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An exploration of elderly care in the Greater Bay Area - Integration and innovation for the future

May 2025

■ ■ ■
The better the question.
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Foreword

As a key driver of economic growth in China, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) holds strategic significance for the exploration and implementation of cross-border elderly care. Within the GBA's one-hour living circle, the idea of cross-border elderly care has steadily developed in recent years. Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau have joined hands in promoting high-quality development in this area, focusing on the creating an elderly care ecosystem that offers seamless access across the region. From the Guangdong Province's promulgation of *Certain Measures on Speeding Up the Provision of Elderly Care Services* in 2019 to the expedited accelerated implementation of cross-border elderly care in Hong Kong and Macau, there is a clear upward trend in this field. This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of policymaking in elderly care in the GBA, addressing the current status, challenges and opportunities for development. It includes analyses of collaborative progress in the areas such as elderly care facilities, health care security measures, elderly care financing, and innovative elderly care services. By examining these opportunities and challenges, the article proposes certain strategic recommendations to serve as policy references for enhancing the elderly care system in the GBA, and fostering ongoing regional synergy.



2

An overview of elderly care policies in the Greater Bay Area cities

2 An overview of elderly care policies in the Greater Bay Area cities

There is a global trend of an aging population, making elderly care a central focus in policymaking for many communities. The population and dependency ratios of the senior population aging 65 years and above in the GBA cities have shown an upward trend between 2010 and 2020. This increase has been most notable in Hong Kong and Macau, leading to a higher demand for local health care and elderly care services.

Cities	Ratio of population 65 years and above (2010)	Dependency ratio (2010)	Ratio of population 65 Years and above (2020) ¹	Dependency ratio (2020) ²
Hong Kong	13%	18%	19%	27%
Macau	7%	9%	12%	16%
Guangzhou	7%	8%	8%	10%
Shenzhen	2%	2%	3%	4%
Dongguan	2%	3%	4%	4%
Foshan	5%	6%	7%	9%
Huizhou	6%	8%	7%	9%
Jiangmen	9%	12%	13%	18%
Zhongshan	4%	5%	6%	8%
Zhaoqing	9%	13%	12%	18%
Zhuhai	5%	6%	7%	9%

The unique characteristics of elderly care services in each GBA city reflect the different economic backgrounds of these societies. In Hong Kong and Macau, elderly care provisions emphasize social security measures, including economic assistance and provident funds. These systems aim to provide economic security for the senior population, while also protecting their economic and social welfare. In contrast, Guangdong Province's elderly care system is based on the concept of "rooted in home-living, with social assistance and institutions as the support," relying on family and community as the primary care units. The focus here is on strengthening of family-based elderly care.

1 Data source for the nine GBA cities in the Chinese mainland: Data of the Sixth National Population Census and Data of the Seventh National Population Census.

Data source for the Hong Kong SAR: The Census and Statistics Department of The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Data source for the Macao SAR: Statistics and Census Service, The Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region.

2 The dependency ratio of the aging population is one economic indicator in reflecting the consequences of an aging population. It refers to the ratio of each 100 persons above the age of 65 (aging population) to the number of population aged between 15 and 64 (working age population). This indicates the number of aging population that must be supported by each 100 of the working age population. The relevant data on dependency ratio is taken from the wind database.

An overview of elderly care policies in the Greater Bay Area cities

An overview of the elderly care policies in Guangdong Province, Hong Kong SAR and Macao SAR

Hong Kong SAR

Retirement provident fund	Social security and subsidies	Health care policy	Elderly care policy
1 Mandatory Provident Fund With contributions by both the employer and the employee, to be redeemed at the time of retirement (65 years old), or under other special circumstances.	1 Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Provides economic assistance to individuals and families in need, including seniors. 2 Social Security allowances Including Old Age Living Allowance, Normal Disability Allowance, and Higher Disability Allowance.	1 Public healthcare system The public health care system of Hong Kong SAR is heavily subsidized, ensuring that no one will be refused health care due to financial difficulties. These services are provided by the Department of Health and the Hospital Authority. 2 The Elderly Health Care Voucher Scheme This scheme provides health care vouchers to seniors annually, to be used in the basic health care services provided by the private health care providers.	1 Community and residential care services Includes the District Elderly Community Centres, Neighbourhood Elderly Centres, Day Care Centres/Units for the Elderly, and the residential care services of different categories. These services aim to provide the elderly with community support.

An overview of elderly care policies in the Greater Bay Area cities

Macao SAR

Retirement provident fund	Social security and subsidies	Health care policy	Elderly care policy
1 The Non-Mandatory Central Provident Fund The Non-Mandatory Central Provident Fund of Macao SAR provides for the contributions by the government and individuals, so that residents can accumulate savings for their retirement.	1 Social Security Fund The Social Security Fund of Macao SAR provides, amongst others, welfare assistance such as old-age pension, disability pension, and unemployment allowance. 2 Old-age Pension This scheme provides pension for those who have made at least 60 months of contribution in the social security system and met the residency requirement.	1 Public health care system The public health care system of Macao SAR is subsidized by tax and provides free basic health care for residents via the public hospitals and health centers.	1 Community support and residential care facilities Provides elderly care services and support such as elderly care home, daycare services, home care services and elderly support, and pays consistent attention to the lives and daily needs of the elderly.

An overview of elderly care policies in the Greater Bay Area cities

Guangdong Province

Retirement provident fund	Social security and subsidies	Health care policy	Elderly care policy
1 Basic Elderly Insurance System The Basic Elderly Pension System consists of the Pension Administrator and individual pension accounts. It requires the contribution of a portion of the total salary by the participating units and the individuals. The system assists residents in accumulating retirement savings. 2 Individual Pension System The Individual Pension System carries out an individual account system, whereby the participant makes all contributions for comprehensive accumulation. In the Chinese mainland, a basic three-pillar insurance infrastructure has been set up with a basis on pension insurance as supplemented by enterprises making annuity (occupational) contributions, along with individual savings pension and commercial pension insurances.	1 Sickness and disability subsidies system If the participant lost all the abilities to work due to sickness or non-work-related causes before the statutory retirement age, participants may apply for Sickness and Disability Subsidies, to be paid out monthly. 2 Old age subsidies system Subsidies are given to persons 80 years or above who experience financial difficulties.	1 Health care securities system With lateral coverage by the two main health care systems of Basic Healthcare Insurance for Workers in Urban Areas and Basic Healthcare for Residents of Rural Areas, supplemented by the six health care system policies of significant coverage medical assistance, supplementary health insurance, major illness insurance, long-term care insurance, medical assistance, health care insurance for the poor as vertical coverage of the society's health care needs.	1 Basic Elderly Care Services List system Established the Elderly Ability General Assessment System and provided categorized services for different elderly groups. In accordance with the financial resources of the different localities, a list of basic elderly care services has been rolled out, addressing the needs of health, loss of abilities, and financial difficulties of the different elderly groups and provides appropriate categorized services including elderly care security, daily living assistance, rehabilitative care, and social assistance etc.

An overview of elderly care policies in the Greater Bay Area cities

An overview of the elderly care policies in the nine Mainland cities of the Greater Bay Area

Besides the basic policies of Guangdong as listed above, the GBA cities in the Chinese mainland have made their own relevant elderly care policies with unique features to address the local needs, as discussed in the following.

