



February 15, 2024

Mr Paul CHAN Ma-po, GBM GBS MH JP  
Financial Secretary  
Financial Secretary Office 25/F  
Central Government Offices  
2 Tim Mei Avenue Tamar, Hong Kong

Dear Mr Chan

**RE: The Women's Foundation Response to the Hong Kong Budget 2024-25 Public Consultation**

The Women's Foundation (TWF) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in Hong Kong. We focus on challenging gender stereotypes, increasing the number of women in decision-making positions, and empowering women in poverty.

We commend the Administration for its results-oriented approach to boosting the economic and broader advancement of Hong Kong, which has seen a reduction in unemployment and improvements in the economy, as well as its continued commitment to boosting the city's workforce and well-being.

Gender equality is a key catalyst in driving Hong Kong's growth and competitiveness. It is only through cultivating an inclusive and diverse workforce we can draw from a broader pool of talent who can contribute their unique skills and perspectives to drive Hong Kong's prosperity forward.

We are therefore pleased to make this submission in advance of the 2024-25 Budget on recommended areas to address gender-specific challenges facing women and girls in Hong Kong, which include: eldercare, poverty, gender stereotypes, sexual violence and research.

As we work towards greater cooperation, dynamism and growth for our city, it is more vital than ever that gender equality, diversity, and the needs of our most vulnerable are kept in mind. We are fully aligned with your vision for a better Hong Kong and extend our support to work together with the Government and other relevant actors to help close these critical gender gaps and boost the city's economy.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss our recommendations further and offer our support where appropriate. Please contact my colleague Lisa Moore, Research and Advocacy Senior Director, via email: [Lisa.Moore@twfhk.org](mailto:Lisa.Moore@twfhk.org) or phone: +852 9248 8199 for more information or to make arrangements for a meeting.

Sincerely

Signed.

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CC:

Mr CHAN Kwok-ki, SBS, IDSM, JP, Chief Secretary for Administration  
Mr Chris SUN Yuk-han, JP, Secretary for Labour and Welfare  
Mr Algernon YAU, JP, Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development  
Dr CHOI Yuk-lin, JP, Secretary for Education  
Mr SIU Chak-yee, PDSM, PMSM, Commissioner of Police  
Ms Alice MAK Mei-kuen, SBS, JP, Secretary for Home and Youth Affairs  
Dr Eliza CHAN, GBS, JP, Chairperson, Women's Commission  
Mr Ricky CHU Man-kin, IDS, Chairperson, Equal Opportunities Commission  
Dr Donald LI Kwok-tung, SBS, JP, Chairperson, Elderly Commission

## 2024-25 Budget Recommendations

### STRENGTHENING ELDERCARE SERVICES AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT

We know the Administration has been focused on cross-sector solutions and support to meet the demands of an increasingly ageing population. With the population of eldercare recipients set to more than double from 5% to 11% by 2060, our [research](#) conducted in partnership with HSBC and the HKU Sai Po Centre on Ageing, shows the cost to society will increase by 6 times from HK\$39 billion to HK\$222 billion; the indirect cost of eldercare for employers will increase 4.7 times from HK\$1.8 billion to approximately HK\$8.4 billion; and the overall cost of eldercare to individuals will quadruple from HK\$1.8 billion to HK\$7.2 billion. We recommend funding around the development and implementation of policies and practices to alleviate the financial burden on families and employers.

The Government can consider allocating funds for:

- **Societal income insurance mechanism that protects the income of caregivers who need to take a partial/ complete break from work to provide caregiving:** The Government, working closely with the private sector and insurance industry, can explore the possibility of a public-private scheme or set of insurance products that would enable companies and/or individuals to have the option of income protection in the event the employee needs to move to parttime hours or stop work due to caregiving responsibilities. This would ensure that individuals continue their MPF contributions, thus help alleviate financial pressure
- **Capacity building:** Integrate caregiver support in the Government's quality standards for all home care services and professional caregivers. More funding can be allocated towards building greater capacity for carer support service organisations, including providing regular training, learning opportunities and support for family and other caregivers including volunteers and domestic helpers; and share best practices on caregiver support innovations and services
- **Home Care Service Support:** Subsidies can be considered for home care services provided by NGOs and direct care services utilised by caregivers and those in need of elder care, drawing on [best practice](#) from economies such as Norway and Sweden.
- **Private Sector Subsidies:** Subsidies can be considered for entrepreneurs or business owners looking to establish, improve and/or expand their eldercare service provisions; create best practice guidelines for the industry; and explore incentivisation schemes to drive growth in this industry
- **Strengthen services for frail older adults:** Creating a centralised and comprehensive solution to subsidised home or respite care, along with on call advice and free support on any legal, emergency, or administrative challenges that caregivers may encounter

