

# Safe water for rural areas a priority

State Council encourages private sector participation in construction and maintenance of facilities

By WANG QINGYUN  
wangqingyun@chinadaily.com.cn

The State Council has laid out specific requirements to ensure rural residents have access to sufficient and safe drinking water.

At an executive meeting on Wednesday presided over by Premier Li Keqiang, it was decided that the construction of rural water supply projects should be enhanced to help 60 million rural people enjoy sufficient drinking water that does not contain excessive fluoride by next year.

As a result of China's efforts to guarantee water supply for rural residents, centralized water supply or tap water are now available to more than 80 percent of people living in rural areas, the meeting was told.

Yu Fawen, a rural environment researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the government has played a major role in making drinking water widely accessible in rural areas, but "there is a long way to go" to ensure drinking water security.

Yu said many rural areas lacked the funds or the professional staff needed to guarantee the smooth operation of water facilities. That could lead to the early breakdown of facilities, or leave them standing idle, resulting in insufficient water supply.

Liu Baohong, manager of the water supply industry center at the E20 Environment Platform think tank, said waterworks in rural areas were also relatively less capable of dealing with risks to supply.

Compared with those in cities, some rural waterworks were smaller and lacked professional operators, or did not have backup

reservoirs, which meant they were unable to provide water during emergencies, such as when pipelines failed or when the reservoir was polluted, Liu said.

The executive meeting also decided there should be a reasonable water pricing and fee charging system for rural areas, and the private sector should be encouraged to participate in the construction and maintenance of water supply facilities in rural areas through public-private partnership arrangements.

Also, the central government and local authorities should grant subsidies to impoverished areas in Central and West China to help them maintain their drinking water security projects.

Liu said the decisions could solve the water facility maintenance issue, as the capital brought by private companies and the fees collected might make up for a possible shortage of funds from local governments.

But the fundamental solution, he said, lies in the development of industries, specifically green industries, such as tourism, to attract people to work and live in rural areas, where they would then use and pay for water.

To achieve that goal, "it is very important to implement the strategy of rural vitalization and channel more talent and capital to the countryside," Liu added.

In order to improve the quality of drinking water, the meeting called for strengthened protection of water sources for centralized water supply networks in rural areas.

“Drinking water security for rural residents in China will no doubt keep improving.”

Yu Fawen, a rural environment researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

80 percent of people living in rural areas have access to centralized water supply or tap water.

On the sidelines of this year's two sessions in March, Minister of Water Resources E Jingping said the ministry is working with the Ministry of Ecology and Environment to regulate and protect water sources, Xinhua reported.

The Ministry of Water Resources had come up with a list of 12,000 rural water sources that need regulation and protection, E said.

Yu, from CASS, said the government is shifting the focus of its efforts from simply providing enough drinking water for rural residents to guaranteeing the quality of the water.

"Drinking water security for rural residents in China will no doubt keep improving," Yu said. "But the pressure to ensure water quality will also increase."

"Industrial pollution is still a serious issue threatening water sources. To tackle that, the government needs to invest lots of effort."



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

## POLICY RESPONSE

# Generic drugs, child welfare among key issues addressed

By XU WEI  
xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

Several ministry-level departments, including those for health, civil affairs and education, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

### Commission publishes generic drugs catalog

The National Health Commission said on Thursday that pharmaceutical companies will be encouraged to develop 34 kinds of generic drugs, including those used in the treatment of AIDS and leukemia, to reduce the burden on patients.

The commission published the catalog of drugs the companies will be encouraged to develop, register and produce as part of efforts to cut the cost of drugs and ensure their supply.

It said it will publish the catalog every year, and generic drugs that have passed biological equivalence testing will be given priority in government procurement.

The 34 kinds of drugs, able to be sold after the expiry of their patents, were proposed by experts recommended by the commission and four other departments. Some of the

drugs were in short supply in hospitals, the commission said.

### Child welfare efforts to be stepped up nationwide

China will step up the construction of child welfare infrastructure and boost investment to better help children living in difficult circumstances, Minister of Civil Affairs Huang Shuxian said on Thursday.

Huang told a national work conference on child welfare that at least one institution for raising orphans and foundlings should be built in every city to provide healthcare and education.

He also urged greater efforts to develop relief centers for minors, adding that eligible child welfare institutions can open schools and kindergartens devoted to helping disabled children.