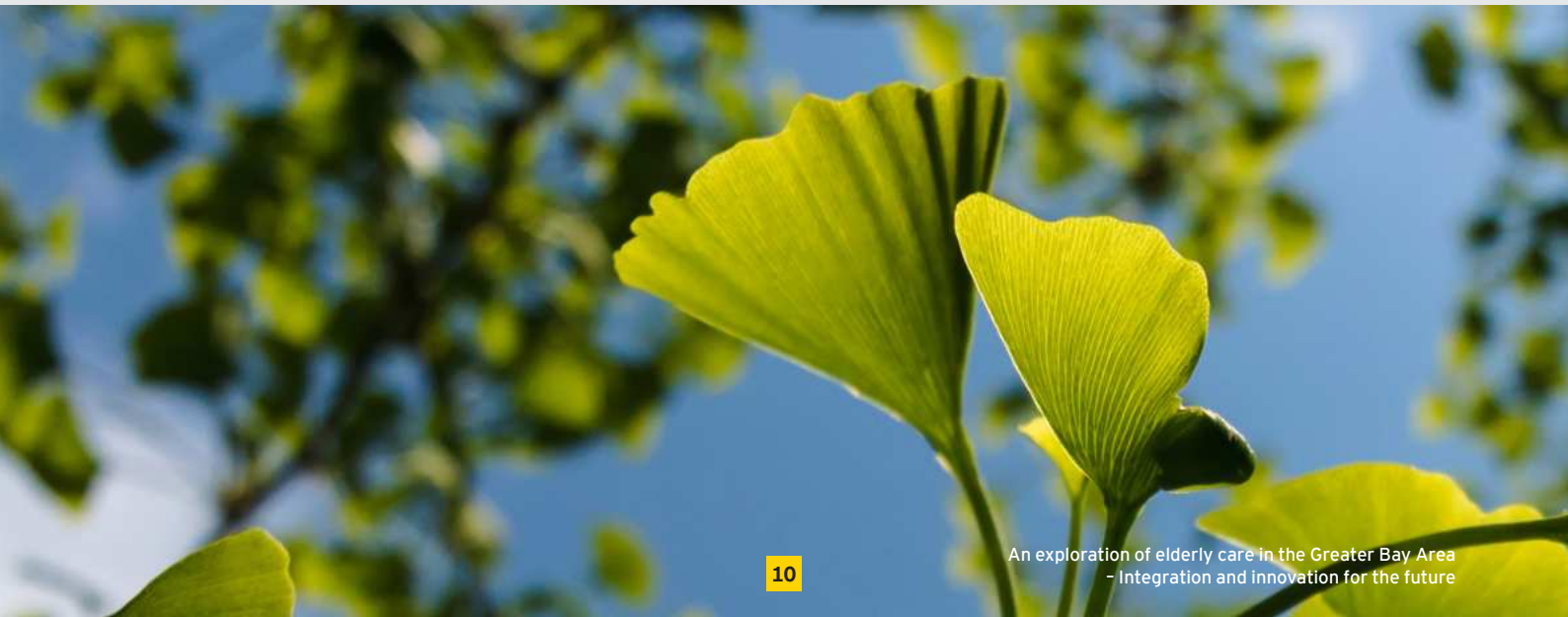
Guangzhou

Guangzhou has taken a proactive approach in promoting the steady development of cross-border elderly care in the GBA.

- Guangzhou has initiated a pilot scheme for health care and elderly care reform by establishing the Joint Body in the Integrated Reform of Elderly Care in the GBA (Nansha). Additionally, it has launched the 2024 Pilot Project in the Nationwide Standardization of Cross-border Elderly Care Services by Elderly Care Organizations to foster mutually beneficial, collaborative and synergistic developments in cross-border elderly care services. Furthermore, Guangzhou has encouraged local health care providers to participate in the Pilot Scheme for Senior Health Care Vouchers in the Greater Bay Area, facilitating the recognition of Hong Kong's Health Care Voucher Scheme for use by the elderly of Hong Kong in Mainland hospitals.
- Guangzhou has stepped up its commitment in elderly care facilities and promoted the establishment of elderly care services organizations integrated within the community.

Throughout Guangzhou's metropolitan area, the government has promoted the construction of numerous elderly care organizations offering comprehensive on-site residential care or home visit services. This pioneering effort in national elderly care infrastructure includes providing subsidies to both profit-making and non-profit organizations run by non-state operators, aiming to encourage active social participation and resources allocation in establishing elderly care organizations.

- Guangzhou has expanded the establishment of community-based, home-based elderly care facilities, with a focus on the diet, living environment, and leisure activities of the elderly. This effort is part of the “housekeeping + elderly care” initiative, aimed at jumpstarting the provision of such services. Additionally, Guangzhou has developed an overall plan to integrate the facilities and resources required to organize activities for the elderly, thereby creating a network for elderly care services within the community.



