

Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme

Preamble

1. The Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme (“VHIS”) is a policy initiative introduced by the Health Bureau (“HHB”, formerly known as the “Food and Health Bureau”) of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“Government”) concerning indemnity hospital insurance plans (“IHIP”) offered to individuals, with voluntary participation by insurance companies and consumers.
2. VHIS seeks to offer consumers an additional choice, so that the VHIS-insured can choose to use private healthcare services when in need. The Scheme offers a Standard Plan with basic standardised features for the insured, including –
 - (a) guaranteed renewal rights, despite changes to the health conditions of the insured, up to the age of 100;
 - (b) no lifetime benefit limit;
 - (c) cover for Pre-existing Conditions not known at time of joining; and
 - (d) cover for day case procedures like endoscopy provided medically necessary, etc.

The Scheme also allows VHIS Providers to offer “Flexi Plans” with enhanced protection for the insured provided generally all protection under a Standard Plan is preserved.

3. The Scheme is administered by HHB. Insurance companies seeking to offer VHIS-compliant products must first register as a VHIS Provider; the Standard Plan, along with Flexi Plans if offered, must each be certified as VHIS-compliant Certified Plans before so marketed. Applications for registrations and certifications started on **1 December 2018**.
4. The Scheme has been fully launched, i.e. offered to consumers, as from **1 April 2019**. Premium paid on Certified Plans on or after 1 April 2019 may be eligible for tax deductions.

Scheme Documents

5. VHIS Providers must comply with all the scheme rules set out below (collectively referred to as “Scheme Documents”) –
 - (a) **Registration Rules for Insurance Companies under the Ambit of the VHIS** –

Insurance companies must be successfully registered with HHB as VHIS Providers before they are allowed to sell Certified Plans.

- (b) **VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template** – The policy terms and benefits of all Certified Plans – whether as Standard or Flexi Plans, must be based on this template.
- (c) **Product Compliance Rules under the Ambit of the VHIS** – All insurance plans must be certified by HHB according to these Rules before they can be marketed as Certified Plans.
- (d) **Code of Practice for Insurance Companies under the Ambit of the VHIS** – VHIS Providers must comply with the required practices stated in this Code which covers, among others, product offering, migration, sales and marketing, cooling-off period, and underwriting.

6. The Scheme Documents are non-statutory in nature. They should not supplant or conflict with any applicable statutes, laws, rules, regulations, codes or guidelines.

7. HHB may review and amend/update the Scheme Documents on a need basis. HHB may also offer clarification or elaboration on certain parts of the Scheme Documents (say, in the form of Frequently Asked Questions). Such information will not form part of the Scheme Documents but will provide guidance on the interpretation and/or elaboration.

8. HHB reserves the final right to –

- (a) interpret the Scheme Documents, including the right to determine the meaning of the rules in both English and Chinese versions and to resolve inconsistency, if any, between the two versions of the same Scheme Document; and
- (b) grant exemption from compliance with part of the Scheme Documents under exceptional circumstances.

Any determination made by HHB is conclusive.

Enquiries

9. Enquiries about the VHIS may be addressed to the VHIS Office of HHB via vhis_enquiry@healthbureau.gov.hk.

**Code of Practice
for Insurance Companies under the Ambit of
the Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme**

Health Bureau

Version as at 1 July 2022

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1. Background

Objectives

- 1.1 This Code of Practice for Insurance Companies under the Ambit of the Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme (“Code”) is intended to –
- (a) set out the required conduct and practices to supplement the “VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template”;
 - (b) enhance transparency and accessibility of the VHIS market segment so as to assist consumers to make proper comparison among the VHIS-compliant Plans certified by HHB (“Certified Plans”) and exercise informed choices;
 - (c) ensure fair treatment to consumers;
 - (d) facilitate compliance with the minimum requirements of the VHIS; and
 - (e) facilitate claim for tax deduction for the qualifying premiums paid by Policy Holders of VHIS policies.

Principles

- 1.2 The above objectives are to be achieved having regard to –
- (a) the policy objectives of the VHIS;
 - (b) the need to observe the principles of fair trade and fair competition; and
 - (c) the need to strike a reasonable balance among consumer protection, consumer choices, commercial viability and market flexibility.

