

POLICY REVIEW

POLICY RESPONSE

Measures focus on rural issues and providing disaster aid

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A slew of ministry-level departments, including those responsible for civil affairs, emergency response, health and education have responded recently to matters of public concern.

Action plan introduced to help develop community NPOs

To bolster the role of nonprofit organizations in innovating governance in communities and the grass-roots, a three-year action plan aimed at accelerating the growth of NPOs was unveiled by the Ministry of Civil Affairs on Dec 7.



A policy campaign will start next year and run until the end of 2023.

It will promote efforts to nurture the development of volunteer organizations in rural areas to provide services that will facilitate agricultural production and daily life.

Such groups will be urged to provide more care and services for people with specific needs, such as seniors and “left-behind” children, whose parents work in distant cities and towns, according to the action plan.

The plan called for the training of personnel nationwide and further development of a standardized system for managing NPOs, with the goal of establishing a mature working mechanism by 2023.

Ministries earmark government funds for disaster-hit areas

The central government has allocated 6.24 billion yuan (\$955 million) for disaster relief work this winter and in spring next year, the Ministry of Emergency Management announced on Dec 7.

The funds, issued by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Emergency Management, aim to meet people's basic daily needs in disaster-hit areas and ensure their safety and well-being during cold seasons.

As more provincial-level regions were hit hard by floods this year compared with previous years, the ministries are collaborating to ensure that work is initiated earlier to deal with local needs through the fund for winter and spring relief.

When deciding each region's share of the funds, officials took many factors into consideration, including poverty alleviation requirements and the impact of the novel coronavirus epidemic.

New moves will see number of grassroots fever clinics rise

A policy issued recently to encourage the construction of fever clinics in eligible township and community-level medical institutions is aimed at perfecting regularized disease prevention and COVID-19 control efforts, and guiding the operations of local fever clinics, according to policymakers.

The comments were included in a policy explanation document issued by the National Health Commission on its website on Dec 7.

The NHC also issued a guideline on Dec 2 to encourage the establishment of such clinics.

To curb the spread of COVID-19, community-level clinics should ensure confirmed patients have access to services including registration, screening, quarantine, treatment and transfer, the NHC said.

Such clinics should be isolated from general clinics within medical institutions and be equipped with facilities for treatment, protection and sterilization. They should be staffed by professionals who have anti-epidemic skills, the commission said.

Vocational schools continue to nurture nation's key workers

In the past five years, vocational education institutions have nurtured more than 70 percent of the nation's newly employed front-line workers in modern manufacturing, and strategic and emerging industries in addition to modern services.

The country has 11,500 vocational schools, and they are teaching 28.57 million students the skills required for employment, Chen Ziji, an official in charge of vocational education and adult education at the Ministry of Education, told a news conference on Dec 8.

More than 70 percent of students at vocational colleges and schools come from the rural areas, Chen said.

China is working with over 70 countries and international organizations, and more than 400 of its higher vocational schools have cooperated with their counterparts overseas to improve vocational education, Chen added.

Around 10 million technical and skilled personnel are trained every year by vocational colleges and schools, which cover most of the sectors that serve China's economy and offer more than 1,200 majors, the ministry said.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

State Council urges more personal health insurance

China's Cabinet stresses need to address increasing demand for senior care as nation ages

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The State Council, China's Cabinet, has outlined a number of measures to bolster the growth of the personal insurance sector, while pledging to accelerate the development of commercial health insurance and encourage insurers to devise more products for seniors.

At an executive meeting on Wednesday, the cabinet stressed the need to improve financial services and unleash the growth potential of the personal insurance industry to address the growing demand for healthcare, senior care and social security.

In a statement, the State Council said China must move forward with the reform and opening-up of the sector, which would provide a range of high-caliber personal insurance products.

More products targeting major diseases must be developed, and they must complement basic health insurance to widen the safety net for urban and rural residents, it added.

The State Council pledged to offer insurers incentives to develop products to suit seniors' demands and financial resources, and to incorporate treatment costs that lie outside the basic medical insurance in their coverage.

“With China's huge market, there is still immense potential for insurance sector growth,” Premier Li Keqiang said. He noted that people age 60 or older face many restrictions when purchasing commercial health insurance, which leaves them with limited choices.

Liu Zining, a researcher with the School of Insurance at the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing, said the measures will help the development of a multitiered social security system appropriate for China's increasingly aging society.

“With an insurance sector that offers a wider range of professional services and more diverse products, the government,

“With China's huge market, there is still immense potential for insurance sector growth.”

Premier Li Keqiang

businesses and individuals can respond jointly to the challenges presented by the country's aging society,” she said.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that by the end of last year, China was home to 254 million people age 60 or older, accounting for 18 percent of the population.