### GREATER SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IN POVERTY

The implementation of the Women's Empowerment Fund last year was welcome, and provides funding to NGOs in significant areas such as mental and physical health, job transitions, and facilitating the use of new technology, among others. However, among low income families in

particular, additional targeted assistance in certain areas would go a long way towards supporting these vulnerable groups.

The Government can consider allocating funds for:

- **Vulnerable Women's Relief Fund:** Funding dedicated specifically to financially assisting underprivileged women with a particular focus on single mothers and elderly women
- **Increasing access to technology:** The pandemic highlighted the divide between those with skills and access to hardware and those without, exacerbating the already existent gender gap in STEM. Further funding should be allocated to underprivileged women and girls so that they are encouraged and supported to access STEM and technology through Government subsidised initiatives
- **Strengthen the reach and gender sensitivity of mental health support:** The pandemic has brought mental health to the forefront. According to a global study by CARE, women have been [three times more likely](#) than men to report higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress during COVID-19. It is key all individuals suffering from mental health issues have support and access to the care they need. We recommend that more mental health services, such as counselling, be provided in underprivileged communities through NGOs, the Social Welfare Department's Integrated Family Services Centres, The Hospital Authority's Gender Outpatient Clinic Services, or the Family Planning Association's Women's Clubs.
- **Awareness raising:** Widely promote messages around the importance of caring for mental health (which can still be a sensitive topic among segments of the population), and direct individuals to available free and subsidised mental health resources in languages that meet the needs of Hong Kong's diverse population, particularly marginalised groups
- **Increase funding to services:** Provide mental health services with the financial support they need to meet the growing demand

## INCREASING FEMALE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

A wholesale approach is needed to address female workforce attrition rates and to support their return to work. At only 48%<sup>1</sup>, Hong Kong's female workforce participation rate is lower than its neighbours in [Mainland China](#), [Singapore](#) and [Australia](#), which all have over 60% participation. From the [Labour & Welfare Bureau-commissioned research](#) earlier this year on women currently not working in their 40s and 50s, low income homemakers and ethnic minority women, a third of these populations would like to be an active part of the workforce but are not able to secure part time or flexible work, and are not able to juggle their caregiving responsibilities with full time employment.

The Government can consider allocating funds for:

- Incentives to companies that adopt flex-work or part time arrangements and recruit non-traditional pools of talent such as low income homemakers and mature age women.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department. Labour force participation rate (excluding Foreign Domestic Helpers). The 48% female workforce participation rate excludes Migrant Domestic Workers. While TWF recognises the great contributions of this population, we want to reflect the seriousness of the low workforce participation rate among the local population.*

- Review of childcare services, particularly home-based services, with a view for affordability alongside consistent, quality and safety standards in line with best practice in economies such as Sweden and Iceland that [perform well](#) in this regard.
- While we recognise the value of the Government Employment Programme for the Elderly and Middle-aged and the soon-to-be-launched Re-Employment Allowance Pilot Scheme, funding should be allocated to raising awareness of these opportunities and the type of support provided throughout the employment process, particularly among women in vulnerable communities who may lack confidence after an extended break from the workforce.
- Collaborations with NGOs and businesses to provide returnship programmes for individuals, particularly parents and caregivers, who are trying to enter / re-enter the workforce.

### TACKLING GENDER STEREOTYPES

The Government will be well aware that gender stereotypes are highly prevalent in Hong Kong society from gendered expectations surrounding appearance to career choices and leadership behaviours. From TWF's work and numerous studies, we know that gender stereotypes are exacerbated for both men and women after prolonged exposure. It also contributes body image and self-esteem issues for women and girls, violence against women and the ambition gender gap.