Application

- 1.3 This Code applies to all insurance companies (“Company” or “Companies”) registered with HHB as VHIS Providers that are allowed to sell Certified Plans.
- 1.4 In the event that a Company ceases to be registered as a VHIS Provider, it is still required to continue to renew the policies issued under the Certified Plans according to the relevant requirements as stated in Part 4 of the VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template. As far as these policies are concerned, the Company is bound to continue to comply with this Code.

Relevant regulations and guidelines

1.5 Where appropriate, this Code should be read in conjunction with any applicable statutes, laws, rules, regulations, codes or guidelines, including but not necessarily limited to –

- (a) Laws of Hong Kong, e.g.
 - (i) Insurance Ordinance (Chapter 41);
 - (ii) Inland Revenue Ordinance (Chapter 112);
 - (iii) Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Chapter 486);
 - (iv) Competition Ordinance (Chapter 619);
 - (v) Prevention of Bribery Ordinance (Chapter 201); and
 - (vi) Anti-Money Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Ordinance (Chapter 615);
- (b) Guidelines and corresponding Interpretation Notes issued by the Insurance Authority (“IA”), e.g.
 - (i) Guideline on the Use of Internet for Insurance Activities (GL 8);
 - (ii) Guideline on the Corporate Governance of Authorised Insurers (GL 10);
 - (iii) Guideline on Underwriting Long Term Insurance Business (other than Class C Business) (GL 16);
 - (iv) Guideline on Cooling-off Period (GL 29);
 - (v) Guideline on Medical Insurance Business (GL 31);
 - (vi) Code of Conduct for Licensed Insurance Agents; and
 - (vii) Code of Conduct for Licensed Insurance Brokers;
- (c) Codes and Guidelines issued by the Hong Kong Federation of Insurers (“HKFI”), e.g.
 - (i) The Code of Conduct for Insurers;
 - (ii) Best Practice on the Use of Genetic Test Results;
 - (iii) Best Practice on Standardising Underwriting Questionnaire for Individual Indemnity Hospital Insurance Plans; and
 - (iv) Direct Marketing, e.g. circular on “Recent convictions under the direct marketing regime” issued on 12 October 2015;

and

(d) Codes and Guidelines issued by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Personal Data, e.g.

(i) New Guidance on Direct Marketing.

1.6 Companies bound by this Code should continue to comply with the applicable statutes, laws, rules, regulations, codes or guidelines.

Role and responsibility of HHB

1.7 The Voluntary Health Insurance Scheme Office (“VHIS Office”) of HHB is responsible for administering the VHIS and handling enquiries and complaints related to the compliance of the VHIS, enforcing VHIS-specific provisions under this Code and making referrals to other authorities or organisations including IA as necessary.

1.8 For greater transparency and accountability, HHB reserves the right to disclose in public and report to the Legislative Council updates as necessary on the implementation status of the VHIS and this Code.

Role of IA

1.9 In accordance with the Insurance Ordinance (Chapter 41), IA is responsible for regulating and supervising the insurance industry for the promotion of the general stability of the insurance industry and for the protection of existing and potential policy holders. One of its major functions is to promote and encourage the adoption of proper standards of conduct and prudent business practices by authorised insurance companies.

1.10 Complaints that may amount to suspected “misconduct” of insurance companies as defined under section 41P of the Insurance Ordinance (Chapter 41) may be referred to IA.

1.11 IA may also provide guidance to the insurance industry on businesses relating to individual IHIP (whether they are Certified Plans or otherwise).

2. Product availability for application

Principles

- 2.1 The Standard Plan should be widely available for application.
- 2.2 Availability of Flexi Plans should hinge on market initiatives. Proper flexibility should be allowed to promote product innovation, competition and choices.

Requirements

Availability of Certified Plans for new application

- 2.3 Companies are required to make available a Standard Plan duly certified by HHB for new application at all times when they are registered as a VHIS Provider.
- 2.4 Companies are allowed to offer Flexi Plans or not, and the number of Flexi Plan on offer is not restricted. After offering a certified Flexi Plan in the market, the Company concerned is allowed to cease receiving applications for such Flexi Plan at its discretion, but is required to continue to renew the policies issued under the Certified Plans according to the relevant requirements as stated in Part 4 of the VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template.

