

**Executive Summary**  
**Equal Opportunities Commission**  
**Submission on 2024-25 Budget Consultation**  
**Inclusive Economy and Universal Design: Budgetary Measures to Promote Equality**

**Highlights (5 Themes, 10 Recommendations)**

Promoting Universal Design Principles in Hong Kong

1. Budget to enhance adoption of Universal Design Principles (UDPs) in both private and public sectors through continuous territory-wide accessibility audits and stakeholder engagements.

*[Improving People's Livelihood; also affects Capital Works Projects]*

2. Budget to facilitate the Deputy Financial Secretary's incorporation of UDPs into the *Buildings Department's Design Manual - Barrier Free Access 2008 (2021 Edition)* within 2024 as suggested in *The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address*, and to facilitate wider social application of UDPs in both building management and service provision.

*[Improving People's Livelihood; also affects Capital Works Projects]*

Inclusive Economy and Society

3. Budget for subsidizing the acquisition of inclusive technologies which would allow and encourage remote work of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Investments may create new job opportunities and increase GDP.

*[Expanding Economic Capacity, Improving People's Livelihood, Opportunities brought by Innovation and Technology]*

4. Budget to train PWDs for job opportunities that are closely related to market developments (e.g. E-sports players, online content creators, customer service ambassadors etc.). Also, train PWDs in using remote access technologies which would help them overcome physical barriers in employment and open them to opportunities.

*[Expanding Economic Capacity, Finding New Growth Areas]*

5. Review eligibility of disability-related subsidies and reimbursements so that PWDs can choose to more actively engage in economic activities without fully falling out of the safety net. The arrangement may save expenses rather than incur costs, and can boost the self-esteem of PWDs.

*[Improving People's Livelihood, Expanding Economic Capacity]*

6. Budget for promoting inclusive digital cultural resources such as virtual museums. Budget should allow acquisition of hardware and expertise.

*[Improving People's Livelihood, Opportunities brought by Innovation and Technology]*

Enhancing Hong Kong as a Touristic City for Persons with Disabilities

7. Budget for promoting tourism for PWDs in Hong Kong and for conducting the relevant research to evaluate Hong Kong's overall accessibility to PWDs.

*[Improving People's Livelihood]*

Assistance to Persons with Disabilities and Women regarding Municipal Solid Waste Charging

8. Budget to assist disability allowance recipients in need with their timely disposal of medical and hygiene wastes.

*[Improving People's Livelihood]*

9. Researches to estimate long-term financial and social effects of Municipal Solid Waste Charging on PWDs and women.

*[Improving People's Livelihood]*

Sexuality Education

10. Budget for promoting sexuality education and resources to enlighten teaching professionals on the subject may be considered.

*[Improving People's Livelihood]*

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## **Introduction**

In the post-pandemic era, economic activities are striving for returning to normal, and great emphasis is put on revitalization of the economy. Incidentally, the pleas of people with special needs are often put in a lower priority. The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) sees disadvantaged groups as an integral part of the economy and wishes to put forward 10 recommendations under 5 themes that would contribute to an inclusive economy where people with diverse needs can also thrive and contribute to economic developments of Hong Kong. We suggest that an inclusive economy is not only about welfare and accommodation to disadvantaged people, but a community that is fit for all and concerns all.

## **I. Promoting Universal Design Principles in Hong Kong**

### *Budgeting for Review of Accessibility of Premises*

1. **Budget to enhance adoption of Universal Design Principles (UDPs) in both private and public sectors** through continuous territory-wide accessibility audits and stakeholder engagements is suggested. In view of the vast number of capital works projects planned ahead, an ageing society with longer life expectancy like Hong Kong would benefit from more personal mobility,<sup>1</sup> and in turn, more economic activities, only if UDPs are adopted at the early planning, design, and construction stages. Universal Design helps create an inclusive environment in Hong Kong which can be enjoyed by people with diverse needs, including the elderly and Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). Universal Design also fosters a childbearing environment to support carers with new-borns, in line with the Government's goal in encouraging childbirth.

