

**Commission on Poverty (CoP)  
Ad Hoc Group on the Elderly in Poverty**

**Assisting the “Hidden Elderly”**

**Purpose**

This paper seeks Members’ views on further measures to strengthen assistance and support to the elderly who are disengaged from the community (the so-called “hidden elderly”).

**Background**

2. During the Sharing Session on Elderly in Poverty on 10 April 2006, Members noted that while there are measures in place for the elderly in need<sup>1</sup>, special attention should be given to the issue of “hidden elderly” in order to ensure that these elderly who are eligible and willing to be assisted could gain access to available services when they have a need. It is thus included as a work focus of the Ad Hoc Group on Elderly in Poverty<sup>2</sup>.

**Who are the hidden elderly?**

3. Frontline experience suggested that some elderly are disengaged from the community and disadvantaged yet not helped by the available services and support, partly due to the following reasons -

- (a) they may be unaware of the existing available services due to illiteracy/low education level, physical/social isolation, e.g. those living alone or in remote place, lack social networks, or are isolated/excluded due to ill health or lack of financial resources; and
- (b) they have some special/unfavourable circumstances, e.g. they do not get along well with their families and have no financial capability on their own, but they may not be eligible for assistance after taking into account their total family income and assets.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, please refer to [http://www.cop.gov.hk/eng/pdf/Brief\\_Need\\_eng.pdf](http://www.cop.gov.hk/eng/pdf/Brief_Need_eng.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> For details of the work programme of the Ad Hoc Group, please refer to CoP EP Paper 1/2006.

4. It should be noted that some elderly may choose not to be assisted (albeit they may be considered as needy) e.g. their preference to be self-reliant, or their reluctance to be on social security for fear of bringing shame on their families etc. While elderly with genuine needs should be encouraged to come forth and be assisted, ultimately their personal choice and preference should be respected. Elderly who choose not to be assisted should not be considered as hidden elderly in need of assistance.

### **Objective**

5. Given the nature of our safety net, our objective is not to proactively encourage elderly to rely on Government assistance. Rather, we aim to assist the hidden elderly who are physically or socially excluded/isolated, to develop social networks so as to facilitate their access to available support and assistance, and to identify and assist those with special circumstances (e.g. complicated family circumstances).

### **Efforts in assisting the hidden elderly**

6. The Government provides a wide range of elderly services and support with a view to enabling the elderly to age actively and healthily in the community. In recent years, there has been increasing emphasis on adopting a community-based approach, and in mobilising community resources to facilitate ageing in the community. Such community support services are provided through -

- (a) elderly centers, notably the District Elderly Community Centers (DECCs) (長者地區中心) and the Neighbourhood Elderly Centers (NECs) (長者鄰舍中心); and
- (b) outreaching efforts to provide support and care to elderly at home e.g. Support Teams for the Elderly (STE) (長者支援服務隊) under the DECCs.

### ***Elderly centres***

7. Currently, there are 41 DECCs and 115 NECs operating in 18 districts, providing community support services at district level to enable elders to live in the community. A wide range of services and support are provided by DECCs and NECs to elders, such as carer support services, social and recreational activities, community and health education, as well as counselling services and meals for the needy. DECCs are also charged with the role to collaborate with other service units in the district, including NECs, to enable a better use of community resources to assist the elderly.

### *Support Teams for the Elderly*

8. Each DECC has one Support Team for the Elderly (STE) which organises volunteers to reach out to the elderly who are -

- living alone or lacking family support;
- lacking social network;
- suffering from poor health;
- having financial difficulties;
- living in unfavourable environment;
- unable to make proper use of community resources or services; and
- facing other unfavourable circumstances.

Besides providing concern and assistance to these elderly through the development of self-help and mutual help support networks, the STEs also refer cases in need to DECCs/NECs/other appropriate units for follow up.

### **Next steps**

9. The Government has established a fairly extensive network of community support services for the elderly, including efforts to reach out to the hidden elderly. Based on a community-based approach, the DECCs play an important role in building a caring community for the elderly, including reaching out to the hidden elderly through STEs.

10. Nevertheless, the issue of hidden elderly continues to attract concern from the community and frontline NGOs, and the issue is still largely “hidden” since there is little information on the existing practices and areas of support that should be strengthened. Building on the existing platform, it is worthwhile to take stock of the on-going efforts of the DECCs including the STEs in identifying and assisting the hidden elderly, and to consider the additional assistance that should be given to them.

11. Members are asked to suggest issues and areas that should be looked at in addressing the needs of hidden elderly.