New application

- 2.5 Companies are required to consider applications for Certified Plans in relation to persons to be insured who are –
 - (a) Hong Kong residents¹; and
 - (b) aged between 15 days and 80 years².
- 2.6 Companies are required to consider applications for Certified Plans that involve –
 - (a) more than one Policy Holder per policy; or

¹ Including holders of Hong Kong Identity Card, and children who are Hong Kong residents and under the age of 11.

² This requirement may be exempted for the Certified Plans of which the product design is targeted at particular age groups, such as people in younger ages.

(b) Policy Holder and Insured Person not being the same person, unless a Company adopts Underwriting practices that do not accept (a) and/or (b) above. In such cases, the Company should explain the reason to the consumers, consistently apply the relevant practices, and ensure that the relevant information is readily accessible at least through their company websites.

2.7 Companies are not allowed to receive applications for Certified Plans that involve more than one Insured Person per Certified Plan coverage.

2.8 All applications for Certified Plans are subject to Underwriting. Companies are allowed to impose Premium Loading and/or Case-based Exclusion(s) when accepting an application, declining an application, or postponing handling of an application due to missing information.

Plans for renewal

2.9 For policy holders who have signed up for existing individual IHIP policies before the implementation of the VHIS³, the Company concerned should offer them a Standard Plan or a Flexi Plan option for renewal (see Section 3 for details).

2.10 For Policy Holders who have signed up for the existing Standard Plan policies, the Company concerned should offer the Standard Plan for renewal, but is allowed to offer Flexi Plans as an additional option(s) for renewal.

2.11 For Policy Holders who have signed up for the existing Flexi Plan policies, the Company concerned should offer the Flexi Plan for renewal. The Company should also offer the Standard Plan as the fall-back renewal option if a Policy Holder refuses to accept the Flexi Plan offered for renewal.

2.12 Companies should ensure that the plans offered for renewal are duly certified on the date of policy renewal according to Part 4 of the VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template.

³ Unless otherwise specified, existing individual IHIP policies in this document refer to those policies effective on or before 31 March 2019.

Offering of other insurance plans

- 2.13 Companies are allowed to offer other insurance plans to the applicants of Certified Plans. However, Companies are not allowed to require uptake of such other insurance plans as the prerequisite for accepting applications for Standard Plan. In other words, uptake of other insurance plans must be optional for the Standard Plan applicants.
- 2.14 The restriction in Section 2.13 does not apply to Flexi Plans.
- 2.15 Companies are not allowed to offer any insurance plan with product design contradictory with the VHIS objectives to the applicants of Certified Plans as the prerequisite for accepting application. A pertinent example is an insurance plan offering cash benefit payable only upon the use of public healthcare services in Hong Kong which contradicts with the VHIS objective to relieve the public healthcare system.
- 2.16 Where a consumer takes out both a Certified Plan and another insurance plan, the respective premiums charged and any discount provided should not be intended by the Company to contravene the relevant laws on tax deduction for Certified Plans particularly the definition of qualifying premiums (see Inland Revenue Ordinance (Chapter. 112) for details).

Plans targeting at particular age groups or client groups

- 2.17 Subject to HHB's approval, Companies are allowed to offer Flexi Plans that are targeted at particular age groups (e.g. people in younger ages) or client groups (e.g. members of the same association). Under these circumstances, the Companies concerned are allowed not to consider applications from people not fitting the definition of the targeted age groups or client groups. Nevertheless, the Companies concerned are required to renew the policies issued under the Certified Plans according to the relevant requirements as stated in Part 4 of the VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template, irrespective of whether the Policy Holders or Insured Persons continue to fit the definition of targeted age groups or client groups upon policy renewal.
- 2.18 If any forms of discounts, gifts or other privileges offered to the Policy Holders or Insured Persons will or may be withdrawn when the Policy Holders or

Insured Persons no longer fit the definition of targeted age groups or client groups upon policy renewal, Companies should make this known to the consumers during the selling process and upon enquiry.

3. Migration arrangement

Principles

- 3.1 Policy holders who have signed up for existing individual IHIP policies before the implementation of the VHIS (“existing IHIP policy holders” in short) are entitled to a one-off Migration facilitation offered by the relevant Company concerned. Companies should commit to offering each such existing IHIP policy holder a VHIS-compliant product option as soon as possible after the Company has registered with the Government as a VHIS Provider. This commitment is open for ten years since the full implementation of the VHIS on 1 Apr 2019.
- 3.2 The Migration arrangement(s) should be transparent and fair to the existing IHIP policy holders.
- 3.3 Companies are under no obligation to offer Migration facilitation to policy holders other than the existing IHIP policy holders, estimated to be around 2.3 million in numbers in 2016⁴.

