

Elderly care services to be expanded

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The central government has underscored the need to expand the supply of elderly care services and spur consumption in the sector as China rapidly transitions to an aging society.

At an executive meeting on Wednesday, the State Council, China's Cabinet, decided on measures to boost the development of various community- and home-based elderly care services to make it easier for senior citizens to access meal, transport, home cleaning and medical services.

Businesses will be encouraged to develop high-quality products that fit the needs of the elderly, and the government will step up the development and renovation of facilities devoted to aged care services, a statement released after the meeting said.

"Home-based aged care not only follows the tradition of the Chinese people, but also suits the current development standard of our country," Premier Li Keqiang said at the meeting.

He underlined the importance of providing more aged care services and expanding access to them, even though the family remains the primary source of care for the elderly in China.

Enabling private sector participation in aged care services and adopting multiple steps to boost the growth of related sectors, such as tourism and health-related services, were crucial steps, the premier said, adding that the measures will follow the demands of the public, spur the vitality of cities, and expand effective investment and broaden consumption.

Last year, the number of people in China age 65 or above reached 166 million — 11.9 percent of the country's population — according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

China will move from being an aging to an aged society by 2027, and by 2050, 26 percent of the population is expected to be 65 or older, and about 8 percent will be 80 or older, according to a report published by the World Bank in December.

"To tackle this pressing challenge, China will require a balanced mix of services across home, community, and institutional settings that can best meet older people's preferences and needs," the report said.

Although continued government support was needed for elderly people who have limited functional ability and who are poor and vulnerable, the report said "the most effective and sustainable approach would be to leverage

resources and complementary capacities from both the public and private sectors to create a functioning market for elderly care across income groups and across urban and rural areas."

The report estimated that the aged care industry in China needs 10 million workers, with the great majority working in institutional care facilities.

However, by 2015, the industry had just 1 million workers — and only 20,000 had official training.

"To retain and incentivize the current aged care workforce, Chinese policymakers should focus on finding sustainable ways to raise the wages of these workers, and local governments must eventually increase minimum wages for elder care workers," the report added.

In its statement on Wednesday, the State Council said it will step up the training of workers for aged care institutions and support the development of commercial aged care insurance.

A long-term aged care mechanism featuring insurance, social benefits and government assistance will be established.

Subsidies for caring for elderly

people who are faced with economic difficulties or physical disabilities will be increased, the statement said.

It also called for greater efforts to monitor the quality of products and services for the elderly and to crack down on wrongdoing that harms their interests.

Pan Helin, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Fiscal Sciences, said the need for a more compre-

hensive aged care system is more pressing because the elderly are living increasingly lonely lives.

He said aged care services must focus on meeting seniors' physiological, safety and social belonging needs and nurturing their self-esteem and self-actualization.

Policy digest

Steps taken to ensure stable supply of pork

China will step up efforts to stabilize hog production and ensure pork supply at stable prices following the effects of African swine fever on the industry, the State Council decided at an executive meeting on Wednesday.

Subsidies to farms with culled pigs will be dispensed more quickly, and major hog producers and farm owners will receive more support in expanding their herds, a statement released after the meeting said.

The transportation of piglets and chilled pork will be covered by preferential policies so logistics costs will be reduced, it said.



The meeting said local authorities should promptly scrap bans and limits on hog raising except those stipulated in laws and regulations. For hog producers whose farms have been shut down, land should be organized for rebuilding their farms in areas where hog raising is allowed.

Large-scale farming should be promoted and the one hectare cap on supporting facilities for hog production will be canceled, the statement said.

The meeting also called for efforts to enhance the development of the animal disease prevention system and beef up disease control capabilities, increase local pork reserves, and ensure the basic living standards of people in difficult circumstances.

Better facilities to help attract foreign tourists

China will encourage efforts to develop a group of tourism routes, destinations and creative products to improve the country's environment for inbound tourism, according to a guideline released on Friday.

The guideline, issued by the General Office of the State Council, said a series of measures that benefit the public will be introduced in the latest effort to boost consumption in areas of culture and tourism, thus stimulating economic growth.