The Government can consider allocating funds for:

- **Review and reform of the current education curricula, which can include:** teacher training on gender equality and gender sensitivity; replacing materials that omit women or tokenise their experiences; taking out gender stereotypical language or examples; and ensure all school libraries feature books with gender diverse content and authors.
  - Listed as one of the top three priorities of the Equal Opportunities Commission, we urge the Government to update and expand the sexual education curriculum in particular, to provide a more holistic education around gender awareness and sex education including understanding consent, contraceptive options, relationships, sexual health, pregnancy and the destigmatisation of abortion and post-abortion care that is age appropriate, evidence-based and addresses the drivers of gender-based violence.

### ADDRESSING DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

[More than 1 in 3 women](#) in Hong Kong have experienced sexual violence. While there was a [33% drop](#) in reported rape cases and 6.4% decrease in indecent assault cases, given the scale of unreported incidents, it is important to remain vigilant and strengthen preventative and interventive efforts. Victim-survivors face a number of hurdles when trying to report an incident: lack of knowledge on where to seek help, fear of retribution by the assailant, entrenched stereotypes and a culture of victim-blaming and social stigma from the community.

The Government can consider allocating funds for:

- **Public education & awareness:** Raising public awareness around the issue of domestic and sexual violence to tackle stigma and taboos aids both prevention and support efforts. Working with media, transport services, and NGOs familiar with the profile and needs of

victims is paramount. We urge the Hong Kong Government via bodies like the Equal Opportunities Commission to lead public campaigns in collaboration with local NGOs over the long term.

#### *Sexual Violence*

- **Hong Kong Police Force**
  - **Special Unit:** Add a special unit to the Hong Kong Police Force to handle sexual assault cases that has special training on trauma informed approaches and operates to a code of practice, in line with other jurisdictions such as Australia and Germany
  - **Gender sensitivity and sexual harassment training:** Provide all officers with gender sensitivity and sexual harassment training on a periodic basis to ensure officers are aware of special sensitivities / needs in handling these cases

#### *Domestic Violence*

- **Emergency Fund:** Consider setting up an emergency fund to help women and their dependents temporarily cover living expenses and to provide housing support to help victim-survivors leave their perpetrators.

#### *Online sexual violence and harassment*

- **Education and awareness raising:** Provide funds for NGOs and schools to provide training around media literacy and internet safety to prevent instances of online bullying, harassment or exploitation. Consider funding community classes for adults around these topics as well.

### **ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS**

Certain groups in Hong Kong have particular vulnerabilities and gaps in addressing critical needs, including ethnically diverse women and girls; Migrant Domestic Workers and the LGBT+ community.

The Government can consider allocating funds for:

- **Targeted services:** In collaboration with NGOs and other groups, provide targeted services and information around critical areas such as mental health and rights for sexual violence victims, etc to these groups in languages that meet the needs of Hong Kong's diverse populations
- **Awareness raising:** In collaboration with NGOs, create public campaigns educating Hong Kong's public about the vulnerabilities of these groups, where further resources or information is available and promoting the importance of non-discriminatory mindset

### **CONDUCTING CITY-WIDE RESEARCH**

There is a paucity of up-to-date and comprehensive research around the gendered impacts of widespread social and economic issues. This reduces the ability of government, businesses, and civil society from being able to fully understand city-wide gaps in gender equality. Investing in research would go a long way towards policies and initiatives that effectively target women and girls, and also accurately identify gaps where further services are needed.

The Government can consider allocating funds for research on:

- **Sexual Violence:** Conduct a territory-wide survey that provides comprehensive publicly available data on sexual harassment and sexual assault, with a view to update this data annually so that NGOs, government departments and other organisations / institutions have a baseline for understanding the prevalence of this issue across demographics
- **Territory wide review of menopause in the workplace:** Given that menopause will affect half of Hong Kong's population at some point in their lifetime and the [adverse effects](#) lack of awareness on menopausal symptoms can have on workplace retention, particularly at senior levels, consider conducting territory-wide research to better understand the types of challenges menopausal women are facing and determine the best resources needed to support them