Requirements

- 3.4 Companies should provide the following Migration arrangements to their existing IHIP policy holders –
 - (a) Same plan with VHIS features incorporated, without Re-underwriting –
 - (i) Under this arrangement, existing IHIP policy holders will be offered the same plan with the incorporation of VHIS features for renewal, which may be a Standard Plan or a Flexi Plan. No Re-underwriting is allowed⁵. In other words, though the Standard Premium of the plan may be adjusted by the Company, no premium adjustment based on change in health condition of individual insured person is allowed. However, if an existing IHIP policy holder does not accept the Standard Plan or Flexi Plan so offered, his/her IHIP policy may be terminated;

⁴ The corresponding number of insured persons is about 2 million in 2016, with the difference from 2.3 million being due to the fact that some people hold more than one policy.

⁵ Except in cases where the existing policy provisions do not provide renewal guarantee.

- (ii) Companies are required to offer all existing IHIP policy holders belonging to the same Portfolio⁶ the same Certified Plan for renewal. This Migration principle of offering the same Certified Plan for a group on a Portfolio basis is designed to avoid unfair practices upon renewal;
- (iii) If the plan offered is a Flexi Plan, Companies are required to allow the existing IHIP policy holders, who decline the offer, to renew their policies into the Standard Plan policies; and
- (iv) The Waiting Period for Unknown Pre-existing Conditions under the policy terms and conditions of the plan after Migration is counted from the inception date of the existing IHIP policy;

and/or

- (b) Different plan with VHIS features incorporated, subject to Re-underwriting –
 - (i) Under this arrangement, existing IHIP policy holders will be offered a different plan incorporating VHIS features, which may be a Standard Plan or a Flexi Plan. If existing IHIP policy holders opt to switch to the new Certified Plan, the existing IHIP policies will not be renewed. Re-underwriting is allowed which may be carried out for each policy or selected policies in the same Portfolio. However, if the Company wishes to carry out Re-underwriting for selected policies only, the criteria of selection for Re-underwriting should not be based on whether an insured person has made claims previously;
 - (ii) Companies are required to offer all existing IHIP policy holders belonging to the same Portfolio the same new Certified Plan. This Migration principle of offering same Certified Plan for a group on a Portfolio basis is designed to avoid unfair practices upon the switching to the new Certified Plan;
 - (iii) Companies are required to allow existing IHIP policy holders to opt to stay insured with the existing IHIP policies according to the existing policy provisions;
 - (iv) If the Company rejects an application after Re-underwriting or the existing IHIP policy holder concerned refuses to accept the application result and Underwriting decision, the Company is required to allow him/her to stay insured with the existing IHIP policies according to the existing policy provisions;
 - (v) The Waiting Period for Unknown Pre-existing Conditions under the policy terms and conditions of the plan after Migration is counted from the inception date of the new policy, or an earlier date offered by the Company; and

⁶ See Annex B for the definition of Portfolio.

(vi) In any case, Companies are required to offer at least the Standard Plan for all existing IHIP policy holders.

- 3.5 There is no restriction on the number of designated Certified Plans to be offered to the same Portfolio.
- 3.6 The cooling-off period in this Code applies to the Migration arrangement in Section 3.4(b), whilst not mandatory for all policy renewals including the Migration arrangement in Section 3.4(a). Details about the cooling-off period are provided in Section 4.14 to Section 4.15 and **Annex A**.
- 3.7 Companies should make known to their existing IHIP policy holders of the availability of Migration arrangements and the associated Underwriting arrangement through at least one accessible means, such as company website, email notification or letter of notification.
- 3.8 Companies should provide easily accessible channels with trained staff to handle enquiry about Migration arrangements.

4. Sales and marketing

Principle

4.1 Companies should provide clear, accurate, non-misleading and easily accessible information of the VHIS and Certified Plans to consumers for them to make informed choices.

Requirements

Accuracy of information

4.2 Companies should ensure that all sales and marketing materials, including but not limited to contents on the company website, leaflets and other printed and online materials, are –

- (a) accurate and in a non-misleading manner;
- (b) in Chinese and English (except for social media and advertisement);
- (c) in plain language; and
- (d) provided with available access to complete information in case complete information cannot be readily available due to space constraints (e.g. printing of website address for full details of information on advertisement or leaflets).

