

Save the Children Hong Kong Recommendations on the 2022-23 Budget

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), a legally-binding international agreement on the rights of children, is at the heart of what we do.

Fulfilling children's rights requires financial investment. In Hong Kong and around the world, we ask the government to invest enough in children's health, learning, and protection. We also emphasise equitable public spending, to ensure resources reach those children most impacted by inequality and discrimination.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant impact on children, family, and community. The physical, mental and psychosocial wellbeing of our children has been threatened. In addition, the economic impacts of the pandemic have hit children from vulnerable communities in Hong Kong the hardest. The number of child abuse cases reported in Hong Kong has increased 45 per cent, from 2020 to 2021. In advance of this year's government budget, we would like to draw the Government's attention to the following recommendations.

Listen to children in matters that affect them

- Organise opportunities to listen to children's ideas, experiences, and needs during COVID-19 and in general, and ensure their views and suggestions are considered in the budget formulation.
- Adopt transparent finance mechanisms, to enable the community, including children 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.
- Expedite the progress and allocate necessary resources to develop a Central Databank on Children in Hong Kong, to provide essential data to make evidence-based and informed decisions for our children.

Protect children from harm

- Allocate resources to develop a comprehensive law to prohibit all corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishment of children in all settings, and introduce a new offence of "failure to protect".
- Resource public education campaigns to build a culture of zero tolerance for violence against children across society.
- Support large-scale parent education programmes to provide appropriate guidance to parents and caregivers to increase their knowledge in nurturing their children.
- Ensure sufficient resources are allocated to successfully deliver the proposed legislative changes in mandatory reporting mechanisms for child abuse cases, including: existing manpower, training, investigation mechanism, and social services support.
- Allocate sufficient resources to the social work service for pre-primary institutions to facilitate early identification of and the provision of timely support for those pre-primary children and their families with welfare needs.

Protect children's mental health

- Increase resources for public child psychiatric specialist outpatient services to reduce the waiting time for those who suffer from ADHD, autism, depression, anxiety disorder or other psychological illnesses.
- Ensure the human resources 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.
- Invest resources to increase the supply of educational psychologists to provide better support to students who suffer from poor psychological and emotional health.
- Allocate funding to 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 adequate budget to support additional training opportunities for teachers and school social workers to enhance professional knowledge in mental health to promptly identify and support students with mental health needs.

