

February 10, 2026

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

Dear Mr Chan

RE: The Women's Foundation Response to the Hong Kong Budget 2026-27 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's commitment to increasing our talent pool and fostering an inclusive and diverse workforce, which is critical for Hong Kong's continued growth and competitiveness. Gender equality remains a key catalyst in enabling our city to draw from a broader talent pool to drive prosperity forward.

Ahead of the 2026-27 Budget, we are pleased to make a submission with priority areas for funding focused on caregivers and workforce participation as follows:

- Employer tax deductions to support caregivers, boost employee retention and promote female workforce participation
- Returnship programmes for caregivers trying to re-enter the workforce through collaborations with NGOs, social enterprises and businesses
- Income protection for caregivers who have had to partially or completely drop out of the workforce through a private-public insurance scheme or similar

Full details and other areas for consideration are in the document below, including those around poverty, sexual violence, gender stereotypes and research.

As Hong Kong builds a bright, prosperous future, prioritising gender equality will ensure everyone's talents are fully leveraged.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss our recommendations further and offer our support to collaborate with Government and other stakeholders to close these gender gaps and strengthen our economy where appropriate. Please contact my colleague Lisa Moore, Research and Advocacy Senior Director, via email: Lisa.Moore@twfhk.org or phone: +852 9248 8199 for more information or to arrange a meeting.

Sincerely

Signed.

Fiona Nott
CEO, The Women's Foundation
Fiona.Nott@twfhk.org

婦女基金會
THE WOMENS
FOUNDATION

CC:

Mr CHAN Kwok-ki, GBS, IDSM, JP, Chief Secretary for Administration
Mr Christopher HUI, GBS, JP, Secretary for Financial Services and the Treasury
Mr Chris SUN Yuk-han, JP, Secretary for Labour and Welfare
Mr Paul LAM Ting-kwok, GBS, SC, JP, Secretary for Justice
Mr Algernon YAU, JP, Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development
Dr CHOI Yuk-lin, JP, Secretary for Education
Mr Joe CHOW Yat-ming, 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
Ms Linda LAM, SBS, Chairperson, Equal Opportunities Commission
Dr Donald LI Kwok-tung, SBS, JP, Chairperson, Elderly Commission

2026-27 Budget Recommendations

INCREASING FEMALE WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

With a female workforce participation rate of just 48%¹—well below rates in [Mainland China](#), [Singapore](#), and [Australia](#)—Hong Kong must adopt a comprehensive strategy to retain and re-engage women in the workforce. Research indicates that a third of non-working women in their 40s and 50s wish to work but face a mismatch between available roles and their need for flexible arrangements to manage caregiving duties².

The Government can consider allocating funds for:

- **Offer incentives to companies that adopt flexible or part-time work arrangements and recruit from non-traditional talent pools, such as low-income homemakers and mature-age women.** We appreciate the Administration's focus on boosting workforce participation, including women and mature-age workers, through several schemes. To complement the Administration's existing efforts, we recommend a tax deduction for employers who adopt flexible work arrangements and family-friendly policies, including encouraging men to take an active role in caregiving responsibilities. This retention strategy would incentivise businesses to support employees with caregiving duties, drawing on successful models in the region like Malaysia³.
- **Review of childcare services, particularly home-based services,** with a view for affordability alongside consistent, quality and safety standards, drawing on economies such as Sweden and Iceland who perform well in this regard⁴. In parallel, consider increasing funding for outreach to raise awareness of existing support schemes, specifically targeting women in vulnerable communities who may be unaware of these schemes or lack confidence after an extended career break.
- **Collaborations with NGOs, social enterprises and businesses to provide returnship programmes** for individuals, particularly parents and caregivers, who are trying to enter / re-enter the workforce.

STRENGTHENING ELDERCARE SERVICES AND CAREGIVER SUPPORT

The Administration has rightly prioritised cross-sector solutions for our rapidly ageing population. By 2060, the share of older adults requiring care is projected to more than double from 5% to 11%, with significant cost implications: societal eldercare spending is set to rise from HK\$39 billion to HK\$222 billion; employer costs could increase from HK\$1.8 billion to HK\$8.4 billion; and out-of-pocket costs for individuals may quadruple⁵. We recommend dedicated funding to

¹ The 48% female workforce participation is taken from the latest Census and Statistics Department figure, excluding Migrant Domestic Workers. Whilst TWF recognises the great contributions of this population, we want to reflect the seriousness of the low workforce participation rate among the local population.