4.3 Companies should ensure consumers, Policy Holders and Insured Persons can easily distinguish terms and benefits under Certified Plans from non-VHIS products across all sales and marketing materials.

Access to information

4.4 In the course of marketing Certified Plans, Companies and their sales representatives should exercise due diligence in explaining the key product and premium information of Certified Plans to consumers.

4.5 Companies should provide an easy access to essential information so that consumers can easily enquire about the information of the VHIS and the Certified Plans, e.g. –

- (a) Companies' registration status as a VHIS Provider;

- (b) Product and premium information of Certified Plans on offer;
- (c) Underwriting factors, material facts and information of consumers for Underwriting purpose;
- (d) Eligibility for tax deduction; and
- (e) Complaint handling procedures.

Examples of easy access include company website, communications with sales representatives and service representatives, and enquiry telephone hotline.

Company participation in the VHIS

- 4.6 Upon successful registration as a VHIS Provider, Companies should disclose their registration status to consumers at least through their company websites.
- 4.7 Upon cessation of registration as a VHIS Provider, insurance companies should immediately disclose this change to consumers at least through their company websites.

Product information

- 4.8 Companies should make known to consumers an up-to-date list of Certified Plans available at least through the company website.
- 4.9 For each Certified Plan, Companies should disclose the following product information –
 - (a) Whether the plan is a Standard Plan or a Flexi Plan;
 - (b) The certification status with the certification number issued by HHB;
 - (c) The policy terms and conditions and the benefit schedule;
 - (d) The enhanced and exempted features vis-à-vis the Standard Plan in the case of a Flexi Plan;
 - (e) The restrictions on territorial scope of cover, Lifetime Limit, healthcare services providers and ward class, if any, in the case of a Flexi Plan; and
 - (f) The option about Deductible and Coinsurance, if any, in the case of a Flexi Plan.

Premium information

4.10 Companies should disclose the following premium information of each Certified Plan –

- (a) Standard Premium Schedule (showing rates excluding levy collected by IA) by age, gender and other factors (e.g. smoking habit) at least through the Company’s website;
- (b) Definition of age (last birthday, next birthday or nearest birthday);
- (c) How premium discount if any (e.g. no claim discount) operates in broad terms;
- (d) Levy collected by IA (or link to the relevant webpage); and
- (e) Other fees and charges (or link to the relevant webpage), if any.

4.11 If Companies will or may cease offering any forms of discounts, gifts or other privileges to the Policy Holders or the Insured Persons under certain circumstances (e.g. the circumstances related to the Flexi Plans targeted at particular age groups or client groups as stated in Section 2.18), Companies should explain the relevant arrangements to the consumers during the selling process and upon enquiry.

Disclosure obligation for Underwriting

4.12 Companies should inform applicants of their obligation to disclose personal information and material facts for Underwriting, and the possible consequences of material non-disclosure, misrepresentation and fraud.

4.13 Where Companies stipulate in the VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template that the Companies may withhold part of premium refund for reasonable administration charges, the Companies should explain the relevant practices and calculation to the applicants upfront.

Cooling-off arrangements

4.14 Companies should inform applicants that under the Standardised Policy Terms and Conditions, the Policy Holder has the right of cancelling the policy with full refund of paid premium during the cooling-off period. The cooling-off period gives VHIS Policy Holders a chance to re-think within a reasonable period of time their decision to purchase a Certified Plan, and obtain a full refund of premium paid if no benefit

payment has been made, is to be made or impending. The cooling-off period is applicable to all Certified Plans⁷.

4.15 The cooling-off period lasts for 21 days (or longer if offered by Companies) after the Delivery of the policy or the cooling-off notice to the Policy Holder or the Policy Holder's nominated representative, whichever is the earlier. (See **Annex A** for the details of cooling-off period and cooling-off notice).

