

Section 3. Providing Support for People in Need of Social Support and Establishment of Bases to Provide Welfare Services

1. Support for People with Low Incomes and Sufferers of Disasters

(1) Public Assistance System

1) State of public assistance system

The public assistance system is the last safety net in social security that aims at providing protection for anybody with hardship in their lives in accordance to the degree of need and maintaining the minimum standard of a healthy and cultural life as well as promoting their self-sufficiency.

In order to make the system function appropriately and most effectively it is important to operate the system focusing on 3 points: ① establishment of “public assistance standards on sufficient grounds”, ② fair and impartial operation, and ③ attentive self-sufficiency support.

2) Establishment of “public assistance standard on sufficient grounds”

The public assistance system aims at realizing minimum standards of a healthy and cultural life.

Current assistance standards are determined by the level equilibrium method (a method which takes into consideration the estimated consumption trends of the general public in a target year and adjusts it using the actual consumption of the general public the previous year). More concretely, it is comprehensively determined according to the economic and cultural development level of the time as well as using the sense of inequality and social acceptance of the people. In order to establish a “public assistance standard on sufficient grounds”, a rule was made to verify whether it is equivalent to actual consumption or not once every 5 years. In FY 2007, an expert meeting was held and the regular verification conducted for the first time.

3) Fair and impartial operation

Operation of public assistance must secure fairness and impartiality so that □ those who are eligible for assistance will receive payment (prevention of being left out) and □ those who are not eligible do not receive payment (prevention of abuse).

As part of these measures, ways to handle consultations/applications for public assistance and standards for payment have been clarified and efforts to improve the system through regular re-examination of daily work (implementation of the so-called PDCA cycle) in prefectures since April 2008.

4) Attentive self-sufficiency support

Public assistance recipients not only face financial hardship but in many cases also various other difficulties in their lives that can include unemployment, injuries or disabilities, and family problems. Hence it is important to provide attentive support according to the individual situation in helping them to improve their lives and facilitate self-sufficiency so that their dignity can be maintained. With the public assistance system self-sufficiency support previously depended on the experience of case workers assigned at welfare offices. In order to carry this out systematically a “self-sufficiency support program” was introduced in FY 2005.

In the Self-sufficiency support program, the situations with and obstacles to the self-sufficiency of public assistance recipients in respective regions are classified and concrete support measures and a procedure for implementing them provided for respective classifications. By FY 2007, at least one self-sufficiency support program aiming at employment support or promotion for people leaving hospital had been implemented in every local government. Advanced local governments have put in place specialized self-sufficiency support staff and achieved successful results through the many programs being provided.

Further improvement of individual support programs (for example, debt reduction for people with multiple debts) will be made in the future to cope with the broad range of problems that public assistance recipients have. In addition, efforts to improve the skill of self-sufficiency support staff need to be made.

(2) Livelihood Welfare Fund Loan System

The livelihood welfare fund loan system has been implemented by the Council of Social Welfare in each prefecture since 1955 with the aim of securing stable lives through providing low- or free-interest loans to low-income households. In FY 2008, the “Self-Sufficiency Support Fund” was created to provide loans to facilitate the self-sufficiency of households who are subjects of self-sufficient life support programs (programs to provide self-sufficiency support for people who have hardships living due to various reasons yet not at the level of need of public assistance).

(3) Support for Homeless

As for homeless issues, pursuant to the “Law on Special Measures for Self-Sufficiency Support for the Homeless” that was enforced in August 2002, a national survey on actual the situation of the homeless was made in form January to February, 2003. In accordance with the survey results, the “Basic Policy to Support Self-Sufficiency of the Homeless” was drafted in July 2002, and comprehensive employment, housing, health and medical care, and welfare measures based on the

basic policy are being promoted.

According to national surveys conducted in January 2007 and January 2008 the number of homeless was 18,564 in the January 2007 and 16,018 in January 2008, decreasing from 2003.

(4) Support for Sufferers of Disasters

In FY2007 many disasters including earthquakes like the Niigata Chuetsu-oki Earthquake, torrential rainfall, and tsunamis took place causing damage. And as a result the Disaster Relief Law was applied in 5 prefectures and 15 municipalities. Regarding the payment of disaster condolence grants in accordance with the “Law Concerning the Provision of Disaster Condolence Grant”, condolence grant was paid in 21 cases, disaster disabilities grant was paid in 1 case and loans from the disaster relief fund made in 61 cases. Further efforts are being made so that appropriate emergency rescues can be provided to those needing them.

2. Nurturing and Securing Human Resources in Welfare Services

(1) Promotion of Measure to Secure Human Resources in Welfare

In the field of welfare/long-term care services the turnover rate of workers is relatively high and job openings always exist, and there is a persistent shortage of human resources in some regions and workplaces. As a further increase in the need for welfare/long-term care services is expected, stably securing human resources for welfare/long-term care services is becoming an urgent issue.

Therefore, the “Basic Guidelines for Measures to Secure Workers in Social Welfare Services” was revised in accordance with the Social Welfare Law of August 2007 for the first time in 14 years. This guideline provides measures for securing human resources in welfare to be taken by service providers, related organizations, the government, and local governments from the following 5 viewpoints. At present efforts are being made in cooperation with related organizations in accordance with the content of the guideline.