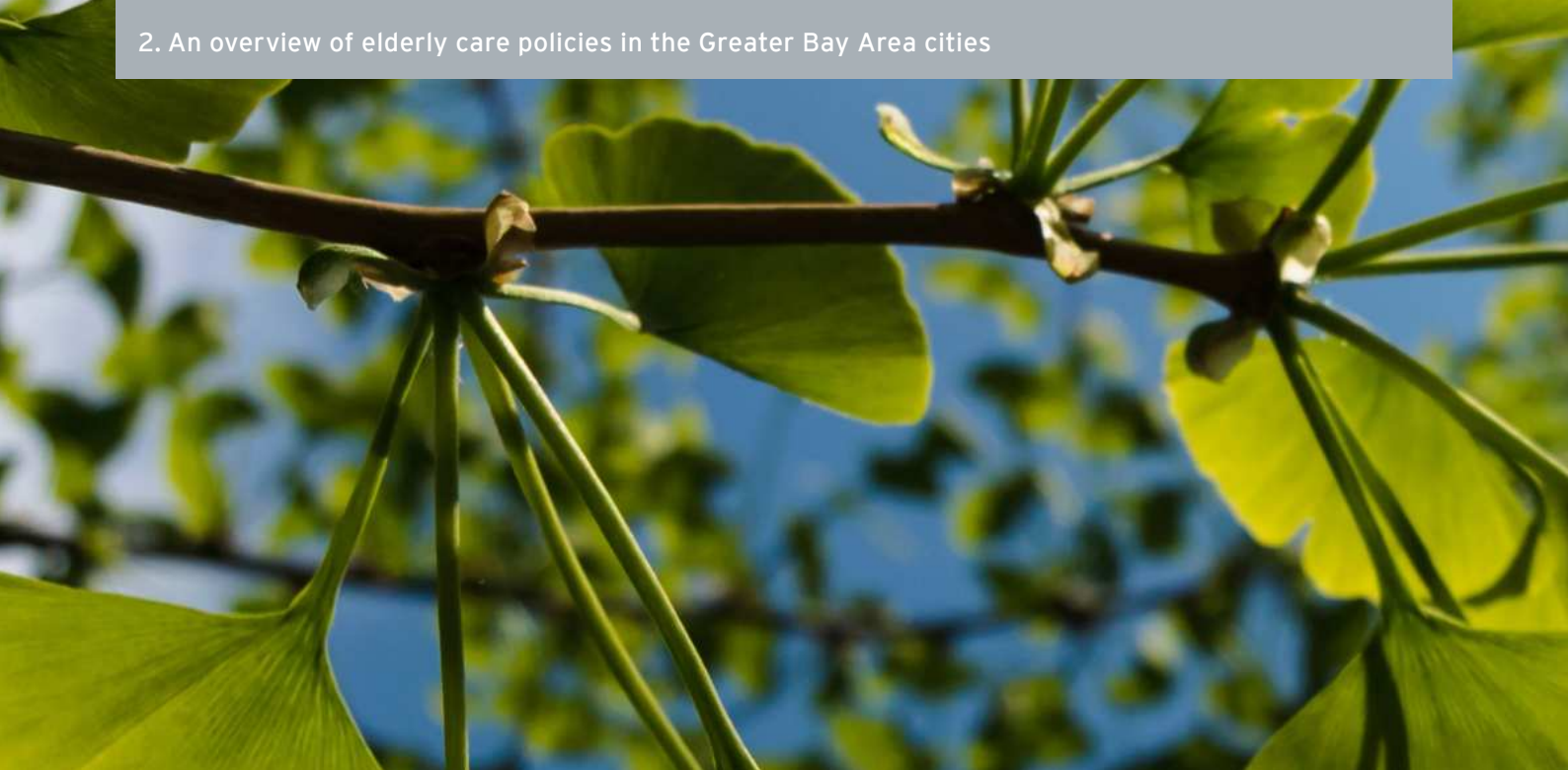


Table 1 Recently issued documents and policies concerning cross-border elderly care in Guangzhou

No.	Document/policy	Issuing authority	Date of issue
1	<i>Basic Elderly Care Services List of Guangzhou (2024 Version)</i>	Guangzhou Civil Affairs Bureau	17 July 2024
2	<i>Overall Plan to Promote Comprehensive Cooperation among Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macao by Further Deepening Opening-up in Nansha District of Guangzhou</i>	The State Council	6 June 2022
3	<i>Implementation Plan for Enhancing the Establishment of Community-Based Elderly Care Organizations</i>	Guangzhou Civil Affairs Bureau	June 2019
4	<i>Trial Measures for Guangzhou's Support of Social Forces to Participate in Community- and Home-Based Elderly Care Services</i>	Guangzhou Civil Affairs Bureau	6 June 2019
5	<i>Trial Measures for Guangzhou's Support of Social Forces to Participate in Community- and Home-Based Elderly Care Services</i>	Guangzhou Civil Affairs Bureau	1 June 2019
6	<i>Notice on Adjusting the Subsidies for Profit-Making Elderly Care Services Organizations Operated by Non-State Owned Enterprises and Related Matters</i>	Guangzhou Civil Affairs Bureau, Guangzhou Municipal Finance Bureau	15 March 2019

Shenzhen

Shenzhen has strived to enhance convenience and comfort for cross-border elderly from Hong Kong and Macau living in the Chinese mainland.

- Shenzhen has implemented urban planning policies tailored to the needs of an aging population, including barrier-free access throughout the city. Age-appropriate regulations have been established to address structural requirements for public space corridors and rooms on the second floor and above for elderly use and management. The government has proposed construction specifications for barrier-free escalators, slopes in addition to stairs, and handrails, along with legal requirements for higher-grade fire prevention and safety facilities.
- Shenzhen has promoted infrastructure development to support the financing of elderly care services organizations, focusing on increasing the supply of accessible and affordable elderly care services. Government departments have coordinated financing and

collective brainstorming for elderly care service provision, supporting overall planning and strategizing of projects to institutionalize the elderly care system. Highly capable providers with strong backgrounds and dedication to professional service are selected for project financing, and are responsible for constructing and operating the projects.

- Shenzhen has proposed an action plan for smart and high-quality elderly care services to boost the development of elderly care services in certain subdistricts within the city. The overall objective is to develop high-quality services through a series of actions to implement assistance plans for health care, meals and living, raising the standards of the elderly care service facilities. The plan envisions expanding service coverage with professionalism, standardization, and a smart approach, establishing a 15-minute home- and community-based elderly care service zone.

Table 2 Recently issued documents and policies concerning cross-border elderly care in Shenzhen

No.	Document/policy	Issuing authority	Date of issue
1	Action Plan for High-Quality Development of Elderly Care Services “Year-Round Elderly Care” (2024–2025)	Bao’an District, People’s Government, Shenzhen Municipality	28 April 2024
2	Trial Implementation Measures for Shenzhen to Initiate the “0570” Elderly to Live in Age-Appropriate Homes	Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau	12 May 2023
3	Interim Measures for Implementing “The Four Synchronized Tracks” of Community-Based Elderly Care Service Facilities in the Shenzhen Municipality	Shenzhen Civil Affairs Bureau	12 May 2023
4	Regulations of the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone on Elderly Care Services	Sixth Session of the Standing Committee of the Shenzhen Municipal People’s Congress	23 November 2020

Zhuhai

Zhuhai promotes the organic integration of strengths in elderly care services provision within the GBA.

- Zhuhai has developed a regulatory framework focused on the needs of districts with a significant population of elderly from Hong Kong and Macau to promote infrastructure and development in the Guangdong-Macao In-depth Cooperation Zone. Zhuhai has introduced the *Regulations on the Facilitation of Home-Based Elderly Care Services in the Zhuhai Special Economic Zone*, aiming to enhance cross-border elderly care services and align regional standards. With its innovative approach, Zhuhai has established close cooperative ties to integrate the elderly care services sector in Guangdong and Macau, laying the groundwork for creating standards for home- and community-based elderly care services.
- Zhuhai has introduced elderly care services with the care and specificity expected of Hong Kong and Macau service providers. By setting service standards for elderly caregivers, Zhuhai aims to establish a system of standardized services in its elderly care space. To this end, it has introduced Macau's standard homecare and assistance services and thereupon made certain improvements. As a result, the elderly living alone in the cooperative zone is provided with home-based visitation services. The service standards for home- and community-based elderly care in the GBA aim to provide convenience and support to elderly residents from Hong Kong and Macau living in Zhuhai.
- Zhuhai envisions an elderly care system staffed with specialists, implementing a policy of “immediate service without the need for application” and a time-efficient mechanism, ensuring comfort and convenience in service provision. Aligned with the regulations’ scope and conditions, Zhuhai is ready to embrace modern information technology for elderly care, enhancing accuracy in location tracking and matching the elderly with suitable caregivers. This shift signifies a service provision philosophy change: moving from individuals in need searching for suitable policies to policies tailored to meet the demands of those in need. Additionally, the plan includes a system for accumulating volunteer service hours for the elderly. The young generation, including the “young elderly” in good health, are encouraged to assist the very elderly individuals with mobility challenges, offering necessary support.

Table 3 Recently issued documents and policies concerning cross-border elderly care in Zhuhai

No.	Document/policy	Issuing authority	Date of issue
1	<i>Trial Implementation Plan for Providing Long-term Care for Old Aged and Severely Incapacitated Elderly in Zhuhai Municipality</i>	Zhuhai Civil Affairs Bureau, Zhuhai Municipal Finance Bureau, Zhuhai Municipal Health Bureau	22 October 2024
2	<i>Notice on Further Improving the Relevant Regulations on Basic Elderly Care Insurance for Rural Residents (Zhufu (2024) No. 18</i>	The People's Government of the Zhuhai Municipality	7 March 2024
3	<i>Regulations on the Facilitation of Home-based Elderly Care Services of the Zhuhai Special Economic Zone</i>	Standing Committee of the Zhuhai Municipal People's Congress	2 December 2022
4	<i>Notice on the Printing and Distribution of Implementation Plan for Speeding Up the Development of Elderly Care Services Industry of the People's Government of the Zhuhai Municipality</i>	The People's Government of the Zhuhai Municipality	8 November 2016

Zhongshan

Zhongshan dedicates itself to providing better elderly care services and meeting the increasing demand for the same.