Period of cover

4.16 Subject to request from the applicant and acceptance by the Company, the first Policy Year may last for less than 12 months. In such event, the Company concerned should explain the following to the consumers during the selling process and upon enquiry accordingly –

- (a) That the benefit limits and cost-sharing requirements of the shortened first Policy Year should not be affected, including –
 - (i) the benefit coverage, benefit amount and benefit limits as shown in the Benefit Schedule;
 - (ii) Coinsurance; and
 - (iii) Deductible;
- (b) That the Waiting Period for Unknown Pre-existing Conditions should not be affected (i.e. the Insured Person can enjoy 25% reimbursement for unknown Pre-existing Conditions upon renewal after the first Policy Year which is less than 12 months); and
- (c) Whether the calculation of discounts (e.g. no claim discount) will be affected, if any.

⁷ Except those offered for renewal, including renewal under the Migration arrangement stated in Section 3.4(a).

Territorial scope of cover

4.17 Companies should explain the following to the consumers during the selling process and upon enquiry –

- (a) All benefits described in the Standard Plan are applicable worldwide except for psychiatric treatment; and
- (b) For Flexi Plans with restrictions on territorial scope of cover,
 - (i) the definition of regions with restrictions and the benefit adjustment rules; and
 - (ii) the reduction must not apply to the Basic Benefits of the Flexi Plans, i.e. the coverage equivalent to the Standard Plan⁸.

Choice of healthcare services provider

4.18 Companies should explain the following to the consumers during the selling process and upon enquiry –

- (a) All benefits described in the Standard Plan are not subject to any restriction in the choice of healthcare services providers; and
- (b) For Flexi Plans with restrictions in the choice of healthcare services providers,
 - (i) the list of selected healthcare services providers; and
 - (ii) the restrictions must not apply to the Basic Benefits of the Flexi Plans, i.e. the coverage equivalent to the Standard Plan⁹.

Choice of ward class

4.19 Companies should explain the following to the consumers during the selling process and upon enquiry –

- (a) All benefits described in the Standard Plan are not subject to any restriction in the choice of ward class; and
- (b) For Flexi Plans with restrictions in the choice of ward class,
 - (i) the targeted ward class, and the details of benefit adjustment upon voluntary choice of higher ward classes;

⁸ See Section 1(a), Part 6 of the VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template for details.

⁹ See Section 1(c), Part 6 of the VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template for details.

- (ii) the Company will guarantee that the benefit adjustment in (i) does not apply in the event of involuntary ward upgrade; and
- (iii) the Company will guarantee that in the event of voluntary ward upgrade, the adjustment must not apply to the Basic Benefits of the Flexi Plans, i.e. the coverage equivalent to the Standard Plan¹⁰.

Deductible and other Coinsurance

4.20 Companies should explain the following to the consumers during the selling process and upon enquiry –

- (a) The Coinsurance arrangement of Prescribed Diagnostic Imaging Tests under Standard Plan; and
- (b) The Coinsurance and Deductible arrangements approved by HHB for eligible Flexi Plans, if any.

Eligibility for tax deduction

4.21 Subject to the rules on tax deduction to be promulgated by the Government, Companies should inform the consumers of eligibility of the Certified Plans for claiming tax deduction in the selling process and upon enquiry.

¹⁰ See Section 1(d), Part 6 of the VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template for details.

5. Application, underwriting and issuance of policies

Principles

- 5.1 Companies should inform or make known to the applicants of their rights and obligations in the applications and disclosure of personal information in accordance with the VHIS Certified Plan Policy Template, and the reasons for the Underwriting decision and application result.
- 5.2 The Underwriting process and practice that Companies adopt should be fair, objective, and consistently applied when assessing prospective Insured Persons with similar risk.

Requirements

Collection and use of information in the application documents

- 5.3 In designing the Underwriting questions for any application documents (including the application form, questionnaires, evidence of insurability, any documents or information submitted in relation to such applications), Companies should ensure that –
- (a) the type and amount of personal information obtained from applicants for the Insured Person are relevant and sufficient for application processing and Underwriting;
 - (b) the application form is clear and succinct such that it can be easily understood by an average applicant (e.g. use of plain and jargon-free language, legible fine prints);
 - (c) the questions are specific, relevant and easy to respond to such that all material facts essential to Underwriting can be effectively collected (e.g. how questions should be answered are explained with illustrations);
 - (d) the inquired facts are within a well-defined period, including the period after the time of submission of applications and before the Policy Issuance Date or the Policy Effective Date (whichever is the earlier);
 - (e) the inquired health related information is well defined in accordance with the Best Practice on Standardising Underwriting Questionnaire for Individual Indemnity Hospital Insurance Plans issued by the HKFI and the Standardised Underwriting

Questionnaire prescribed under the Best Practice is used in obtaining health related information when handling applications for VHIS Certified Plans¹¹;

- (f) important information is prominently displayed and highlighted as appropriate to draw the attention of applicants (e.g. disclosure of health conditions to the best knowledge of the applicant, and possible consequences of non-disclosure); and
- (g) sufficient time should be given for applicants to provide information which is not immediately available.

