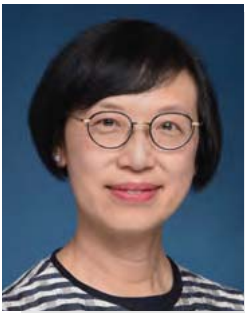


Message from the Secretary for Food and Health



I am delighted to welcome you to the Health Research Symposium 2021. This year, the Symposium marks an important milestone and commemorates the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Health and Medical Research Fund (HMRF).

Over the past 30 years, the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), through the HMRF and its former funds, has taken the lead in supporting health-related research, developing the infrastructure and building research capacity necessary to address public health threats caused by emerging infectious diseases and the increase in non-communicable diseases in order to advance scientific knowledge, enhance clinical practice and improve population health. The central theme of this year's Symposium, "Implementing evidence-based research in the era of COVID-19 and other global health challenges", aims to understand how the

challenges to the healthcare system resulting from the global COVID-19 pandemic can be mitigated through application of evidence-based research findings, and well reflects the HMRF's objectives. This year's Symposium, for the first time, is being held in hybrid mode with the presentations being made both virtually and in person.

During the present COVID-19 epidemic, Hong Kong has demonstrated that its evidence-based public health measures are able to bring the outbreak under control. The Government's prompt reactions to this public health crisis are, in part, due to its foresight and considerable support to enhance Hong Kong's preparedness for the control of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases over many years since the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003 by setting up the Research Fund for the Control of Infectious Diseases with an approved commitment of \$450 million, which provided extensive support to epidemiologists, researchers and clinicians up to its consolidation into the HMRF established in 2011 with an injection of \$1,000 million. In 2021, the approved commitment of the HMRF has been increased to \$4,223 million.

Since April 2020, FHB and HMRF have awarded a total of \$513 million to 67 COVID-19 research studies to address important research areas in transmissibility and infectability of the virus; effective surveillance and prevention strategies of the disease; development of treatments and therapies; evaluation of vaccine-induced immune response and reactogenicity to different groups including young adolescents, adults, the elderly and cohorts receiving booster vaccinations, as well as comparison of the immune status in convalescent and vaccinated cohorts; the role of gut microbiota in enhancing immune response to vaccination; and knowledge, confidence and acceptance of vaccination, and social and behavioural interventions to reduce the spread of novel coronavirus in different community groups. Many of these studies have already published their findings in the world's leading medical journals, and these new evidence are crucial in informing Government's policy on COVID-19 preparedness and control.

While COVID-19 may have been at the forefront of our thoughts for most of the past two years, HMRF has also committed extensive resources to support research on primary healthcare and non-communicable diseases including tobacco control, cancer, diabetes and mental health, among others. The increasing ageing population means that the number of people living with chronic diseases in particular will increase and research on ameliorating these long-term conditions is required. Several studies, for example, those on tobacco control and cancer screening, have had a positive impact on the quality of life and overall population health through informing health policy and decision making as well as enhancing clinical practice and health services. The significant reduction in smoking and tobacco use in Hong Kong in recent years and the implementation of the Breast Cancer Screening Pilot Programme are two examples of the application of findings from HMRF-funded research projects.

I am very pleased that we shall be honouring the many excellent researchers who have contributed their efforts to improving the health of the Hong Kong population through an award ceremony today. In addition, to recognise the excellent research efforts on COVID-19 and celebrate the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the HMRF, two categories of special award, namely, "Outstanding Project Team on COVID-19 Research Award" and "10th HMRF Anniversary Award" will be presented during the Symposium.

Finally, this Symposium is a remarkable platform to facilitate academic exchange, bringing together researchers, health service providers, and policy makers to share with a view to advancing science in health. I expect to see more excellent research projects supported by HMRF in the years to come. It is with immense pleasure that I acknowledge the contribution of our renowned overseas speakers and our many local experts for joining us today and for sharing their knowledge and experience with us all. I look forward to a stimulating and rewarding event.

Prof. Sophia Siu Chee CHAN, JP
Secretary for Food and Health of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region