- In its continuous strive to improve its elderly care system, Zhongshan has upgraded 23 home-based elderly care services centers in its townships to integrated elderly care services centers in 2022. Furthermore, all kinds of elderly care services have been extended to the village level (community) elderly care services stations in 2023. In a similar vein, the government has established canteens for the elderly, as well as providing subsidies. In encouraging the establishment of senior canteens, the government regulates the operation and management of elderly care services providers and facilitates a sound development of the industry.
- Zhongshan has also enhanced the innovative and talent nurturing aspects of the service models. By harnessing the “five social forces” of the community, namely social workers, community organizations, community volunteers, and the resources of community charities, Zhongshan continues to explore different models of elderly care services with their mutually reinforcing support. The service model of “internet + elderly care” continues to resonate deeply in Zhongshan’s initiative, as the internet platform lends itself to the provision of smart elderly care services for the elderly. Finally, professional training of elderly caregivers will raise the competence of those serving the elderly.
- Zhongshan facilitates the development of social security. The government has ensured that the rural residents have certain economic security in terms of receiving elderly care by coming up with relevant government documents. Finally, the Social Insurance Management Bureau of the Zhongshan Municipality and the Government of the Macao SAR’s Social Security Fund have set up one Guangdong-Macao Social Insurance Window in each of the three levels of the municipality, township and community.

Table 4 Recently issued documents and policies concerning cross-border elderly care in Zhongshan

No.	Document/policy	Issuing authority	Date of issue
1	<i>Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the Guangdong-Macao Social Insurance Window (Zhongshan Window)</i>	Signed jointly by the Social Insurance Management Bureau of the Zhongshan Municipality and the Government of the Macao SAR	September 2024
2	<i>The Implementation Plan of the Establishment of the Senior Canteen on the Streets of the Western District in the Zhongshan Municipality (2023 Amendment)</i>	The People’s Government of Zhongshan Municipality’s Western District Streets Office	5 July 2023
3	<i>Management Measures for the Credit Assessment of Elderly Care Services Organizations in the Zhongshan Municipality</i>	Zhongshan Civil Affairs Bureau	12 October 2023
4	<i>Measures on Subsidizing Elderly Care Services Organizations in the Zhongshan Municipality</i>	Zhongshan Civil Affairs Bureau	22 May 2023
5	<i>Management Provisions for Home-based and Community-based Elderly Care in the Zhongshan Municipality</i>	Zhongshan Civil Affairs Bureau	22 December 2021

Jiangmen and Zhaoqing

Jiangmen and Zhaoqing have pressed ahead with the establishment of elderly care infrastructures in facilitating the joint development of elderly care organizations and home-based elderly care.

- Jiangmen has taken policy actions in planning for the construction of elderly care facilities. Policies have been put in place to implement the practice of allowing newly leased residential land to include express provisions in their planning conditions and leasing proposals for elderly care facilities construction, such as the requirements for additional structures, the standards for transfers and the recipient department for transfers. Zhaoqing has made new facility standards for the construction of elderly care services facilities as additional structures in both newly constructed urban districts and residential areas, as well as old urban districts and existing residences.
- Both Jiangmen and Zhaoqing have promoted the development of home-based elderly care services. Jiangmen has clarified the relevant content for home-based and community-based elderly care services with express

encouragement of involvement by health care organizations in the provision of elderly care services. As to Zhaoqing, the relevant policies show the government's resolve in launching support for the establishment of service guidance centers and the relevant management systems by district, municipal and county level departments.

- Significant efforts have been made to establish public elderly care organizations. Jiangmen has implemented the remodeling and upgrade of organizations caring for persons with extreme difficulties (nursing homes). Also prominent in its policy agenda is the establishment of regional elderly care services centers and demonstrative elderly care organization projects, with emphasis on installing nursing care beds in order to raise the standard of health care and caring services. Zhaoqing has made explicit that the People's Governments on the district, municipal and county levels shall establish public elderly care organizations, which provide long-term elderly care services to eligible elderly.

Table 5 Recently issued documents and policies concerning cross-border elderly care in Jiangmen and Zhaoqing

No.	Document/policy	Issuing authority	Date of issue
1	<i>Measures in Managing Home-based and Community-based Elderly Care in the Jiangmen Municipality</i>	The General Office of the People's Government of the Jiangmen Municipality	30 September 2022
2	<i>Certain Measures for Promoting the Development of Health and Elderly Care Services in the Jiangmen Municipality</i>	The General Office of the People's Government of the Jiangmen Municipality	8 April 2020
3	<i>Regulations of Elderly Care Services of the Zhaoqing Municipality</i>	The Standing Committee of the Zhaoqing Municipal People's Congress	12 August 2024

Foshan, Dongguan and Huizhou

Foshan, Dongguan and Huizhou have extended their effort in raising the quality of elderly care services, satisfying the diverse needs of the elderly, and promoting the process of integration, professionalization and standardization of the GBA.

- In promoting the development of the elderly care services industry, Foshan has been proactive in upgrading the elderly care services organizations by pioneering the “Star-quality Elderly Care” initiative. The organizations that receive a “Stellar Elderly Care Organizations of Guangdong Province” rating receive awards. Dongguan has sought to enhance cooperation with Hong Kong on the provision of health care services, which supports the development of the elderly care services industry. At the same time, high-end integrated health and elderly care communities serve as the archetype in the future development of the elderly care industry, one that serves both the needs of health care and elderly care.
- Foshan and Huizhou have been facilitating the standardization of elderly care services. In Foshan’s Shunde district, a system of standardization with “Shunde characteristics” has typified the idea that health care and elderly care are part and parcel to each other. By way of the combined health care and elderly

care model, Dongguan has established a standardized process in the parallel provision of health care and elderly care. Dongguan’s effort is the very practice of standard-setting for elderly care services. During the Greater Bay Area Healthcare and Elderly Care Industry Facilitation Conference, Huizhou has shown a clear understanding of the norms and expectations of cross-border elderly care services.

- Foshan, Dongguan and Huizhou have stepped up the exchange and exploration of elderly care services systems. Foshan has held the Conference on the Coordination of Healthcare for Hong Kong and Macao Residents, whereby participants explored in-depth the issues of Hong Kong and Macau elderly residents’ health care burden and the model of elderly care services. Dongguan has also participated in the Elderly Health Care Voucher Greater Bay Area Pilot Scheme, as its effort to enhance common understanding with Hong Kong on sharing health care resources. Finally, the Huicheng District Civil Affairs Bureau of Huizhou has initiated in-depth dialogs with the Association of GBA Elderly Care Industry in search of the prospects for an all-rounded elderly care services system.

Table 6 Recently issued documents and policies concerning cross-border elderly care in Foshan, Dongguan and Huizhou

No.	Document/policy	Issuing authority	Date of issue
1	<i>Basic Elderly Care Services List of Huizhou Municipality</i>	The General Office of the People’s Government of the Huizhou Municipality	17 April 2024
2	<i>Management Norms for Elderly Care Organizations</i>	Foshan Civil Affairs Bureau	27 July 2021
3	<i>Management Provisions for Home-based and Community-based Elderly Care in the Dongguan Municipality (Amendments)</i>	The General Office of the People’s Government of the Dongguan Municipality	17 March 2021



3

The current status of the elderly care industry and synergistic development in the Greater Bay Area

The current status of the elderly care industry and synergistic development in the Greater Bay Area

As driven by policy-level initiatives, the GBA cities have cooperated in exploring the parameters for an appropriate model for development.