Disclosure of cooling-off rights on application form

- 5.4 Companies should announce cooling-off rights on the application form by prominently displaying a statement (see **Annex A**) immediately above the space for signature and where applicable clearly explained to applicants by insurance intermediaries.
- 5.5 The statement should be prominently displayed using a legible font size which is no smaller than the font size used for any other declaration on the policy application form. This requirement applies irrespective of whether the policy application form is paper, electronic or in some other format.
- 5.6 The statement should be communicated in the same language(s) as are used for all other sections of the application form.

Due process in underwriting

- 5.7 Upon the receipt of personal information of the Insured Person at the time of submission of applications that is material to Underwriting, Companies should assess the risks according to its Underwriting practice which should be fair, objective and consistently applied to assess applicants with similar risk.
- 5.8 Companies should make known to the applicants the health and non-health factors in general terms that may affect its Underwriting decision. Where the Underwriting involves risk assessment associated with occupation grouping and Place(s) of Residence, Companies should make known to the applicants the

¹¹ As from 1 January 2022, Companies are mandated to adhere to the Best Practice on Standardising Underwriting Questionnaire for Individual Indemnity Hospital Insurance Plans when handling applications for VHIS Certified Plan coverage.

classification involved and implications to the Underwriting decision, including the rate of Premium Loading if applicable.

- 5.9 Where the Underwriting decision involves imposition of Case-based Exclusion(s), Companies should ensure that the scope of exclusion is clearly defined and specific to the underwritten information. Companies should apply Case-based Exclusion(s) on a particular health condition instead of the whole body part or signs and symptoms where possible.
- 5.10 Companies are allowed not to disclose information about their Underwriting practices that are proprietary and sensitive.

Notification and explanation of application results

- 5.11 Companies should inform applicants of the application results within a reasonable time upon the completion of Underwriting. In the event that additional time is required for handling applications, Companies should notify applicants the delay of application results and, where necessary, the additional information required for processing the application.
- 5.12 Companies should explain to applicants the application results based on the Underwriting decisions and, upon applicants' request, provide written notice for such explanation. In the event that the reported health conditions lead to Premium Loading and/or Case-based Exclusion(s) or decline of application, Companies should notify applicants –
- (a) The rationale of applying Premium Loading and/or Case-based Exclusion(s), or decline of application;
 - (b) Details of the Premium Loading and/or Case-based Exclusion(s) being applied (e.g. amount of loading attributable to different factors, health conditions resulting in such exclusion, extent of health condition/body part being excluded, possible complications that may be excluded from coverage, and whether exclusion is temporary or permanent); and
 - (c) Risk class information and the applicable Premium Loading for risk factors such as smoking habit, occupation or Place(s) of Residence where they are considered at the time of Underwriting.
- 5.13 Companies should provide easily accessible channels with trained staff for enquiry about and appeal against the application results or Underwriting decisions.

Issuance of policies and notification of cooling-off rights

- 5.14 Companies should ensure the policies are delivered to the Policy Holders (or the nominated representatives of the Policy Holders) within 9 days of the date of issue of the policy (extend to the next working day if the last day of such 9-day period is not a working day). “Date of issue” under this Section means the date on which the Company having accepted an application for insurance by the Policy Holder, creates the document that is Policy Holder’s policy.
- 5.15 The cooling-off period is to be drawn to the attention of the Policy Holder, by means of –
- (a) a reminder to be included with the policy when the policy is delivered; and
 - (b) a cooling-off notice to be delivered to the Policy Holder (or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder) by the Company within 9 days of the date of issue of the policy (extend to the next working day if the last day of such 9-day period is not a working day).
- 5.16 In the event that the cooling-off notice as stated in Section 5.15(b) is delivered with the policy to the Policy Holder (or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder) by the Company directly, such cooling-off notice can be considered as have served as the reminder as stated in Section 5.15(a) provided that all necessary information required in Section 4 of **Annex A** are included in the notice.
- 5.17 Details of cooling-off period are provided in Section 4.14 to Section 4.15 and **Annex A**.

