

## Four organisations to operate gamblers' counselling and treatment centres

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Four counselling and treatment centres for problem and pathological gamblers, operated by Caritas-Hong Kong (Caritas), Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGHs), Zion Social Service Limited (Zion) and Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service (HKLSS), will begin operations tomorrow (January 1) according to new service agreements. They will provide counselling and treatment services for problem and pathological gamblers as well as their families.

The four centres are commissioned by the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) and financed by the Ping Wo Fund. The level of funding support for the four centres will be increased to \$11 million per year.

Caritas and TWGHs will operate two centres in Tsuen Wan and Wan Chai respectively for a term of four years. Zion and HKLSS will run another two centres in Kwun Tong and Tai Po respectively for three years. Apart from providing counselling and treatment services, the four centres will continue to provide training programmes to help concerned professionals, such as social workers, build expertise in handling cases. Under the new terms of service, the four centres will strengthen their public education programme in schools to enhance students' awareness of problem gambling.

A spokesman for HAB said, "The four centres are located in different areas of the territory, making them easily accessible by people living or working in different districts. For those who are not able to visit the centres in person, they may call the existing hotline (1834 633) for assistance provided by any one of the centres."

HAB commissioned the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to conduct a research on the development of counselling and treatment services for problem gamblers in Hong Kong, and evaluated the effectiveness of the four existing counselling and treatment centres for problem and pathological gamblers supported by the Ping Wo Fund and operated by Caritas, TWGHs, Zion and the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups (HKFYG). The research confirmed the need for provision of counselling and treatment services on gambling. The service contracts of the four existing centres will expire today (December 31). HAB conducted an open tender exercise for the service contracts of the four centres in mid-2009. A Vetting Committee had been formed under Ping Wo Fund Advisory Committee to evaluate the proposals based on the principle of fairness, openness and impartialness. Caritas, TWGHs, Zion and HKLSS

were selected as the service operators of the four centres.

"We thank HKFYG for operating the counselling and treatment centre in Tuen Mun in the past two years on a pilot basis. We hope that the community would continue to support counselling and treatment services for problem and pathological gamblers," the spokesman said.

Ends/Thursday, December 31, 2009