliver high level of care and professional services;
- Targeted communication mobilization programs have raised significant resources supporting the services of the homes;
- The homes are operating on self-financing basis, and their financial conditions remain positive and solid;
- Residents facing financial hardship will receive fee allowance during the epidemic period.

We just share with you our experiences in fighting the virus. The battle has not been won. However we are hopeful that when summer comes, we shall be holding hands with smiling face, but no masks, to enjoy the beauty of nature, and community socialization. Hong Kong is committed to collaborating with the RI Global family in fighting the COVID-19 global pandemic. Together we shall overcome.