Civil affairs authorities at district or county levels must have institutions devoted to visiting and taking care of rural children left behind by parents working in cities and children in need of help, he said.

In counties with small populations, the authorities can merge their efforts with those of city-level child welfare institutions, he added.

Huang also called for local authorities to enable NGOs and volunteers to play a bigger role in providing care to children facing difficulties.

### Ministry clarifies role of kindergarten supervisors

The Ministry of Education clarified the responsibilities of kindergarten supervisors in a guideline issued on June 18 as part of efforts to improve preschool safety and ethical supervision.

It said governments at the county, municipal and district levels must assign supervisors to every kindergarten in their administrative area so they can provide routine oversight of the institutions, and give instructions on issues such as safety, management and teachers' ethical standards.

In the case of an emergency or a



major accident threatening kindergarten safety, supervisors must reach the scene quickly, supervise the emergency response and report the incident to higher authorities, the ministry said.

Kindergartens must fully comply with the requirements of supervisors as they assume their responsibilities and rectify problems they point out, it said.

### Shoddy plastic surgeons to be blacklisted

The National Health Commission said on June 18 that evaluation of the social credit of plastic surgery institutions will be developed to boost government oversight and better protect the rights of consumers.

The commission said in an online statement that the Chinese Association of Plastics and Aesthetics has been asked to research the estab-

lishment of a social credit system that will see shoddy operators blacklisted.

The authority also vowed to help the public identify illegal beauty surgeons by requiring that medical institutions and doctors display their licenses and provide online verification through official health department websites.

The government will also improve its supervision mechanisms by stepping up coordination between departments and employ modern technologies, such as information technology, big data and artificial intelligence, to enable more efficient oversight, the commission said.

A yearlong crackdown on illegal beauty surgery launched in May 2017 saw the authorities handle 2,772 cases, with 139 handed to prosecutors.



## Policy digest

### Inspection mechanism for environmental work

China has established a mechanism for the inspection of ecological and environmental protection that enables routine oversight of provincial authorities, central government departments and State-owned enterprises, according to regulations made public on June 17.

The document, regulations on central inspection work of ecological and environmental protection, was jointly issued by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council.

It is aimed at solving prominent environmental problems and improving the quality of the environment and ecology and includes measures to ensure the authorities fulfill their political responsibilities on environmental and ecological protection.

The country will establish a central leading group for the inspection of ecological and environmental protection, with members comprising officials from the ministries of environment, justice, the National Audit Office and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, according to the regulations.

The inspections launched by the group will target areas and water bodies where the quality of the ecology and environment has deteriorated, and the sites of prominent cases of pollution.

They will also look into how problems reported by the public have been rectified and illegal interventions in law enforcement and judicial procedures dealing with environmental and ecological problems. The regulations, which came into force on June 6, also clarify the ways the inspection groups can conduct their work and how wrongdoers should be held accountable.

### Call for better facilities in old urban areas

China will beef up efforts to improve facilities in old urban residential communities to stabilize investment and growth, the State Council decided at an executive meeting chaired by Premier Li Keqiang on Wednesday.

The renovation of old urban residential communities, a major program in boosting public livelihoods and development, has been in line with public aspirations, a statement released after the meeting said.

The meeting called for efforts to effectively expand investment that could promote domestic consumption and avoid duplication of construction projects.

There are at least 100 million people nationwide living in old urban residential communities that require substantial upgrading, the statement said. It called for accelerated efforts to spell out the scale of renovation and the standards that need to be met, with pilot programs set be launched this year as a precursor to nationwide implementation.

The meeting also underscored the importance of clearly defining the responsibilities of local governments and respecting residents' needs.

The government will prioritize the upgrading of roads, and water, electricity, gas, and optical fiber networks, with elevators to be installed and parking lots built in communities where conditions permit, the statement said, adding that households will be offered incentives to upgrade facilities in their own homes.

The central government will roll out funding support to the renovation efforts, with financial institutions and local governments also encouraged to explore sustainable ways to increase financial support for the renovation of old residential communities, the statement said, adding that market-based approaches will be employed to attract private investment.

The government will encourage the development of services, such as elderly care, day care for children, and medical and domestic services in communities. The meeting also decided on measures to move forward with a new round of power grid upgrading in rural areas. The time it takes for enterprises to get electric power will be further shortened, the statement said.