Establishing a platform of cross-border resource sharing with an integrative approach to health care systems

Conduit for international medicine and medical equipment to reach the Chinese mainland via The Hong Kong and Macao Medicine and Equipment Connect policy

In 2020, the State Council approved the *Work Plan for Innovative Development in the Supervision of Drug and Medical Equipment in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area*. This plan aims to align the medicine supervision systems of the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Macau. Guangdong Province has named this innovative supervisory measure the Hong Kong and Macao Medicine and Equipment Connect policy. This policy allows the designated health care providers in the Chinese mainland to use Hong Kong and Macau medicine and medical equipment in cases of urgent need, thereby enhancing the quality of health care services. Since 2021, Guangdong Province has implemented this policy, releasing three lists of designated health care service providers in August 2021, February 2023 and September 2024. According to the official website of the Central People's Government, the number of designated hospitals has reached 45, covering all the nine Mainland cities in the GBA. By the end of August 2024, these designated hospitals have introduced 80 types of medicine and medical equipment from Hong Kong and Macau, benefitting more than 8,000 patients.³ The establishment of a cross-border health care cooperation mechanism has facilitation collaboration and resource

sharing between Guangdong and Hong Kong, yielding results in the health care talent training, exchange initiatives, and successful medical research. Significant progress has also been made in the mutual recognition of medicine and medical equipment between Hong Kong SAR and Guangdong Province, making it more convenient to meet the medical needs of the cross-border elderly.

High-quality, high-standard and diverse cross-border elderly care services

As the transportation infrastructure of the GBA continues to improve, the regional transportation network, consisting of the High Speed Rail, highways and metro etc., has become highly effective. It is now much more convenient for the elderly residents of Hong Kong SAR and Macao SAR to travel between their homes and the cities in Guangdong Province. Hong Kong has collaborated with Shenzhen to establish numerous cross-border elderly care communities that offer high-quality, affordable services to the elderly of Hong Kong. These communities are typically equipped with comprehensive health care, rehabilitation and entertainment facilities, along with professional caring services meeting the diverse needs of the elderly. Starting in November 2024, the number of residential care organizations for the elderly participating in the Guangdong Residential Care Services Program will increase from four to eleven.⁴ This expansion provides more options for those waitlisted for subsidized residential care programs and open to receiving in the Chinese mainland. This program pays part of the related health care costs for the enrolled elderly individuals, offering dedicated attention to help them adjust well in Guangdong.

3 "Hong Kong and Macao Medicine and Equipment Link Achieves Full Coverage of 9 Mainland Cities in the Greater Bay Area", Source: Xinhuanet

4 <Guangdong Home Care Service Plan> Source: Department of Civil Affairs of Guangdong Province, Social Welfare Department of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government

The current status of the elderly care industry and synergistic development in the Greater Bay Area

A healthy GBA: forging partnerships in health care and public health

In 2020, the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine issued *The Establishment Plan for the Chinese Medicine Highlands in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (2020-2025)*. The 11 cities of the GBA have since begun establishing pilot districts for international traditional Chinese medicine. Hong Kong SAR has proposed the establishment of the first Chinese medicine hospital, at the same time putting in place the practice of Chinese medicine by Hong Kong and Macau traditional Chinese doctors in the public health care service providers in the Chinese mainland. 204 Hong Kong and Macau Chinese doctors have practiced or started their own practice in Guangdong Province. The 11 GBA cities have established a notable presence of growing bases for Chinese medicinal herbs, demonstrating scaled, regularized and intensified cultivation of Lingnan-specific herbs. These efforts are supported by Guangdong Province's commercialization platforms, where Chinese medicinal herbs are traded internationally. Efforts are also underway to unify the standards in traditional Chinese medicine within the 11 GBA cities, promoting internationally recognized standards. The Guangdong Medical Products Administration has driven innovative developments in the regulation of medical products and medical equipment, resulting in the approval of 10 Hong Kong and Macau Chinese topical medication products for registration and market entry in the Chinese mainland. Two Hong Kong SAR Chinese medications underwent cross-border production and are now available for sale in the Chinese mainland. As the system and institutions of the Chinese medicine highlands mature, more health care service providers and health care talent will be drawn to these opportunities. The Chinese medicine highlands of the GBA are posed to lead the development of Chinese medicine specialties,

education reform and technological innovations in the traditional Chinese medicine sector.

The Guangdong Province, the Hong Kong SAR and the Macao SAR have reached the *Framework Agreement on Health Cooperation in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area*, as well as signing the *Consensus of Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Health Cooperation*. These agreements aim to facilitate the sound development of the relevant industries in the GBA, envisioning a robust and integrated health care community. On this basis, Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau have cooperated closely in opening health care facilities. The Nansha district of Guangzhou has established the first family medicine outpatient clinic, with "Hong Kong doctors providing medical services" as its mandate. Some public hospitals in Guangzhou have set up health care centers to serve the residents of Hong Kong and Macau, offering one-stop medical services, including family outpatient clinics, intra-hospital referrals, remote consultation with the Hong Kong specialists, insurance consultation and direct payments. As the vision of a healthy GBA takes shape rapidly, enhanced and concerted efforts are needed to nurture and exchange of health care talent between Guangdong and Hong Kong. According to the Guangdong Health Commission, the Greater Bay Area Healthcare Talents Visiting Programs have been launched successfully, with 83 health care professionals from Guangdong Province visiting Hong Kong SAR for exchange and study. By the end of 2023, over 500 Hong Kong and Macau medical doctors had obtained qualifications to practice in the Chinese mainland. Guangdong Province was the first to introduce reforms in the ranking assessments of Hong Kong and Macau medical doctors, resulting in nearly 50 Hong Kong SAR medical doctors receiving the Senior Doctor Certificate in the Chinese mainland.

The current status of the elderly care industry and synergistic development in the Greater Bay Area

Expediting the development of elderly care finance with a pragmatic approach to actual demand

At the Central Financial Work Conference held in October 2023, it was emphasized that “the five areas of technology finance, green finance, inclusive finance, elderly care finance and digital finance must be done well,” highlighting the importance of elderly care finance in China’s response to an aging population. In early 2024, the State Council’s General Office issued *Opinions on Developing the Silver Economy and Improving the Well-being of the Elderly*, proposing support for financial organizations to develop elderly care finance businesses in accordance with laws and regulations. This measure envisions the eventual provision of an array of services in elderly care financial planning and capital management, diversifying elderly care financial products and strengthening research in this area. Subsequently, the National Financial Regulatory Administration emphasized further in *The Guidance Opinion in Regard to Handling “The Five Main Areas” Properly by the Banking Industry and Insurance Industry* that the pace of development for elderly care finance must be accelerated, with notable improvements in the elderly care finance system and vigorous development in elderly care insurance as the third pillar of the pension system. Firm support must be given to the exploration and innovation of relevant financial products and services, reinforcing the overall development of the elderly care finance industry.

