



Autism and China's 15th Five-Year Plan

- Three-Part Series -

Part 3.

Disability Policy Development and Autism Action Planning in China - *Implications and Opportunities for the Hong Kong SAR*

Summary

In Part 3 of the Series, we will outline the implications of the *15th Five-Year Plan for the Protection and Development of Persons with Disabilities* for the Hong Kong SAR and present five recommendations for the city to optimise its contribution to the national effort.

One Country Two Systems Presents an Opportunity

The *One Country Two Systems* framework enshrined in Hong Kong's Basic Law, affords the Hong Kong SAR a high degree of autonomy specifically over policy regarding the economic and social development of the city. This ultimately means the Hong Kong SAR has a high degree of autonomy over policy areas such as disability. As an issue that overlaps with, but is not entirely related to the question of disability policy, Autism care and support presents itself as a priority in terms of long term social and economic risks in Hong Kong SAR and indeed for the entire Chinese nation.

Autism is arguably the defining condition of our times in Hong Kong SAR and beyond.

Autism in Hong Kong SAR and Chinese Mainland

- Estimated to impact 1 in 39 Hong Kong children aged 6-17 years (CUHK)
- Autism is now the leading cause of juvenile critical illness insurance claims for boys in Hong Kong SAR, overtaking cancer for the first time (GenRe)
- 10 million people in Mainland China including 2 million children under the age of 14 (Wucailu Centre, Beijing)
- 685,000 people in China's Greater Bay Area (GBA), including 288,000 children (Hong Kong Autism Institute estimates*)

* Based on CDC, WHO and CUHK estimates reflecting published population data

Given the greater and new emphasis on disability and Autism at a national level through the *15th Five-Year Plan for the Protection and Development of Persons with Disabilities* and the *Action Plan for Promoting Care for Children with Autism (2024-2028)*, the Hong Kong SAR has a meaningful opportunity to harness *One Country Two Systems*. It can also leverage its unique position as a global healthcare talent, financing and innovation hub to accelerate positive impact at scale when it comes to disability and Autism for its own residents, for the Chinese nation and as a leading global city.

The Hong Kong SAR also has an opportunity to transparently account for its weaknesses and by aligning to the national policy emphasis on disability and Autism, it can build beneficial cross border and cross institutional collaborations, particularly in the Greater Bay Area (GBA).

In the light of all this, it is positive to note the Hong Kong SAR Government will soon announce its *First Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development*. This will be an important vehicle for alignment and collaboration across many areas including disability and Autism.

Recommendations

In line with the *15th Five-Year Plan* and considering the context of Autism, the *Hong Kong Autism Institute* presents five recommendations on disability for medium term consideration by the Hong Kong SAR Government.

1. Capacity Building

- Collaboration with public and private sector providers, NGOs, policy institutes and academic institutions to assess emerging and future capacity shortfalls.
- Focus on the availability, productivity and cost of key resources including pediatric psychiatry and psychology, rehabilitation and development therapists and specialised teachers.
- Expand the impact of child assessment capabilities to enable materially higher levels of early intervention through fostering public/private cooperation in areas such as funding, technology development and service provision.
- Evaluate the option to foster and develop an expanded specialised private non-profit school infrastructure that is economically accessible to all families, to cater to the wide spectrum of Autism and ADHD development needs and opportunities for children and adolescents.
- Raise community awareness through increased promotion and education.

2. Technology and Science

- Take a thematic approach to encouraging and enabling scientific and technology innovation in disability and Autism in the Hong Kong SAR.
- Foster and enable cross-border and cross-institutional innovation collaborations focusing on the Greater Bay Area (GBA).
- Encourage and support ‘use-cases’ that prioritise access, social-equity and better value in early identification, early intervention, rehabilitation/therapy and life-cycle benefits such as long-term employment.

3. Education and Vocational Employment

- Encourage and enable private and public sector employers to develop capacity, capabilities and programs to support long term, legitimate and non-tokenistic employment opportunities for disabled people.
- Assess the opportunity to allocate additional focus and resources to the vocational training and placement of persons with disabilities.

4. Long-Term Dependency

- Evaluate the impact of the current Special Needs Trust (SNT).
- Assess opportunities to foster, enable and develop *Public Private Partnerships* to address the significant shortfall in access to legal, financial and practical everyday protection and management of children with long term dependencies after the death of their parents/guardians/caregivers.

5. Centres of Excellence (CoEs) – Greater Bay Area (GBA)

- Encourage, support and enable the development of CoEs centered on disability reform and innovation objectives and opportunities.
- Encourage cross-border and cross-institutional collaborations across the GBA including public and private institutions, organisations and providers, NGOs and academic institutions.
- Encourage the development of ‘model city’/‘model region’ best practices including the removal of physical and non-physical (e.g. sensory) access barriers for disabled people.

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