

Save the Children Hong Kong

Response to the First Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) and the 2026-27 Policy Address

The Chief Executive delivered the *First Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (2026-2030)* and the *Policy Address* today. Save the Children Hong Kong (SCHK) welcomes the HKSAR Government's continued focus on children's and youth well-being. We are particularly pleased to see the Government establish a long-term development blueprint through its first "*Five-Year Plan*" and utilise the annual *Policy Address* as a concrete action roadmap, breaking through the limitations of past annual planning.

We affirm the various measures introduced in the *Five-Year Plan* and the *Policy Address* to address mental health issues. These include institutionalising the Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism in secondary schools and extending it to upper primary levels, promoting community mental health through the "4Rs Mental Health Charter" and the "Mental Health Workplace Charter", and implementing the "Pilot Programme on Training for Mental Health Promotion Ambassador". These measures reflect the Government's further shift from crisis intervention to prevention, education, and community participation, a direction worthy of recognition.

To further consolidate these achievements, we believe the Government should continuously strengthen collaboration across schools, families, and the community to build a more comprehensive and sustainable mental health support network. This will ensure that children and youth receive timely and appropriate assistance at different stages of their development.

1. Formulate the "Long-term Development Blueprint for Child Protection and Child Mental Health in Hong Kong"

In recent years, the Chinese Mainland has actively promoted the development of child-friendly cities and the protection of minors, integrating child well-being into key development agendas. Building upon the foundation of the first *Five-Year Plan*, we recommend the Government formulate a "Long-term Development Blueprint for Child Protection and Child Mental Health in Hong Kong". This should incorporate child protection, mental health, family support, educational development, and digital safety into a long-term plan. The Government should set specific goals, establish cross-departmental collaboration mechanisms, and define key performance indicators (KPIs), while regularly publishing progress to monitor and evaluate policy effectiveness.

Furthermore, we urge the Government to grant statutory status to the "Commission on Children" and establish a standing post of "Commissioner for Children". We welcome the Government's proposal to establish a "Welfare Information Sharing E-platform". We hope this platform will include comprehensive

child data, integrating cross-sectoral information across education, healthcare, and social welfare to enable the early identification of high-risk children and families in need. The platform should also regularly publish child well-being indicators and trend analyses, providing a solid foundation for targeted, evidence-based policies and services.

2. Deepen the Implementation of the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance and Establish a Child-Friendly Support System

The Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance marks a significant milestone in Hong Kong's child protection framework. We recommend the Government continuously enhance training for frontline professionals, particularly to boost their capacity in identifying psychological and emotional abuse. It should also refine cross-disciplinary referral and risk management mechanisms and gradually expand the mandatory reporting obligation to cover more practitioners who frequently contact children, further strengthening the child protection system.

Drawing on Chinese Mainland and international experiences, we recommend establishing child-friendly "One-Stop Centres". These centres would integrate forensic interviews, medical assessments, psychological support, social services, and judicial coordination to reduce the secondary trauma caused by victims repeatedly recounting their traumatic experiences, thereby fully implementing the "best interests of the child" principle. By the end of 2025, the Chinese Mainland had established over 2,600 one-stop evidence collection and protection centres for juvenile cases, effectively reducing repeated testimonies and secondary trauma. This model has been incorporated into the Law on the Protection of Minors and relevant institutional frameworks, offering a vital reference for Hong Kong to refine its child protection mechanisms and promote a child-friendly judicial system.

We also recommend that the Government establish dedicated funding to help schools, NGOs, national sports associations, and extracurricular organisations build comprehensive "Child Safeguarding" systems. These systems should cover codes of conduct, staff recruitment and training, safety project planning and management, reporting and incident response mechanisms, data privacy protection, and monitoring and accountability arrangements, fostering an organisational culture centred on child safety and their best interests.

3. Shift the Child Mental Health Strategy from "Crisis Intervention" to "Prevention"

In recent years, the Government has continuously allocated resources to promote student mental health, including regularising the Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism, promoting the "4Rs Mental Health Charter", and enhancing mental health education. Building on this, we recommend the Government further strengthen prevention and early intervention efforts by establishing a more

sustainable mental health support system for children and youth through school, family, and community collaboration.

The Government should systematically incorporate Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into school curriculum to enhance students' emotional management, empathy, interpersonal communication, and resilience. To this end, we recommend the Government partner with NGOs (for example, in government primary schools) to launch pilot schemes. For instance, SCHK's "Social and Emotional Learning" curriculum could be integrated into classes such as Values Education, Moral and Civic Education, Class Teacher Periods, other cross-curricular activities, Visual Arts, or Physical Education. Through experiential learning and a whole-school approach, this will establish a positive campus culture and promote students' physical and mental well-being.

