

# Measures help young couples expand families

Officials roll out incentives as part of efforts to lift dwindling fertility rates in the nation

By LI LEI  
lilei@chinadaily.com.cn

When China allowed all couples to have a third child on May 31 in response to the nation's flagging fertility rates, that turned out to be just the start of its efforts.

About two months later, authorities followed up with a combination of rules incentivizing young couples to expand families.

The rules mainly target rising education costs, a shortage of day care services and gender discrimination in the workplace.

Such issues have come under growing public scrutiny in recent years for chipping away at the appeal for working couples to have babies.

The rules were laid out in a landmark resolution made by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, on June 26.

Officially published almost a month later, the document said the aim is to overhaul the nation's child-birth policies and achieve long-term balanced population growth.

It said authorities will establish a support system by 2025 that will help greatly ease the burdens associated with child-rearing and education.

The reform will also produce more benefits that help improve the "gender ratio, structure and quality" of the Chinese population.

To achieve those goals, rapid investment will be greenlighted during the period to develop maternity and day care services and related facilities.

Kindergartens will also be encouraged to admit children slightly younger than 3, which is currently the minimum age a child can enroll in such schools.

Further, parents will be given tax breaks, easier access to subsidized housing and breastfeeding leave. Inspections will also be made to ensure pregnancy and childbirth do not jeopardize women's careers.

The supporting measures are expected to play an even larger role in improving fertility rates than simply adjusting family planning policies in the long run, said Yu Xuejun, deputy head of the National Health Commission.

He told a news conference last month in Beijing that the new three-child policy is intended to boost fertility rates and slow the downward spiral of the nation's population growth.

But whether that goal can be reached in the long run is dependent on the implementation of support measures, which requires coordination from nearly all departments at all levels, he said.

"Participation and support from all parties are needed to create a favorable demographic environment to build China into a modern socialist country and rejuvenate the nation," Yu said, referring to China's modernization goals set for 2035 and 2049.

Yu said figures from the first six months suggest that the country's fertility rate and number of newborns will continue to fall.

He noted that dwindling fertility rates will keep placing pressure on authorities to balance population growth.

Ou Xiaoli, director-general of the National Development and Reform Commission's social development department, described the supporting rules as the central plank of efforts to build a "fertility-friendly society".

To achieve that, he said one priority is to make it easier and more affordable to care for young children.

That's because young couples have long relied on retired parents to care for infants and toddlers until they are old enough to attend kindergarten, usually at age 3.

But the latest census data showed that Chinese families had an average of 2.62 members last year, down from 3.1 in the previous census a decade earlier.

Experts said the number reflects young people's tendency to live apart from their parents and in-laws, and the trend is weakening the family's traditional function of child care.

Yang Wenzhuang, director-general of the National Health Commission's population and family department,



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## What the CPPCC National Committee members say



**Zheng Bingwen,**  
*a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference*

China has created a three-tier social security system for retirees, which comprises a government-run pension fund, a supplementary pension fund operated by employers and various commercial insurance options.

China's financial reserves for such security options account for a much smaller share of the national GDP compared with developed nations due to inadequate second- and third-tier security choices. But they are the core assets to deal with the challenges of an aging society.

Efforts are needed to maximize the coverage of the pension fund programs run by employers, such as introducing an "automatic participation mechanism".

China rolled out pilot programs to promote commercial insurance tailored-made for retirees more than three years ago. It's time to unveil new policies that offer greater tax breaks,

streamlined individual income tax deduction and more product options, ranging from insurance to funds to financial products.



**Yuan Wen,**  
*a member of the CPPCC National Committee and president of Shanghai Normal University*

It's getting increasingly important to help older people make themselves useful, which is also a central part of China's strategy of dealing with aging through active measures.

I suggest that such efforts be included in government planning with special funding.

The government should roll out special funding to help younger seniors establish volunteer groups and encourage them to offer basic health services to older people.

It should help seniors set up workshops that help promote cultural heritage and traditional skills. It also needs to build a lifelong education system and protect their access to further education and help them

adapt to society.

