

**The Legislative Council Subcommittee on Rights of Ethnic Minorities**  
**13 February 2017 Meeting on**  
**"Employment support services for ethnic minorities"**

**Submission from Health In Action**

1. Health is important because it enables individuals to pursue their life aspirations and achieve their potentials. The "right to health" ensures that all people have access to high quality healthcare services and have equal opportunity of be healthy, irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.
2. We raise our deep concern that ethnic minorities (EMs) in Hong Kong are facing multiple barriers in exercising their right to health due to language, cultural, and religious factors, which is a form of health inequity. In particular, employment is an important social determinant of health, which plays a significant role in the physical, mental, and social wellbeing of EMs. In view of the health inequities faced by EMs in the field of employment, we wish to highlight the following concerns and suggestions:
3. Relax the language requirement to increase healthcare workforce  
While Chinese-learning support is necessary to facilitate EMs in seeking employment, there is an urgent need for the authorities to review and relax the language employment policies at healthcare settings, especially on written Chinese proficiency. Written English is the working language in almost all hospitals and most clinics, and spoken Chinese is sufficient to manage day-to-day operations. Increased employment of competent and qualified EM staff in the health sector shall also help alleviate the social and financial burden of Hong Kong's aging population.
4. Widen the scope of career support services to the health sector  
We support the Administration in implementing measures to ensure that EMs have equal job opportunities in the Government, especially disciplinary services. In addition to civil service posts, we believe it is also important to facilitate EM employment in the public health sector, particularly the Hospital Authority, whose staff are not managed by the Civil Service Bureau. Career guidance, vocational training and retraining support should also be extended to cover the health industry in order to cultivate a larger number of qualified EM health personnel at public hospitals and clinics to cater for growing patient needs, including EM patients.
5. Enhance medical interpretation as a viable professional career  
International best practice recommends professional medical interpreters to facilitate doctor-patient communication for patients who do not speak local languages. Although interpretation is offered at public hospitals and clinics through a service contractor in Hong Kong, frontline experience has reflected that the roles of medical interpreters are sometimes not well understood and healthcare staff often prefer EM patients to bring their own relatives or friends as interpreters due to convenience or time constraints. We suggest the authorities to establish medical interpretation as



standard service (such as setting as default for patients who do not speak Chinese or English, or stationing in-house interpreters), especially at hospitals with high EM patient load to cater for language needs, such as at the Accident & Emergency Department. This also enhances medical interpreter as a viable career option for EMs.

6. Include compulsory Cultural Competence training as part of staff orientation in public sectors

At present, cultural sensitivity or competence training is optional for Hospital Authority staff and managers, which sometimes result in misunderstandings between EMs and non-EMs. We suggest to include compulsory Cultural Competence training as part of staff orientation in public sectors, including the Hospital Authority, in order to facilitate EM recruitment and social inclusion among staff to create an EM-friendly work environment in the public sector. The compulsory Cultural Competence training also has additional benefit for non-EM staff to better work with EM patients and service clients.

END