1) Promotion of establishment of work environments

- ① Establishment of a wage system to suit careers and abilities and secure appropriate wage levels
- ② Establishment of service fees at an appropriate level after considering the distribution between wage levels and business earnings
- ③ Discussions on evaluations of highly specialized human resources in service fees
- ④ Promotion of reduction of working hours, compliance with labour laws, and improved work environments including health management measures
- ⑤ Establishment of new management models, research and dissemination of long-term care skills,

and others

2) Establishment of career advancement system

- ① Establishment of career paths for workers through revision of qualification requirements for director of facilities and lifestyle consultants and a training system
- ② Establishment of a training system according to the career paths of workers
- ③ Human resource development through a human resource exchange utilizing the network of service providers, and others

3) Dissemination/understanding of welfare/long-term care services

- ① Providing opportunities for voluntary experiences at educational institutions
- ② Promotion of understanding through on-the-job training and publicity through the mass media, and others

4) Promotion of entry of potential qualified workers

- ① Identifying abilities of potential Qualified Workers
- ② Improvement of consultation system at social service human resource centers
- ③ Employment/continuation support at free job placement offices, and others

5) Promotion of entry of various human resources

- ① Promotion of entry of the elderly and others through training for the elderly and employment support for people with disabilities, and others

(2) Revision of Certified Care Worker and Certified Social Worker Systems

Systems of certified care workers and certified social workers were created in 1988 to nurture and secure human resources with specialized abilities and the necessary knowledge for people to be able to consult them on welfare and ask for long-term care without anxiety. 20 years have passed since establishment of the system. As welfare and long-term care services are rapidly growing, the number of certified care workers who act as the core manpower in long-term care, reached 639,000 as of July 2007. In addition, the number of certified care and professional workers that provide consultation support with welfare was 95,000 as of July 2007.

On the other hand, new types of long-term care, other than the conventional physical care, such as long-term care for elderly with dementia are becoming necessary due to the introduction of the long-term care insurance system and establishment of the Services and Support for Persons with Disabilities Act. In addition, consultation support service business fields are also expanding to

include service usage support, guardianship for adults, and protection of rights. In order to nurture high quality human resources that are capable of coping with these diverse/advanced welfare/long-term care needs, the “Draft Law to Amend Certified Social Workers and Certified Care Workers Law” which revise the definition/obligation of certified care workers and the method of acquisition was presented at a regular Diet session in 2007, approved on November 28, 2007, and partially enforced on December 5, 2007.

In addition, in response to the revision of the system, the content of nurturing course education for certified care workers and the requirements for instructors will be reviewed in its entirety to extend the hours needed and improve the content, and will take place in April 2009.

3. Promotion of Welfare Activities According to Various Needs in Communities

(1) Reconstruction of Community Welfare

Public welfare services have been improved in every field, but particularly in the fields concerning elderly and people with disabilities they have been upgraded both in terms of quality and quantity in recent years through the Long-Term Care Insurance Act and the Services and Support for Persons with Disabilities Act. However, there are some problems with gaps in the systems in communities as well as various issues that cannot be handled only by public services at the moment which include small needs for help such as help in taking out the garbage or changing light bulbs and also isolation problems with neighbors. In addition, there are also complex problem cases, for example households with parents requiring long-term care or children with disabilities, where public welfare services are not being provided in a comprehensive manner.

However, self-realization needs are being realized through community activities and various activities such as watching over people that require support are being carried out in some communities.

Because of this background a “Study Group on Community Welfare in the Future” has been held since October 2007 with the report of “In Search of 'New Ways of Mutual Support' --- New Wave of Welfare in Cooperation between Residents and Administration” being prepared in March 2008.

In this report, it was deemed necessary to promote community welfare so that it can respond flexibly to the various issues of community life through expanding and improving the scope of “new ways of mutual support” (assistance) in communities on the principle that basic needs should be handled by welfare services. The report also points out that community welfare can be a base for local community revitalization through strengthening relationships between people. In addition, it suggests the required conditions and improvement methods for promoting community welfare and the revisions needed with existing measures.

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare will promote community welfare by taking into consideration the suggestions made in this report. In FY 2008, “community welfare vitalization programs” will be implemented through establishing bases and placing community welfare activity coordination staff in local communities.

(2) Consumers' Co-Operative Association System

The consumers' co-operative association system was created in 1948 as a mutual support organization that aims at the cultural and financial improvement of members' lives. At present there are 60.53 million members in 1,085 associations that implement various programs which involve purchases, usage, and mutual aid (as of March 31, 2007). As their purchasing business accounts for 2% of gross sales they have become significant economic business entities and make a great contribution to their members' lives.

However, nearly 60 years have passed since the establishment of the Consumers' Co-operative Associations Law. And during this period the environment surrounding the consumers' co-operative association system and requests from people have greatly changed, resulting in various issues arising.

To cope with these issues and enable the consumers' co-operative association system to play its roles in an appropriate manner in the future and be in accordance with the purpose of the system, which is to provide mutual support for its members, the “Law to Amend the Consumers' Co-operative Associations Law” in providing better protection for contractors of mutual insurance and improving insurances' managerial/accountability system was approved on May 8, 2007 and enforced on April 1, 2008 (matters related to the loan business were enforced on December 19, 2007).