2. **Seed fund for a designated, independent body with in-depth understanding of diverse end-user perspectives** would facilitate the Deputy Financial Secretary's incorporation of UDPs into the *Buildings Department's Design Manual - Barrier Free Access 2008 (2021 Edition)* within 2024 as suggested in *The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address*, and benefit end-users. Based on the EOC's operational experience in conducting formal investigations, investigating and conciliating accessibility complaints under the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, periodic access audits and

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<sup>1</sup> In 2021, elderly persons aged 65 and above accounted for around 20.5% of Hong Kong overall population. Projections show that the figure will increase to 36% in 2046. **See:** Census and Statistics Department, 2023, *Hong Kong Population Projections 2022-2046*. Retrieved from:

[https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/data/stat\\_report/product/B1120015/att/B1120015092023XXXXB01.pdf](https://www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/data/stat_report/product/B1120015/att/B1120015092023XXXXB01.pdf);

In 2022, the life expectancies at birth for both sexes have increased from 67.8 years for males and 75.3 years for females in 1971 to 80.7 years and 86.8 years respectively. **See:** Centre for Health Protection, 2023. Retrieved from: <https://www.chp.gov.hk/en/statistics/data/10/27/111.html>.

stakeholder education are essential for successful territory-wide implementation of Universal Design. As UDPs embrace both technical aspects in premises and operational considerations in service provision, which may not be entirely covered in technical design standards under the *Design Manual - Barrier Free Access 2008 (2021 Edition)*, this designated team may review the accessibility of existing premises, beyond design and construction stages, to ensure that premises apply UDPs where practicable.

3. As stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), Hong Kong has the obligation to oversee private entities' efforts in enhancing accessibility for PWDs. As many private entities may lack the angles and experiences in assisting PWDs, this designated team could help knowledge transfer in Universal Design and foster good practices from building design to service operation. The EOC is launching the *Universal Design Award Scheme 2024/25* this year, aimed to do just that, to mobilise five categories of premises in public and private sectors towards Universal Design in both technical and service provision aspects. Continuity of such incentive to a broader range of categories of premises, including interface of built environment and technology, is essential to encourage more innovativeness from all sectors. Furthermore, public education initiatives such as seminars and promotional campaigns can also be organised to translate technical concepts to general public. These direct stakeholder engagements will facilitate the transformation of Hong Kong into an inclusive city.

## II. Inclusive Economy and Society

### *Making Use of Inclusive Technologies to Advance Equal Opportunities for All*

4. **Budget may be allocated for promoting acquisition of new inclusive technologies, and provide incentives for innovation and application of inclusive technologies,**<sup>2</sup> thereby helping disadvantaged groups to participate in the economy. Remote access technologies and extended reality devices have successfully encouraged surges in remote employment of home-bound PWDs in other economies. To name a successful forerunner, widespread application of remote access technologies triggered by COVID-19 has created 500,000 long-term job opportunities for PWDs in the United States in October 2021 alone.<sup>3</sup> Subsidies to encourage business adoption of remote access technology has the potential to **create long-term jobs for PWDs, thereby increasing Hong Kong's GDP.** In view of the potential economic synergy, cultivation of new talent pool, and the benefits to PWDs' livelihoods unleashed by new

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<sup>2</sup> For example, technologies that conform with *Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2* released in October 2023 for designs involving Information and Communication Technology. See: The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), 2023, "Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2," *W3C Recommendation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG22/>.

<sup>3</sup> Matt Gonzales, "Remote Work Helps People with Disabilities Land Jobs," *SHRM*, 21 October 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/inclusion-equity-diversity/remote-work-helps-people-disabilities-land-jobs>.

technologies, budget for technologies empowering PWDs is a worthy investment for the long-term wellbeing of the economy as a whole.

### *Exploring New Job Options for PWDs via New Training Modules*

5. **Budget to upgrade the training of PWDs for emerging or common jobs** such as E-sports players, online content creators, data analysts, and customer service ambassadors. In addition, training institutes such as Vocational Rehabilitation Services Centres can **train PWDs in using remote access technologies** which would help them overcome physical barriers in employment and open them to more job opportunities. With new hardware and software, training institutes can develop new modules that reflect newest developments and basic software skills required in the economy. In this way, economic capacity of Hong Kong can be expanded.

