



醫護行者 Health In Action

To eliminate health inequity in societies 消除社會上的健康不公平

Dr Law Chi-kwong, GBS, JP
Secretary for Labour and Welfare

14th December 2018

Dear Dr. Law,

**Re: Concerns Regarding New Measures in Employment for Ethnic Minorities
in Policy Address 2018**

I am writing to on behalf of Health In Action, a registered non-governmental organization in Hong Kong that provides support for and are concerned about the well-being of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. We have been running health programmes for ethnic minorities for over six years.

We are delighted that the government allocate resources to improve ethnic minority employment situation, even though the high unemployment rate of ethnic minority community has been a long problem in Hong Kong. HIA promotes health equity, and we believe that employment is one of the social determinants of health which directly affect a person's well-being. Unemployment leads to the unhealthiness of an individual. Therefore, we urge the government to improve ethnic minority employment condition.

Based on the “New Measures in Employment” suggested by the government in the publication of “Policy Address 2018 - Strengthening Support for Ethnic Minority”¹, we would like to discuss the following topics in greater detail in order to work together to further enhance the employment rate and health and wellbeing of ethnic minorities.

1. **Enhance manpower support to the Labour Department to launch a pilot programme in conjunction with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide employment services for EM job seekers through a case management approach**

It is a good initiative as ethnic minorities have unique barriers in employment such as language barriers, unfamiliar with the working norms and cultural differences. We would like to suggest a case management model concerning the health industry.

a) Industry analysis

We suggest the Labour Department analyze specific industry to highlight to the reason why ethnic minority employment is essential in such industries. For example, the ethnic minority's health is

¹ Policy Address 2018 – Strengthening Support for Ethnic Minorities. Available from https://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/2018/eng/pdf/Leaflet_support.pdf



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statistically poor than Chinese². Therefore, the high demand for health services either in hospital or clinics is needed. However, the supply of ethnic minorities workers or interpretation service is not enough and could not timely cater the needs³. In addition, health industry is suffering from manpower shortage recently. Therefore, there is an urge to increase ethnic minority workers in the health industries.

b) Case management procedures

Case management should focus on exploring career path and development of a client instead of just offering a job. Therefore, understanding a client's aspiration or even helping them to find one is utmost important. Based on feedback from our service users, quite many users would like to work in the health industry. However, they do not have much information about the industry and do not know how to pursue a career path. A caseworker with social work training background should help facilitate the client to understand the industry, develop a feasible career path and connect with different resources such as training parties, workplace support, incentives and allowance to enrich the work experience of that industry. The health industry is good to be explored.

c) Workplace Training

Different kinds of employment training are provided by many EM services nowadays. However, most of them are limited to the classroom setting. In other words, trainees could not have real working experiences equipped. It leads to the problem of adopting the working environment, especially for the ethnic minority. Government provide work placement programmes through Youth Employment Training Programme. However, all placement posts require fluent oral Chinese and written Chinese skills, which is a considerable barrier to ethnic minority youth to start their career.

Nevertheless, there are some industries such as the health industry use English as the primary language for internal communication such as reports or IT system. The government can suggest Hospital Authority explore if they could adjust the language requirement like what the government is doing right now in order to release more positions for ethnic minorities. Moreover, new opportunities can be explored such as in-house ethnic minority interpreter for A&E service in a hospital as there is a particular need for ethnic minority patient who needs timely interpretation service.

2. C. Chen & KH Chen (2014), Type 2 diabetes management in Hong Kong ethnic minorities: what primary care physicians need to know. Available from: <http://www.hkmj.org/abstracts/v20n3/222.htm>. Accessed Nov 2018

3. 香港 01 (2017), 少數族裔病人難預約傳譯服務 遭醫院要求覆診須懂英語親友陪同. Available from: <https://www.hk01.com/社會新聞/134714/少數族裔病人難預約傳譯服務-遭醫院要求覆診須懂英語親友陪同>. Accessed Nov 2018



d) Employers readiness

Apart from enhancing employee's knowledge and attitude in working in a specific industry, we suggest the Labour Department actively communicate with employers to raise their awareness in hiring ethnic minorities. Based on our frontline working experiences, we observed some employers do have some perception on ethnic minorities such as they perceive ethnic minority needs to pray five times per day which is not cost-effective regarding management. Such misconceptions create a massive barrier to employers to start to hire ethnic minorities. During the past six years, Health In Action tried to reach out to different health institutions such as hospitals and clinics to educate the employer about the characteristics of ethnic minority and their culture. Many employers are willing to offer a job vacancy for ethnic minorities after eliminating their perceptions and doubts. Therefore, it is worth paying efforts on educating employers about ethnic minority cultures.

e) Follow-up measures

After matching ethnic minority to training or job, there are still follow-up measures needed because many drops out are due to adaptation problem in the workplace, either from employer or employees. For instance, some employers in management levels agreed to hire ethnic minorities, but the instructions had not passed to the frontline staff. At the result, conflicts happened between the frontline staff and the new ethnic minority employees. The case manager has to monitor the quality of communication and work with the client to adopt the new working environment. A mentor from the hiring company is highly recommended to sustain the employment.

f) Evaluation

We suggest evaluation is not only limited to the success of employment but also the increase of aspiration, industry awareness and knowledge, self-confidence and competence are also important aspects of evaluating. On the other hand, the employer's awareness of ethnic minority culture and their acceptance of ethnic minority workers are also worth to understand after the pilot programme.

2. Expand the range of dedicated language and industry-specific training courses for EMs provided by ERB and enhance the flexibility of enrolment requirements for certain courses

a) Explore medical positions such as allied health profession assistants in English medium

We observed there are ERB courses regarding allied health profession assistants. We suggest introducing English version of such training and promote to ethnic minority communities. The reasons are as follow:



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1. Such positions allow English as a medium in work
2. Reduce the language barrier in using allied health services such as physiotherapy, pharmacy and dietitian
3. Widen the career choices in medical industries
4. Train up future ethnic minority human resources in the medical industry
5. Improve health in the community with more health knowledge spread in the community

We urge the government consider work with Hospital Authority and Department of Health to increase more job opportunities in the health industry for ethnic minorities where we see there is a considerable need to improve ethnic minority health and employment situation.

Our organization consists of healthcare professionals with extensive experiences working with ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. We would be grateful if we could set up a meeting with the Labour and Welfare Bureau so that we can share our experiences and discuss how we could better work together.

Our Research and Advocacy Coordinator Mr. Anthony Lai will be delighted to hear from the department to coordinate the meeting. He can be reached at anthonylai@hia.org.hk or 9619 1577.

Thank you for your attention and we look forward to your favourable reply.

Yours faithfully,
Dr. Fan Ning
Chairman
Health In Action

Health in Action was established in 2011 and is a registered non-governmental organization in Hong Kong. Our vision is to eliminate health inequity in societies and we firmly believe that health is a fundamental human right for all, irrespective of race, religion, gender or political affiliation. We aspire to drive positive social change through cycles of service, research, and advocacy. Our current target beneficiaries include local working poor families, ethnic minorities, and refugees. Health in Action is a member of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and is in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council.