

S. C. W. P.

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\$600m a year bill for public assistance

By AGNES CHEN

There are about 100,000 people from about 61,000 families receiving public assistance amounting to \$600 million a year, the acting Director of Social Welfare, Mr Stephan Law, said.

And expenditure on old age allowance is expected to continue to increase steadily as about 12,000 new cases are added each year for the next five years.

On disability allowance, about 4,500 new cases a year are expected, Mr Law said.

At present, 85 per cent of all people aged 70 and above, or about 220,000 people, receive the monthly old age allowance.

About 47,000 people receive the disability allowance.

Mr Law told members of the Maryknoll Medical and Welfare Association at their annual lunch meeting that Hongkong has a reasonable social security network to help those least able to help themselves.

He referred to the five so-



Mr Law

cial security schemes administered by the Social Welfare Department and the public assistance scheme.

He said the level of assistance may not be high but recipients do not have to worry about their basic daily needs.

Mr Law said the majority of public assistance recipients were the aged, the sick and the disabled. This group ac-

counted for about 84 per cent of all cases.

"With the steady increase of public assistance caseloads in recent years, there has also been an increase in the number of single parents with children, resulting from divorce, separation and desertion. This is disturbing," Mr Law said.

Mr Law said the old age allowance of \$255 a month was provided in recognition of the fact that people over 70 had special needs.

Likewise, the disability allowance of \$510 a month was in recognition of the fact a severely disabled person incurs additional expenses.

Three other schemes — the Traffic Accident Victims Assistance, the Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation and the Emergency Relief — are designed to meet the more unexpected mishaps of life, Mr Law said.

"The levels of payment under all three schemes are the same, and the highest award for an injury case is \$49,010 while that for a fatal case is \$57,870."