### *Redesigning Subsidizing Schemes to Unleash the PWDs Workforce*

6. **Reallocation of resources by changing eligibility of disability-related subsidies and reimbursements** can unleash the otherwise dormant PWDs workforce and contribute to Hong Kong's quest for talents. Contrary to incurring costs, this action may **relieve the government of some expenses**, save the positive effects on GDP. Certain PWDs have chosen not to actively participate in the job market despite their abilities for the sake of keeping their eligibility in various welfare schemes such as *Special Care Subsidy for the Severely Disabled* and *Integrated Support Service For Persons With Severe Physical Disabilities*.<sup>4</sup> The EOC has been advocating for an environment conducive for PWDs' upward mobility and full-time participation in the job market, and has iterated this point in its suggestion to the Government in the *2023 Policy Address Public Consultation*. In this connection, reengineering of the existing subsidizing schemes is again suggested so that PWDs can still be reimbursed or subsidized partially for renting or purchase of machines, fixtures, and services necessary for sustaining their daily functions even when they get a job with a salary that disqualifies them from certain welfare schemes such as the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA). PWDs will then be able to contribute to society with a certain level of safety net, which can, in turn, soothe Hong Kong's talent shortages.

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<sup>4</sup> “殘疾人棄全職免失綜援、實報實銷 | 團體倡復康器材資助劃出綜援消就業顧慮”，《明報》，2023年10月22日星期日。載於：  
<https://news.mingpao.com/pns/%E6%B8%AF%E8%81%9E/article/20231022/s00002/1697909606937/%E6%A E%98%E7%96%BE%E4%BA%BA%E6%A3%84%E5%85%A8%E8%81%B7-%E5%85%8D%E5%A4%B1%E7%B6%9C%E6%8F%B4-%E5%AF%A6%E5%A0%B1%E5%AF%A6%E9%8A%B7-%E5%9C%98%E9%AB%94%E5%80%A1%E5%BE%A9%E5%BA%B7%E5%99%A8%E6%9D%90%E8%B3%87%E5%8A%A9%E5%8A%83%E5%87%BA%E7%B6%9C%E6%8F%B4-%E6%B6%88%E5%B0%B1%E6%A5%AD%E9%A1%A7%E6%85%AE>。

## *Inclusive Digital Cultural Experiences*

7. **Budget for promoting inclusive digital cultural resources** may be set aside. Digital attendance of exhibitions would save PWDs with limited mobility the difficulties in physically accessing cultural resources, and has the potential to benefit the mental health of home-bound PWDs, carers, and elderly in residential care homes. Existing examples show that it is technically feasible to virtually recreate museum spaces, thereby enabling barrier-free virtual browsing of exhibitions.<sup>5</sup> Museums in Hong Kong can follow suit. **Budget for acquiring hardware for museums and employing people with relevant expertise is suggested.** Appropriate digital designs such as extended reality with captions or narrations in various languages will also allow ethnic minorities to appreciate cultural activities in Hong Kong from a first-person perspective, thereby demystifying certain cultural differences with the predominantly Chinese population.

### **III. Enhancing Hong Kong as a Touristic City for PWDs**

8. Allocate a **budget for promoting and researching tourism for PWDs in Hong Kong.** On the one hand, a contest for best PWD tourist routes in Hong Kong can be considered to engage stakeholders and potential visitors to Hong Kong. On the other hand, ethnographic research and focus group studies can identify PWDs' needs in traveling in Hong Kong and give insights as to how stakeholders could modify their premises and services.

9. Hong Kong can consider wider adoption and promotion of UDPs in order to develop Hong Kong into a tourist destination fit for all. Learning from the experience of a trip to Hong Kong organized in November 2023 by a mainland entity,<sup>6</sup> factors such as transportation and hotel accommodation require modifications to better cater to the needs of PWDs visiting Hong Kong. For instance, the EOC's *Study on Taxi Accessibility of Hong Kong* published in 2017 discovered that there are only 0.011 Wheelchair Accessible Taxis per 1,000 residents in Hong Kong, which fails to meet the needs of local PWDs, let alone the needs of visiting PWDs.<sup>7</sup> One can reasonably envisage that more visitors and tourists, be they PWDs or otherwise, would pick Hong Kong as their preferred touristic city if our overall accessibility in areas such as transportation, hotel accommodation, and sightseeing spots could be enhanced and be more accommodating.