This series of national-level policies and measures indicates a strong commitment to developing elderly care finance, signaling the beginning of a new chapter. For the GBA to achieve high-quality development expeditiously, the functions of elderly care finance must be fully utilized. The GBA should seize the historical opportunities and capitalize

on its inherent advantages in developing the silver economy through continuous policymaking, marketization and technological innovations. Support for the relevant financial developments empowers the elderly care industry, bringing the GBA closer to becoming the national financial center for elderly care.

There have been significant accomplishments in the establishment of the pension system in the GBA. By the end of 2023, Guangdong Province’s population coverage of the basic pension, as the first pillar, and the enterprise annuity and occupation annuity, as the second pillar, have shown a steady rising trend.⁵ Individual pension, as the third pillar, have also shown effective preliminary results. As part of the first pilot cities for pension system development, Guangzhou and Shenzhen have led the nation in the number of individual pension account openings. Without question, the development of finance in elderly care services is surging. Policies such as *The Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area* and *The Opinions on Financial Support for the Construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area* have provided the impetus for the development of elderly care finance in the GBA. The insurance industry has played a critical role in the elderly care finance market of the GBA. In recent years, many insurance organizations have engaged in the business setup for the GBA’s elderly health care and care market. From product innovations to the speedy supply of elderly health care and care services, these insurance organizations have rolled out diversified models in elderly care. Elderly care financial management, exclusive commercial elderly care insurance, elderly care-specific savings and commercial pension are among the trial products that were launched, boosting the selection of products and service models in the elderly care financial market of the GBA.

⁵ <Statistical Bulletin on the Development of Human Resources and Social Security in Guangdong Province in 2023>, Source: Department of Human Resources and Social Security of Guangdong Province

The current status of the elderly care industry and synergistic development in the Greater Bay Area

Technological innovations have also empowered the elderly care finance industry in the GBA, offering novel means of security to the development of elderly care finance. For example, the “Smart Elderly Care Services Platform” of the Luohu District in Shenzhen disburses and manages the home-based elderly care vouchers by using the digital Renminbi hard wallet. The elderly can spend money at the coops by tapping their digital cards, significantly enhancing the convenience elderly care services. Technology has been fueling the innovative development of the elderly care finance industry, revitalizing and upgrading the elderly care finance system of the GBA.

Innovate the co-administration of elderly care services

Cross-border elderly care requires the high level of security for health care data transfer and sharing across the region, enabling health care providers and doctors to retrieve the patient’s information quickly. The existing differences of the health care systems in Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau present certain challenges for cross-border elderly care and health care. Therefore, inter-system alignment in cross-border health care is essential to ensure that Hong Kong and Macau residents receive timely and effective health care services. Technological innovations will play a significant role in addressing these challenges by providing convenient, secure and individualized elderly care services in the following ways:

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies: These technologies facilitate remote health care services. Currently, many collaborative projects have demonstrated new possibilities in this respect. For example, the Guangzhou First People’s Hospital have collaborated with the Faculty of Medicine of the Chinese University of Hong Kong to develop the Hong Kong Medicine

Connection project. This project allows residents to seek remote consultation from hospitals over the Internet and obtain the prescription for commonly used medications in Hong Kong and Macau, which are then delivered to their homes in the GBA. Remote health care will also benefit from the advancements in wearable computers and the Internet of Things (IoT). Wearable computers enable the elderly to monitor their health conditions remotely and detect instances of abnormalities in a timely manner.

Big Data Platforms: The construction of big data platforms is crucial for establishing trustworthy and smooth digital data flow. Zhuhai’s Hengqin Hospital and the health care service providers in Macau have set up pilot schemes for the mutual recognition of cross-border health records, e-health histories and testing results. Within the GBA, the cities of Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Huizhou, Zhongshan and Jiangmen have taken the lead in establishing municipality-wide health information platforms, thereby achieving interconnectivity and mutual access, data sharing and joint service provision amongst the major health care providers in these municipalities. Furthermore, big data is the basis upon which the overall health status of Guangdong Province’s population can be monitored. In this sense, big data is laying the groundwork for the integration and sharing of health care information in the GBA. As big data becomes available, health data from the GBA can be collated, allowing for analyses and data mining, which, in turn, informs health care-related policymaking with accuracy and scientific support.





4

Confronting the challenges of cross-border elderly care

4 Confronting the challenges of cross-border elderly care

The foregoing practices and joint developments have shown certain positive results in the cross-border elderly care services industry in the GBA. However, the rising trend of an aging population presents further difficulties and challenges ahead.

The underdevelopment of relevant policies and legal framework

There are significant differences in the current legal systems and policy provisions across the GBA cities. The Chinese mainland has stringent regulations governing data security and privacy, while Hong Kong and Macau have more flexible governance frameworks. The GBA has yet to establish regulations or policies that can resolve the security issues in cross-border data flow effectively. When the elderly receive cross-border health care services, data flow barriers often result in various issues, such as repetitive inspection and testing and gaps in clinical information. In terms of innovations in elderly care finance, existing differences in the relevant policies and regulations hinder the creation and marketization of unified elderly care finance products. In their cross-border elderly care financial planning, the elderly confront the thorny reality of investment restrictions, volatility in investment returns and high transaction costs – let alone the lack of a proper rights protection mechanism. Compliance requirements also prevent the proper matching of resources in elderly care services, impacting the quality of and trust in cross-border elderly care services. There is an urgent need for the governments of the GBA cities to enhance policy coordination and integrate laws, and establish a sound system of legal protection to successfully develop the cross-border elderly care industry.

The individual pension system awaits further improvements

Despite the GBA has been leading the nation in developing elderly care finance, the GBA faces issues of underdevelopment and unevenness. The third pillar of the pension system is still in its nascent stage, with no comprehensive promotion of the individual pension system. Few people recognize the need for elderly care planning and existing financial products tend to be complex with low rates of return, as such dampening market interests. The elderly care financial management products in the market are still in its initial stage, dominated by traditional financial management by the banks and the annuities offered by insurers. There is a severe shortage in the supply of innovative and integrated elderly care financial products to meet the diverse needs of elderly care investments. Additionally, existing differences in the systemic features, the degree of regional financial market openness, as well as the yet-to-complete process for connectivity, limits the allocation of elderly care financial product for cross-border residents, resulting in higher costs. Meanwhile, social welfare resources are yet to be fully aligned, especially with pronounced differences in health care services, health insurance policies and payment settlement systems amongst Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau, as well the conditions for holding the policies and the benefits therefrom. As a satisfactory resolution of these differences do not appear to be forthcoming, the time and economic costs of those elderly needing cross-border care remain high.

Confronting the challenges of cross-border elderly care

Gaps between the supply and demand of elderly care services

As society progresses, the demand for elderly care services by the aging population increases. The demand for elderly care services is no longer confined to the traditional service model. New expectations have arisen concerning multi-dimensional elderly care services, including the handling of daily life needs, health care facilitation, cultural and entertainment activities and spiritual needs. Currently, the elderly care services market faces a significant gap between a rapidly rising demand and a short supply, failing to meet the expectations for diversified and high-quality services. Therefore, the governments of the GBA cities must enhance overall planning, coordination and resources sharing for elderly care services. Continuous upgrades and development of elderly care systems are needed to cater better to the evolving needs.