² Jordan, L.P. Commissioned by the HKSAR Labour & Welfare Bureau, 2023. *Consultancy Study on Considerations and Difficulties of Women in Choosing Whether or Not to Work*. The University of Hong Kong: <https://www.women.gov.hk/download/research/Final%20Report%20with%20Appendices%20-%20English.pdf>

³ Malaysia Ministry of Human Resources. "Grants & Tax Incentives" for companies: <https://www.talentcorp.com.my/our-initiatives/grants-tax-incentives/>

⁴ Asadzadeh M, Maher A, Jafari M, Mohammadzadeh KA, Hosseini SM. A review study of the providing elderly care services in different countries. *J Family Med Prim Care*. 2022 Feb;11(2):458-465. doi: 10.4103/jfmpc.jfmpc_1277_21. Epub 2022 Feb 16. Erratum in: *J Family Med Prim Care*. 2022 Jun;11(6):3398. doi: 10.4103/jfmpc.jfmpc_945_22. PMID: 35360821; PMCID: PMC8963621.

⁵ HSBC, the University of Hong Kong and The Women's Foundation, 2019. *Eldercare Hong Kong: The Projected Societal Cost of Eldercare in Hong Kong 2018 to 2060*. <https://twfhk.org/eldercare-hong-kong/>

develop and implement policies that alleviate this growing financial burden on families, business and the economy.

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:** The Government can explore a public-private income insurance scheme for caregivers reducing their work hours. This would safeguard their earnings and MPF contributions, alleviating financial pressure.
- **Capacity building for all home care service providers:** Integrate comprehensive caregiver support into the Government's quality standards for all home care services. Strengthen funding to build capacity, provide regular training, and share best practices for supporting family caregivers, volunteers, and domestic workers.
- **Private Sector Subsidies:** Subsidies or tax deductions 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.
- **Boost caregiver tax deductions:** Increase the tax deduction amount to support families and provide financial relief for those who care for their children, parents, or dependents.
- **Strengthen services for frail older adults:** Whilst the creation of the 24 hour Carer Hotline has provided support for many caregivers since its establishment in 2023, creating a centralised and comprehensive solution to manage urgent cases would go a long way to complement existing on call advice.

GREATER SUPPORT FOR WOMEN IN POVERTY

The implementation of the Women's Empowerment Fund was a welcome step, supporting NGOs in key areas like health, employment, and technology. However, more targeted assistance is still needed to adequately support vulnerable low-income women and their families.

The Government can consider allocating funds for:

- **Dedicated support for vulnerable elderly women:** Funding for services and support targeting the needs of single elderly women living below the poverty line who do not have a family support system.
- **Increased access to technology:** 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.

ADDRESSING DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

We welcome the Administration's announcement of a public consultation on strengthening Hong Kong's sexual offence laws. This reform is urgently needed, as over one-third of women in Hong Kong have experienced sexual violence. Victim-survivors also face significant reporting barriers, including fear of retaliation, lack of accessible support, and a pervasive culture of victim-blaming and social stigma.

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, drawing inspiration from other jurisdictions such as Australia and Germany.

Domestic Violence

- **Emergency Fund:** Consider setting up an emergency fund to help women and their dependents temporarily cover living expenses and to help victim-survivors leave their perpetrators (who may be controlling finances for all household members).

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.

TACKLING GENDER STEREOTYPES

The Government is aware that pervasive gender stereotypes in Hong Kong shape relationships and career choices to leadership behaviours. Our work and numerous studies show that prolonged exposure intensifies these stereotypes for both men and women, contributing to body image issues, low self-esteem in women and girls, and violence against women.

The Government can consider allocating funds for:

- **Review and reform the education curricula to promote gender equality** including providing teacher training on gender sensitivity; removing materials that omit or tokenise women and eliminating gender stereotypes; equip school libraries with books with gender inclusive content and authors; and updating sex education to be age-appropriate, evidence-based, and focused on preventing gender-based violence.

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 increased and targeted services and information around critical areas such as mental health and rights for sexual violence victims to the above groups in languages and culturally sensitive formats 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.
- **Strengthen the reach and gender sensitivity of mental health support:** We recognise the efforts of the Government to boost mental health services, it is key all individuals suffering from mental health issues have affordable support and access to the care they need including Migrant Domestic Workers and low income women. We recommend that more outreach and 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 General Outpatient Clinic Services, or the Family Planning Association's Women's Clubs.

CONDUCTING CITY-WIDE RESEARCH

A lack of current, comprehensive research on the gendered impacts of key social and economic issues prevents a full understanding of city-wide gender gaps. Investing in such research is essential for developing effective policies and services that support women and girls.

The Government can consider allocating funds for territory-wide research on:

- **Women's health in the workplace:** To improve female workforce retention and advancement, we recommend a comprehensive territory-wide study on women's health challenges, including endometriosis, fertility issues, and menopause. This research will identify the necessary resources and accommodations employers should provide to better support this talent.
- **Employer perceptions of working caregivers:** A [2018 Equal Opportunities Commission survey](#) found nearly 50% of employers preferred not to hire women with children, and women with eldercare duties were 25% less likely to be hired for managerial roles. Given our ageing population, the rise of caregiving responsibilities, and the urgent need for talent retention, updating this research would help identify effective retention strategies.