Moreover, that number could rise to 434 million, accounting for about 30 percent of the population, by 2040, the NBS said.

Liu underlined the significance of developing more commercial health insurance for seniors, which “will alleviate their financial pressures when faced with health risks and reduce the burden on society and families of caring for the elderly.”

Zhang Qingfeng, CEO of Beijing Aixuan Info Technology, an insurtech startup that focuses on specific groups in the population, including seniors, said, “The State Council meeting reemphasized the need to encourage the active participation of the commercial insurance sector to cope with China's aging society and make the sector an important pillar for the country's pension system.”

He noted that a key policy objective is to help more seniors obtain commercial health insurance, provision of which could be technologically demanding for insurers as the level of risk is higher among older people.

“In addition to reimbursing medical costs, it is important for insurers to develop products that emphasize health man-

agement and accompanying services,” Zhang said.

With China scrapping caps on foreign ownership of personal insurers from this year, the State Council has underlined the importance of opening-up and international cooperation to boost the sector's growth.

At the meeting, the State Council's members agreed to develop the commercial endowment insurance sector so it can become a pillar of the nation's social insurance system, saying its role in the social security system will be strengthened as a result.

Insurers will be encouraged to offer elderly care services, including in communities for seniors, and the sector will be allowed to take part in pilot long-term care insurance projects, the State Council said.

Zhou Xing, China insurance leader with the accountancy firm PwC, said the level of personal insurance coverage in China is still far below that seen in developed countries.

However, improving coverage will bolster consumer confidence and help the country's efforts to foster a new development pattern.

“The rapid expansion of China's middle-income group has resulted in surging demand for commercial health insurance,” she said.

“We believe that the measures announced at the State Council's executive meeting will encourage the insurance sector to devote more energy to developing products related to health insurance.”

The State Council's decision to include personal insurance, including those in the form of annuities, as one of the pillars of China's social security system is in keeping with international practice, she added.

However, to further boost the growth of annuities and other forms of life insurance, she highlighted the need for the government to offer preferential tax policies for individuals as a way of encouraging people to save for the future.

Policy Digest

Draft to improve permits for pollutant discharge

Progress was made in further regulating pollutants produced and discharged by industries after an executive meeting of the State Council, China's Cabinet, on Wednesday approved the draft of a regulation on permits for pollutant discharge.

The meeting, presided over by Premier Li Keqiang, approved measures marking a key step toward the final formulation of the regulation. In 2018, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment devised the regulation and made its first draft public to canvass people's opinions.

Under the system outlined by the regulation, all business entities and individuals that plan to discharge pollutants into the environment must apply for a permit from environmental protection authorities in advance.

In recent decades, authorities have stepped up supervision of the discharge and treatment of wastewater, gas and solids, and scrutinized incidents and accidents resulting from unlicensed, illegal discharges.

However, many problems have still to be addressed, such as the prevalence of unlicensed activities or discharges that exceed the limits stipulated by the permits, officials said.

Such violations impede the operation of the permit system, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment said in a 2018 document explaining the regulation.

The draft passed by the meeting on Wednesday proposed that dischargers should be sorted into categories based on the amount of pollutants they produce, the volume discharged and the environmental impact.

The meeting required standardization of the examination and approval procedures overseeing applications for discharge permits, and entities that discharge pollutants are ordered to establish their own systems to note their environmental management and to disclose information about discharges.

Supervision of such discharges should be stepped up during and after the discharge process, the meeting decided, adding that penalties for illegal acts involving pollutant discharge will be strengthened and measures should be taken to increase the cost of breaking the law.

Punitive measures will include penalties based on the number of days of unlicensed discharge, suspension of production, rectification, and the suspension or termination of entire operations, according to the meeting.

Liaoyang ordered to better protect cultural legacy

The State Council has included Liaoyang city, Liaoning province, in the list of national historical and cultural cities, and asked the city to bolster protection of the local cultural heritage.

The city has 705 cultural relic protection sites, including seven national-level key cultural relic protection sites.

It is also home to frescos unearthed at ancient tombs.

According to a State Council circular on Dec 7 that approved Liaoyang's inclusion in the list, the city “has a long history and enjoys a brilliant traditional layout and historical features.”

The city's cultural relics are rich and diverse, clues to its development are clear and it has “important historical and cultural value,” the circular added.

To keep Liaoyang's layout stable, the circular called for properly coordinated construction and protection of the historical and cultural resources.

Liaoyang should improve its urban environment, renovate ancient buildings, maintain the traditional and dimensional layout, and the natural landscape should not be changed, it said.

Construction in the city should not run counter to its historical identity, and ancient buildings should not be damaged, relocated or demolished without permission, it said.

The document also called for strengthened protection of the city's historical and cultural resources, and asked the city authorities to tap into their value and significance via in-depth research.

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