Uneven allocation of elderly care resources

Each of the GBA cities has its own developmental focus and pace in developing foundational facilities and the elderly care services industry. This has led to uneven allocation of elderly care resources. Hong Kong and Macau have internationally recognized health care resources, techniques and expertise but face consistent shortages in the availability of residential care for the elderly. Limited land resources in Hong Kong and Macau severely restrict the expansion of elderly care facilities. While the Chinese mainland has vast space and low labor cost for developing elderly care facilities, it lags in supplying the necessary health care resources that meet international standards and has limited pool of professional talent for high-end elderly care services. This uneven allocation of resources causes ineffective synchronization in the provision of cross-border elderly care services, leading to insufficient alignment of health care services or unsatisfactory care for Hong Kong and Macau elderly. Mainland elderly receiving elderly care services in Hong Kong and Macau must accept higher costs and resource competition pressure.





5

Suggestions for future development

5 Suggestions for future development

Cross-border elderly care is a topic that presents myriad challenges and opportunities. As they are driven by policy objectives and market forces, the GBA cities have sped up their cooperation by complementing each other's strengths and pushing for integration. It goes without saying that there is high demand for high-quality elderly care services, and the traditional notions no longer meet the expectations of the elderly today. The elderly do, and rightly so, expect care that incorporates both leisure and participatory aspects with spiritual and emotional needs at the core of the yearning for aging well. In *The 14th Five-year Plan for the Development of National Old Age Industry and the Elderly Care Services System* and *Opinions on Developing the Silver Economy and Improving the Well-being of the Elderly*, the State Council has placed emphases on expediting the improvement of social security, elderly care services and sound supporting systems. Proactive efforts are needed in introducing a positive attitude towards old age and healthy aging, ensuring the elderly experience an uplifting spirit of prosperity, happiness and security. John Lee, the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong SAR, has also proposed the development of the "Silver Economy" in his Policy Address of 2024. He further directed the Deputy Chief Secretary for Administration to spearhead the Working Group on Promoting Silver Economy. The Silver Economy covers a broad segment in the economy, involves diverse industries and long industry chains, and holds enormous potential for economic efficiency and social value. Not only does it leverage the power of the private markets in reducing the burden on public finances caused by an aging population, it also foster diverse developments in the relevant industries. As one of the most active and prosperous clusters of cities in the Chinese economy, the GBA will bring forth new commercial opportunities with the cooperation by the governments of the various cities.

Cooperation by multiple parties with policy guidance: establish a multilevel cross-border elderly care safety net

Enhancing the basic support for elderly care and health care

Governments of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau should strengthen policy coordination and establish cross-border elderly care safety net systems through policy guidance and multiparty cooperation. By capitalizing on the integration process and its incidental policy advantages, the governments should press ahead with the mutual recognition of pension and health insurance. For example, raising the coverage and protection level of basic elderly care insurance can provide cross-border elderly recipients with basic economic security and health care support. Policy initiatives in boosting the interconnectivity of health care resources, such as medical equipment and health care professionals and the establishment of Chinese medicine highlands, should be leveraged

to promote innovations and share medical research findings, thereby satisfying the health care needs of cross-border elderly care recipients.

Financial support and market regulation

Tax relief covering elderly care financial products can attract investment capital from Hong Kong and Macau and the investment funds of the insurance industry from the Chinese mainland. This will incentivize financial institutions to pioneer the financial products that correspond to the financing needs of cross-border elderly care. The legal framework for elderly care finance awaits further improvements to enable orderly cross-border market activities. Government supervision should adopt an innovative mindset to ensure the stability and security of the elderly care financial markets as well as interconnectivity and security in sharing health care data. Regional supervisory authorities should engage in more frequent exchanges to formulate joint oversight regulations, laying the groundwork for sound development of the cross-border financial industry.

Suggestions for future development

Innovations in integrating resources: create an integrated cross-border elderly care system

Establishing elderly care facilities and service platforms

The governments should promote for the construction of a variety of elderly care facilities within the GBA. In encouraging the different social stakeholders to participate in the construction and operation of elderly care facilities, the governments could provide financial subsidies and tax relief to incentivize enterprises and social organizations in making investments for cross-border elderly care facilities. At the same time, the scale of investment in cross-border elderly care and health care facilities can be augmented, especially with provisions for specialized projects, thereby zooming in on the establishment of the necessary health care, well-being and rehabilitative facilities. To address the significant differences in the elderly care systems and demand amongst Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau, regional elderly care services platforms can be established, integrating geographical features, environmental advantages, and differences in health care provisions. In this way, the relative strengths of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau will be fully utilized and aligned to yield mutual benefits, resulting in the provision of outstanding elderly care services.

The provision of diversified and individualized services

As the Silver Economy develops, a major developmental trend will emerge. The provision of elderly care services that cater to the different individual circumstances of the elderly will be required. To establish an elderly care services system, organizations and units must provide multilevel services according to different elderly needs. Elderly care services of the future must be diversified and individualized. In the same vein, financial institutions should pioneer diversified, stable elderly care financial products with special reference to the successful experience of the Cross-border Wealth Management Connect. The financial aspect of cross-border elderly care bears

potential for the expanding cross-border asset allocation channels, providing a more diversified selection of wealth management mechanisms for the elderly. In addition, the GBA must integrate elderly care finance and health care industries, promoting cooperation amongst the financial institutions, health care and rehabilitation organizations in order to develop an integrated service product, covering the needs for health care, rehabilitation and elderly care.

The empowerment of technology and legal protection: create a smart elderly care ecology

Interconnectivity between smart elderly care and data

New technologies enabling smart elderly care and remote health care must be made widely available for practical application with smart features. For instance, smart health monitor devices can report the health conditions of the elderly in real time. Remote health care technologies make it convenient for the elderly to receive diagnoses and treatment plans by professional doctors. A uniform data standard will facilitate the mutual recognition of data. These measures are the very manifestation of cross-border health care data flow and sharing, the direct consequences of which is the availability of smart diagnoses and services. The most critical aspect of this process is the laws and regulations that govern data security, and it requires close partnerships and diligent coordination. As a comprehensive cross-border data compliance system comes into place, cross-border data flows will be adequately protected.

Technological innovations lend support to elderly care finance

In terms of elderly care finance, technological innovations are the impetus for the development of elderly care finance. Cutting edge technological advances, such as blockchain and digital currency, should see full application in the development process of elderly care finance. It is in this way that elderly care finance integration can be encouraged further in the GBA, thereby providing more

Suggestions for future development

convenient, effective and safer elderly care financial services. By the promotion of the development of big data platforms, elderly care data can be analyzed to effectuate precise alignment of appropriate elderly care services and resources. In this process, the continuous coordination of data security laws is critical in ensuring cross boundary data flows that are legally compliant.