To make such consumption more convenient, renovation of traditional performance venues and museums will be encouraged to upgrade facilities and provide better dining areas and creative product shops, it said.

By 2022, all shops at culture and tourism destinations should support bank card payment and mobile payment besides cash payment, and 90 percent should have access to online ticket sales and 4G or 5G telecommunications networks, it said.

Local governments will be offered support to increase funding for public service facilities in tourist attractions, upgrade their equipment and products and provide more training for personnel. By 2022, all national 5A-level scenic spots should implement a ticket booking system.

To develop the holiday economy and nighttime economy, a flexible vacation system including segmented annual leave with pay will be encouraged, along with the construction of 24-hour bookstores.

By 2022, more than 200 national cluster areas for nighttime culture and tourism consumption should be built.

Government departments will be required to strengthen supervision and crack down on illegal activities in the culture and tourism market and provide financial support for the building of cultural and tourism infrastructure, the guideline said.

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POLICY RESPONSE

Poverty alleviation and school disputes on agenda

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Several ministry-level departments, including those responsible for poverty alleviation, education, healthcare and banking, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

Departments encouraged to buy agricultural goods

China released a plan on August 20 to encourage government departments to purchase agricultural products from poverty-stricken areas as part of targeted poverty alleviation efforts.

The plan, jointly issued by the Ministry of Finance, the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, and the All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives, said



an integrated online sales platform for the display and trading of agricultural products from poor areas will be established before the end of October.

A list of suppliers of priority products from national-level poverty-stricken counties will be compiled and the first group of agricultural products from poor areas will be launched on the platform by the end of October, it said.

According to the plan, all departments with government procurement budgets should be making purchases through the online sales platform by next year.

Crackdown on disruptive school accident protests

Government departments must crack down on acts that disrupt school order and undermine the law-based settlement of disputes over school accidents, according to a guideline released on August 20.

Jointly issued by five departments, including the Ministry of Education, the Supreme People's Court and the Ministry of Public Security, it said such acts, usually committed by students' families in disputes over school-related accidents, include attacking people,



intentionally damaging public property, putting up banners on school grounds, blocking school gates and stalking school officials.

Deng Chuanhuai, director of the Ministry of Education's Department of Policies and Regulations, told a news conference such behavior had affected the quality of education and the education environment.

The guideline said that when schools are responsible for accidents, they should pay compensation to the victims in a timely manner according to the law, but no money should be paid to settle disputes until the responsibilities of different parties had been clarified.

Mechanism to ensure reasonable drug prices

The National Healthcare Security Administration will establish a long-term supervision mechanism

to ensure the stable supply of clinical medicines at reasonable prices, an official said on Thursday.

Chen Jinfu, deputy head of the administration, told a news conference the mechanism will feature measures including price monitoring, credit rating and legal punishment to make sure pharmaceutical firms set reasonable drug prices.

Data showed the prices of 70 percent of commonly used medicines were cheaper or unchanged since 2015, with the prices of cancer drugs and other expensive medicines dropping by an average of 18 percent.

But about 30 percent of commonly used medicines saw price rises, which Chen attributed to a lack of market adjustments and price hikes for raw materials.

He said unreasonable price hikes will be punished in accordance with



relevant regulations and laws, and efforts will be made to further reform the drug procurement mechanism to maintain a fair, healthy and competitive market.

Plan aims to make China a world fintech leader

China will build a fundamental policy framework for technology-driven financial innovation by 2021 to promote the country as a world fintech leader, according to a plan released by the People's Bank of China on Thursday.

It listed key development targets and tasks for fintech from this year to 2021, aiming to improve the quality of financial services, strengthen regulation of technology-driven innovations, and prevent systemic financial risks.

According to the plan, fintech will be the "new engine" for high-quality development of the country's financial industry.

The plan also requires the prevention of risks related to the application of new technology. Fintech should be used to curb and tackle cross-market and cross-regional financial risks, while at the same time enhancing cybersecurity and financial information protection.