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<sup>5</sup> "VR-All-Art". Retrieved from: <https://vrallart.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> "有片 | 殘障人專列來港「無障礙」旅遊 團友：圓了一生的夢", 《香港商報網》, 2023年11月20日。載於: [https://www.hkcd.com/hkcdweb/content/2023/11/20/content\\_8610551.html](https://www.hkcd.com/hkcdweb/content/2023/11/20/content_8610551.html)。

<sup>7</sup> Equal Opportunities Commission, 2017, *Study on Taxi Accessibility of Hong Kong*. Retrieved from: <https://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/upload/ResearchReport/20171218141453791442.pdf>.

#### IV. Assistance to Persons with Disabilities and Women regarding Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) Charging

##### *Helping with PWDs' Disposal of Medical and Hygiene Wastes*

10. **Budget to assist PWDs with needs with their disposal of medical and hygiene wastes** as an interim measure is suggested. Medical and hygiene wastes (especially wastes created by PWDs with contagious diseases) require timely disposal to avoid hygiene and health deterioration. Stacking of such wastes to fit the minimum size of the pre-paid designated bags is inappropriate, but timely disposal would cause a disproportionate financial burden to PWDs with needs. Since the government plans to allocate a short-term \$10 allowance per head for CSSA and Higher Old Age Living Allowance recipients on the basis of easing financial burden, the government is suggested to extend an allowance to recipients of Disability Allowance on needs basis, or to consider using outreach channels for helping PWDs handle offensive wastes.

##### *Research Initiatives to Understand Financial Burdens to PWDs and Women*

11. The government may also allocate **budget for conducting researches to extrapolate the long-term financial effects of MSW Charging on PWDs**. A structured research will discover whether frequent disposal of hygiene wastes and medical wastes can cause a disproportionate financial burden to PWDs directly or due to induced increases in fees of services such as residential care, and whether remedial policy measures such as special bags or collection boxes for hygiene wastes are warranted.<sup>8</sup> This can ensure that PWDs have continuous improvements in their standard of living and social protection as stipulated in UNCRPD.

12. Similar to PWDs, women also have unique hygiene needs as compared to men and will need to dispose more hygiene wastes than men. To understand whether remedies are needed, and whether the uniform MSW Charging may create gender and disability inequality in the long-run, **researches may be conducted from both legal and gender perspectives** to explore ways to address the undesired imbalance imposed by the policy onto PWDs and women.

#### V. Sexuality Education

13. **Budget for promoting sexuality education and resources to enlighten teaching professionals on the subject** may be considered. Sexuality education is important for nurturing respect for other human beings' boundaries and promote gender

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<sup>8</sup> A survey done by the local NGO *Direction Association for the Handicapped* shows that people dealing with severe physical disabilities may use more than a few 5-litre bags each day for medical wastes, amounting to an extra \$90 per month compared to the average person. See: Doris Wai and SCMP, "Deep Dive: Hong Kong authorities warn against fake rubbish bags ahead of launch of waste charging scheme, while disability groups plead for financial assistance," *Youngpost*, 15 January 2024. Retrieved from: [Deep Dive: Hong Kong authorities warn against fake rubbish bags ahead of launch of waste charging scheme, while disability groups plead for financial assistance - YP | South China Morning Post \(scmp.com\)](https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/youngpost/article/3247147/deep-dive-hong-kong-authorities-warn-against-fake-rubbish-bags-ahead-of-launch-of-waste-charging-scheme-while-disability-groups-plead-for-financial-assistance-yp).

equality. Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of sexuality education on preventing sex crimes,<sup>9</sup> as sexuality education can have life-long value-shaping effects on adolescences. Resources are suggested for development of trainings and toolkits so that teachers become prepared to teach primary and secondary school students sexuality education for their holistic development before adulthood.

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<sup>9</sup> **See for example:** Madeline Schneider and Jennifer S. Hirsch, 2020, “Comprehensive sexuality education as a primary prevention strategy for sexual violence perpetration,” *Trauma Violence Abuse* 21(3): 439-455. Retrieved from: [Comprehensive sexuality education as a primary prevention strategy for sexual violence perpetration - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#).