An ecology of diversity: elderly care services models that meet market expectations

Integrating health care, elderly care and culture tourism

A key task in industry development is the creation of a diverse array of cross-border elderly care services with fulfilment-oriented programs. The governments and the relevant organizations must focus on the cultural and psychological needs of the elderly. By promoting a dynamic selection of programs in health care, elderly care, tourism and culture, the industry should establish a comprehensive and effective Silver Economy industry chain. Innovative models incorporating a fusion of health care, elderly care and culture

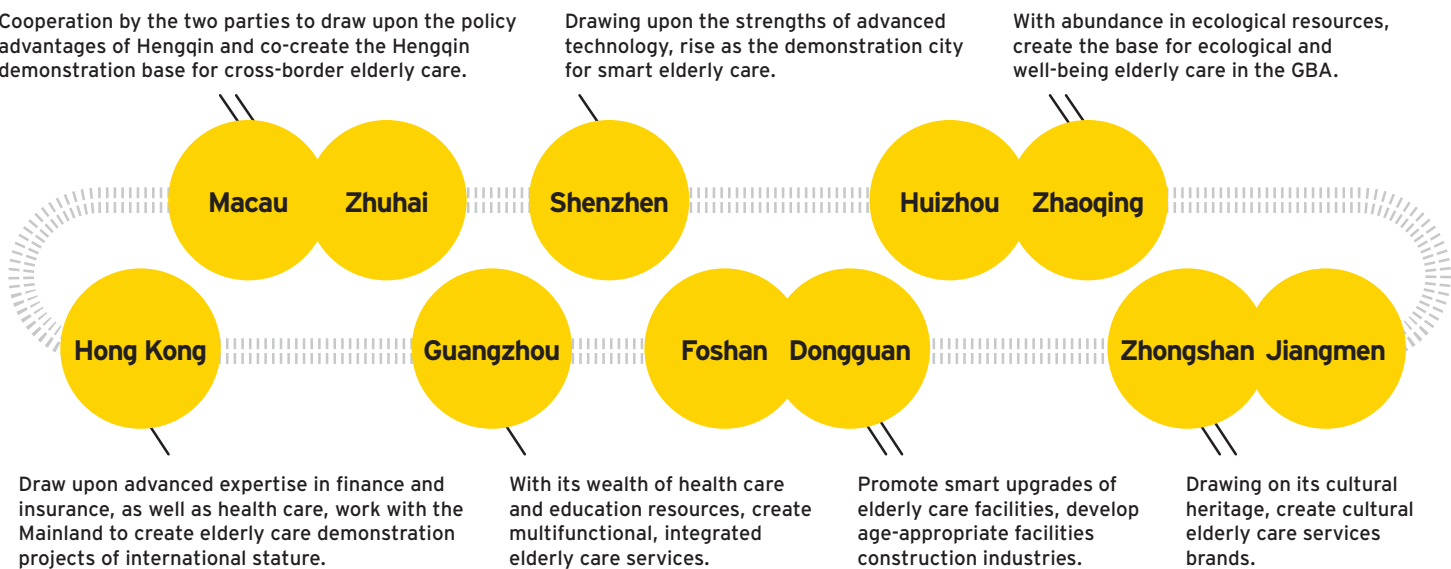
travel require thoughtful input, and only then will the elderly care of the future be able to cater fully to the diverse needs in aging well.

Education and cultural services for the elderly

Elderly care-related enterprises must begin with in-depth market research to understand the needs and preferences of the elderly. They should promote pragmatic products and services that enhance the quality of life for the elderly, with features that provide convenience as well as spiritual fulfilment. Forging close partnerships amongst different enterprises will enable the creation of joint cultural and tourism programs for the elderly that they serve. Another innovative initiative is the organic integration of elderly care communities in tourist attraction sites, a development that underscores the principle of high efficiency in shared resources and mutually beneficial to all parties concerned. Additionally, there is a growing need for education and training for the elderly, and such demand encourages the development of training institutes, such as university for seniors and interest courses. These are the key avenues through which the elderly continue to engage in the society, maintaining mental health and also drive growth in the education economy.

Synergistic development in the Greater Bay Area: the establishment of specialty elderly care services with a vision

Table 1: Suggestions of positioning for the 11 GBA cities



Suggestions for future development

Complementary strengths amongst regions

In fulfilling the vision of the GBA, the joint development of cross-border elderly care has become an unmistakable trend. Hong Kong, with a well-developed finance and insurance industry with cutting-edge service experience, should enhance the cooperation with the Chinese mainland in the areas of elderly health care protection and commercial insurance. Its role is especially apt in exploring the possibilities of cross-border health care insurance and financial services systems and actively promoting exchanges between elderly care service organizations and professional care talent. Macau and Zhuhai should cooperate closely in capitalizing on the policy advantages of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. As cooperation is enhanced in respect of Zhuhai's construction of elderly care services facilities and infrastructures and the management of operations, specialty elderly care services should also be developed in the parallel.

Specialty services and industry development

With a wealth of resources in health care and education, Guangzhou is well-positioned to create integrated elderly care communities that offer all-in-one health care, cultural and educational, and leisure and entertainment functions. This will be sure to satisfy the Hong Kong and Macau elderly's yearning for aging well. Shenzhen, with its strengths as a science and technology hub, is the bedrock for the development of smart elderly care. It will serve as the demonstration point for the provision of smart and convenient elderly care services for the Hong Kong and Macau elderly. Its proximity to Hong Kong enables joint effort in promoting innovative service models in elderly care, sharing health care resources. Foshan and Dongguan can draw upon their existing strengths as the manufacturing hubs of Guangdong and promote smart, age-appropriate upgrades in elderly care services facilities.

An integration of ecology and culture

Zhongshan has a well-developed elderly care services industry with established facilities while Jiangmen is a city with a proud heritage and beautiful natural environment. Together these two cities can extend their existing strengths in their cultural resources to create specialty cultural brands in elderly care, meeting the cultural dimensions of aging well. Huizhou and Zhaoqing are also blessed with a beautiful nature. Their market positioning can involve the adequate use of ecological resources in creating ecology-themed elderly care communities in the GBA, and offering specialty services such as leisure holidays, hot springs therapy and green prescription.

Joining hands in promoting an all-rounded vision of aging well

The 11 GBA cities should draw upon their respective strengths and complement each other in the joint development of the elderly care industry with an all-rounded vision. They are well-positioned in the strive to create elderly care communities with specialty features and international stature.



6

Conclusion

As the global trend of an aging population continues to present challenges, the exploration and practice of cross-border elderly care in the GBA bear increasing significance. The GBA cities have been rolling out the relevant policies. The Mandatory Provident Fund of Hong Kong, community care and support services have provided the elderly with protection in many significant respects. The double-tier social security system, economic assistance and old age allowances of Macau have shown a concerned approach in caring for the elderly. Within the GBA, the nine cities of Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Zhongshan, Foshan, Dongguan and Huizhou have also implemented policies and measures to promote the development of cross-border elderly care services. In exploring this development, health care protection, elderly care finance and innovative elderly care have become the critical areas of concern. In terms of health care, the GBA has seen rising demand for elderly care services due to an aging population. There have been both cooperation and challenges in the establishment of elderly care facilities, medicine and medical equipment access and Chinese medicine highlands development, but emerging trends suggest a positive outlook in the future. In terms of elderly care finance, the GBA is leading the nation, but that is not to ignore the prominent issues of underdevelopment and unevenness in

the system. It has been suggested that key efforts must be made in furtherance of multilevel elderly care safety net systems, innovation of products, tax policies, supervision mechanisms and technological innovations. For innovative elderly care, technological innovations will address the challenges of cross-border elderly care. For example, virtual reality and augmented reality technologies will enable remote health care and the construction of big data platforms. However, progress must also be made toward the standardization and unification of data, a wider circulation and sharing of cross-border health care data, the establishment of regional elderly care services platform and the continuous improvements of laws and regulations.

Significant prospects are present for cross-border elderly care in the GBA. The development of the Silver Economy will bring economic opportunities and, similarly, challenges. As the GBA governments harness their efforts, support will be given to policy-level coordination, facilities constructions, the raising of service quality, technological application and cultural adaptation. Cross-border elderly care in the GBA will be the answer to the elderly's wish for aging well. It shall also serve as the exemplary for the nation, blazing the trail for innovative elderly care in an exciting new age.

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