

Save the Children Hong Kong Recommendations on the 2020 Policy Address

Save the Children's vision is a world in which every child attains their rights to a healthy start in life, the opportunity to learn, protection from harm, and participation in the decisions affecting them. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), an international agreement on childhood, is at the heart of what we do. Save the Children Hong Kong regularly reviews policies related to children and their rights and provides recommendations to support the development of more comprehensive child-centred policies.

This year, COVID-19 has brought about significant impact on children. The political, social and economic situation also continues to challenge our society. Save the Children's research has shown the effect of school closures on children's learning. The physical, mental and psychosocial wellbeing of our children has also been threatened. These have far-reaching impact on children's lives.

In advance of this year's policy address, we would like to draw the Government's attention to the following recommendations.

Child Rights Governance

- Ensure that the laws, policies and practices of government departments in Hong Kong are fully compatible with the UNCRC.
- Review the performance and effectiveness of the Commission on Children and strengthen its role and functions, supporting it to become an independent entity with authority and legal mandates.
- Adopt transparent finance mechanisms, to enable the community to access information on how child-related government bureaus and departments allocate funding on children-related activities and how budget proposals aim to improve children's well-being and advance their rights.
- Monitor the progress of setting up a Children Central Data Bank in Hong Kong, to provide essential data to make evidence-based and informed decisions for our children.
- Encourage children's participation in civic affairs, ensuring the consultative mechanism in the government is responsive in taking their views and suggestions into consideration during the process of policy formulation.

Education and Development

- Work closely with schools to build capacity to incorporate adaptive and flexible online and offline learning and teaching arrangements, capturing lessons from recent school suspensions.
- Review the education curriculum and public examination system to reduce study pressure and foster balanced development and allow more time for leisure and recreation for students.
- Raise public awareness on the importance of leisure and play for every child, in benefiting the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children.

Poverty

- Provide a second round Special Allowance to the eligible Working Family Allowance (WFA) and student financial assistance households, to support low-income households under the deteriorating economic and employment conditions.
- Extend the coverage of the existing e-learning subsidies scheme so that all students from grassroots families are eligible to apply, ensuring they can purchase and get their home connected to the internet to facilitate e-learning.
- Implement digital inclusion policies to close the digital divide to ensure all children have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in society.

Child Protection

- Ensure all policies, practices, and procedures of law enforcement agencies are in line with the standard of the UNCRC and place children's safety and wellbeing as the top priority.
- Put forward a comprehensive law to prohibit all corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishment of children in all settings.
- Establish a mandatory reporting system for all professionals that regularly interact with children, to report any level of suspected child abuse and enable immediate intervention.
- Support large-scale parent education programmes to provide appropriate guidance to parents and caregivers to increase their knowledge in nurturing their children. Mandatory parent education should be provided to high risk caregivers or those families in which abuse and neglect has already occurred.
- Create the necessary legal infrastructure to address the risks posed by the Internet to the safety of children.

Mental Health

- Reduce the waiting time for public child psychiatric specialist outpatient services for those who may suffer from ADHD, autism, depression, anxiety disorder or other psychological illnesses.
- Ensure the supply of psychiatrists, community psychiatric nurses, and case managers are able to meet long-term manpower needs according to the guidelines of the World Health Organization, and increase the supply of educational psychologists to provide better support to students who suffer from psychological and emotional disturbances.
- Establish a coordination mechanism for teachers, social workers, and related professionals, to devise measures to support children on mental health issues, interact socially with their peers, and rebuild a sense of security and connectedness with schools.
- Provide additional training opportunities to teachers and school social workers to enhance professional knowledge in mental health to identify and support students with mental health needs promptly.