We welcome the Government to continue implementing the "Pilot Programme on Training for Mental Health Promotion Ambassador" and recommend expanding it further to train child and youth mental health promotion ambassadors on campuses. This would drive an evidence-based peer support model, equipping students with mental health knowledge, crisis identification, and referral skills to establish an "identify, accompany, and refer" support network and encourage students in need to seek help early. We believe this scheme can supplement the existing Three-Tier School-based Emergency Mechanism and further strengthen the campus mental health support network.

Additionally, we recommend strengthening mental health support for schools at the beginning of every new academic year (especially between September and October). School transitions, academic progression, and study pressure often elevate students' emotional risks, and frontline school personnel may lack the time and professional resources to address these increasingly complex needs. We suggest the Government allocate additional school-based mental health resources at the start of the school year to strengthen services provided by social workers, educational psychologists, and professional support teams. Through the medical-educational-social collaboration mechanism, high-risk students can be identified and supported early, shifting mental health work upstream from crisis intervention to prevention and early intervention and ensuring a smooth transition into the new academic year.

4. Invest in Family Support and Community Prevention Services

The family is the most critical protective factor in a child's development. We recommend the Government further allocate resources to parenting education, positive parenting, and support services for high-risk families. This will help parents manage child-rearing stress, enhance family protection functions, and foster children's healthy growth at the source.

At the same time, the Government should optimise after-school care and support services. Utilising after-school hours to implement SEL, physical and mental well-being, and positive development activities will provide more comprehensive support for children. Moreover, "Community Living Rooms" should expand and optimise their functions to provide parenting support, emotional support, and family

education services for grassroots families. This will foster better family relationships and community mutual-aid networks, preventing abuse, neglect, and mental health issues at their source.

5. Prioritise Children's Digital Safety as a Policy Priority

With the rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital technology, children face increasing online risks. We recommend the Government formulate a comprehensive children's digital safety strategy covering internet addiction, cyberbullying, online grooming, sexual exploitation, privacy protection, and the responsible use of AI. Digital safety education should also be incorporated into school and parent education systems to enhance children's safety awareness and digital literacy in the digital era.

Furthermore, the Government should encourage technology platforms to assume more proactive protection responsibilities by strengthening content management, risk early-warning systems, safety-by-design, and reporting mechanisms. Efforts should also strengthen the capacity of children, parents, and educators to identify and respond to digital risks. This ensures that while driving technological innovation, children can use technology safely, healthily, and responsibly.

6. Synchronise Social Welfare Planning with the Northern Metropolis Development

With the phased development of the Northern Metropolis and its large-scale population intake, we are pleased to see the Government's plan to add an Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness (ICCMW) in the Northern Metropolis “to cope with population growth”, and to commence planning for the New Territories North Hospital Cluster next year. We look forward to the Government upholding the principle of “welfare planning first, synchronising service provision with population intake” by publishing the completion timetables for facilities such as Child Care Centres, Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs), and Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs) across all new development areas. This ensures they are completed in tandem with residential housing. The Government should also review whether the territory-wide planning ratios are sufficient to meet the needs of the Northern Metropolis, which is expected to have a demographic structure dominated by young families.

Concurrently, the Government should proactively deploy support networks for parenting education, child care, children's primary healthcare, and student mental health services. To avoid a service vacuum during the initial stages of a new community, we urge the Government to allow NGOs to enter the community and provide transitional support before residents move in, drawing lessons from the “infrastructure first, services later” shortcomings of earlier new towns.

In terms of planning concepts, we recommend the Government draw on the Chinese Mainland's experience in promoting the construction of “Child-Friendly Cities”. Notably, the *Guiding Opinions on Advancing the Construction of Child-Friendly Cities*, a national-level policy guideline, explicitly proposes “adhering to putting children first, adopting a child's perspective, and being guided by children's

needs”. It mandates “prioritising children's needs in the formulation of urban economic and social development plans, and prioritising the fulfilment of children's needs in the allocation of public resources”, as well as “introducing child impact assessments in major urban development planning, policies, and project decisions”. The document also advocates adopting the child's perspective of “viewing the city from a one-metre height” and “soliciting the opinions of children and their guardians in advance on major matters involving children”.

By 2024, 93 cities nationwide had been included in the national development scope of Child-Friendly Cities, with cities like Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Nanjing already undertaking relevant initiatives. Guangzhou's Nansha District was also recognised as a Guangdong Provincial Child-Friendly Demonstration Zone. These initiatives encompass public spaces, play facilities, education, healthcare, and social services, and establish child participation mechanisms during planning and design to evaluate how policies and the urban environment affect children's development and well-being from a child's perspective. The policy guidelines outlined in the document offer direct and highly valuable reference for the Northern Metropolis as a newly planned community.