

## Two more centres to help gamblers

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Two new small-scale counselling and treatment centres for problem and pathological gamblers, commissioned by the Home Affairs Bureau, opened today (February 1).

The Secretary for Home Affairs, Dr Patrick Ho, has signed agreements with the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (HKFYG) and the Zion Social Service Limited (ZSS), to operate one centre in Tuen Mun and the other in Tseung Kwan O on a pilot basis for two years.

The new initiative will be financed by the Ping Wo Fund which will provide \$2.6 million for each centre over the two years.

A spokesman for the Home Affairs Bureau said Dr Ho was pleased to have commissioned the two non-governmental organisations to operate the two new centres.

“Compared to the two existing centres (Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Even Centre and Caritas Addicted Gamblers Counselling Centre), the new centres are of smaller scale and will provide treatment services to problem and pathological gamblers and their families using a community-based approach.

“They will also provide preventive education for the local district and the community at large. In particular, ZSS will provide services for the elderly and women; and the HKFYG for young people and ethnic minority groups,” the spokesman said.

The two new centres were recommended as a result of a review conducted by the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) on the effectiveness of the two existing pilot counselling and treatment centres for problem and pathological gamblers. PolyU’s report suggested that the existing services provided by Tung Wah and Caritas were effective and should be extended for another two years. The report also proposed to set up two smaller scale counselling centres, using a community-based approach to target specific social groups.

“We also see the need to extend the service hours of the gambling counselling hotline service (1834 633). The two new centres have worked out a plan with the existing two large centres to provide longer hours of hotline service starting from February 5,” the spokesman said.

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