Authorities need to develop the human resources of younger seniors scientifically and roll out workplace standards and job requirements suitable for seniors. Tax breaks can be used to encourage employers to hire older people.

Retirees should be encouraged to continue working, and authorities should set up a special award for those who have made outstanding contributions to society.

Efforts should be made to explore new types of insurance that facilitate seniors' reentry to the job market or provide volunteer services.

The whole of society needs to be encouraged to provide jobs and opportunities for the elderly through government purchase plans.



**Wang Peian,**  
*vice-chairman of the Committee of Population, Resources and Environment of the CPPCC National Committee*

What weighs down the fertility rate is not family planning restrictions,

but young couples' unwillingness to procreate.

The wish to have kids has decreased significantly among the younger generation, and many opt to delay marriage or not to marry or have kids at all. Day care and other public services are inadequate. Home and education are overly expensive. Relevant services are overly marketized.

Further, workplace gender discrimination is common, paid maternity leave is short and leave for child rearing is nonexistent. That makes it difficult for young couples to balance work and family.

To step up fertility support, I propose that day care be made a basic public service.

The government should build a system featuring large numbers of smaller, affordable day care facilities, with the nongovernment sector heavily involved. The aim is to provide quality, affordable and convenient day care services.

In places with lower fertility rates and surplus kindergarten resources, government should encourage kindergartens to roll out day care services for children aged 2 to 3.

## Policy Digest

### Medical bill payment services expanded

China has extended the country's interprovincial settlement services of outpatient bills to more than 23,700 designated hospitals and medical institutions in 29 provincial-level regions, with more than 3.38 million people benefiting from such services in the first six months of this year, according to the National Healthcare Security Administration.

With these services, citizens who are getting medical treatment in other provincial regions can have their bills settled by the public medical insurance system directly rather than having to return to the place they enrolled to be reimbursed.

Jiang Chengjia, an official with the administration, said at a news briefing on July 26 that public medical insurance paid for 54.9 percent of the total medical expenses involved in the direct settlement of interprovincial outpatient bills during the same period, which was 465 million yuan (\$71.5 million).

By the end of 2022, there will be at least one designated medical institution in each county in China that supports the interprovincial settlement of medical bills, including outpatient bills, Jiang said.

### Guidelines protect rights of food deliverymen

Chinese authorities have rolled out a series of guidelines defining the responsibilities of online catering platforms, including ensuring that food deliverymen earn above the country's minimum wage, in a move to protect the legitimate rights and interests of such workers.

According to the guidelines jointly issued by the State Administration for Market Regulation and six other governmental departments on July 26, platforms are prohibited from using the most stringent algorithm to evaluate a rider's performance.

Instead, platforms have to use a moderate algorithm that allows more time for riders to finish their deliveries.

Further, to ensure safety, platforms should improve their order assignment systems and optimize delivery routes to ensure that riders are given a reasonable number of orders, the guidelines said.

Authorities also urged platforms and the third-party companies they cooperate with to help riders gain access to social security insurance and to explore diversified commercial insurance plans for them.

The guidelines call for setting up temporary rest stations for riders, developing smart lockers for fetching deliveries and researching smart helmets for riders so as to improve working conditions and stabilize employment.

### Ministry notice targets students' mental health

The Ministry of Education has recently issued a notice requiring that more targeted and effective measures be made to protect students' mental health, including making mental health education a part of curricula in middle and primary schools.

The notice said that educating students about sports, art and campus culture and instilling a hardworking spirit can play an important role in helping build positive mental health in students in an all-around way.

It also underlined the importance of offering students various forms of life education, including teaching them how to deal with frustration.

Further, it urged schools, families and society to strengthen their coordinated efforts and take active measures to help students deal with psychological problems they face in studies, life, relationships and self-awareness so they avoid the mental crises such problems may create, the notice said.

The notice also said that schools should immediately contact parents when accidents occur on campuses and investigate such situations under the guidance of local education and police authorities.