6. After-sales services

Principle

6.1 Companies should provide effective after-sales services to assist their Policy Holders to understand their rights under the Certified Plans, and handle complaints unique to Certified Plans.

Budget certainty and claimable amount estimate

6.2 Upon receipt from Policy Holders the estimated charges provided for non-emergency surgical procedures to be performed¹², Companies should provide to the Policy Holders upfront claimable amount estimates for the whole course of surgical procedures with reference to the insurance coverage.

6.3 Companies should inform Policy Holders that the claimable amount estimates remain estimates and do not constitute a liability. Claim decision will depend on the submission of all supporting documents as required for claim assessment in accordance with the policy terms and conditions and benefit entitlement in the Policy Year. The final claimable amounts and out-of-pocket expenses will be subject to the actual bill amounts and breakdowns as stated in the invoices or receipts issued by healthcare services providers.

6.4 If there is an option of higher benefits upon the use of selected healthcare services providers, Companies should inform the Policy Holders when providing the claimable amount estimate that the claimable amount may be subject to change if the Policy Holders use other healthcare services providers.

6.5 If the claimable amount estimate is subject to benefit reduction or limitation in relation to the regions where the eligible medical services are incurred, the choice of healthcare services provider or the choice of higher ward class, Companies should inform the Policy Holders of the impact when providing the claimable amount estimate.

¹² According to the Private Healthcare Facilities Ordinance, the licensee of a private hospital must put in place a budget estimate system to provide estimates of the fees and charges of the hospital for prescribed treatments and procedures.

Change of Policy Holder

- 6.6 Pursuant to the Standardised Policy Terms and Conditions, Companies should consider the request from Policy Holders for application of transfer of ownership at the time of policy renewal without any administration charge on the Policy Holder or transferee.
- 6.7 Companies should not refuse any application by the Policy Holders for the transfer of ownership to –
- (a) the Insured Person if he has reached the age of 18 years;
 - (b) the parent or guardian of the Insured Person if he is under the age of 18 years; or
 - (c) any person whose familial relationship with the Insured Person is accepted by the Company according to its prevailing Underwriting practices.
- 6.8 As the right of Policy Holders under Section 6.7(c) depends on the Underwriting practices of individual Companies, Companies should make known to the Policy Holders about their practices and ensure that the relevant information is readily accessible by Policy Holders at least through their company websites.
- 6.9 Upon the change of Policy Holder, Companies should as soon as possible issue the new Policy Schedule or Supplement(s) to the new Policy Holder.

Facilitating claim for tax deduction

- 6.10 Companies should provide proof of premium payment to assist Policy Holders to claim tax deduction for the qualifying premiums of Certified Plans. The proof must show clearly the information required by the Inland Revenue Department for claiming tax deduction, including –
- (a) the marketing name and certification number of the Certified Plan;
 - (b) the policy number;
 - (c) the names of the Policy Holder and the Insured Person;
 - (d) the amount of premium net of discount paid for each Insured Person of the Certified Plan;
 - (e) the benefit coverage period that the premium covers; and
 - (f) the premium payment date (i.e. the date when the premium is collected by the Company).

- 6.11 The proof of premium payment may be in the form of premium receipt or annual premium statement¹³. In any case, the proof has to be issued to the Policy Holders on or before end of April every year for the premium paid during the preceding 12 months ending March of the same year.
- 6.12 In the event of premium refund, Companies should provide within four weeks after making refund the relevant proof to the Policy Holders concerned. The proof should show clearly –
- (a) the marketing name and certification number of the Certified Plan;
 - (b) the policy number;
 - (c) the names of the Policy Holder and the Insured Person;
 - (d) the amount of premium refunded;
 - (e) the benefit coverage period that the refunded premium covers;
 - (f) the date of refund; and
 - (g) the breakdown showing the date and amount of the premiums paid in respect of which the refund is made¹⁴.
- 6.13 The required practices stated in Section 6.10 to Section 6.12 are subject to revision upon the advice from the Inland Revenue Department.

Handling of enquiries and complaints about the VHIS

- 6.14 Companies should have in place internal procedures and provide easily accessible channels with trained staff to handle enquiries and complaints about the VHIS and Certified Plans.
- 6.15 Companies should make known to Policy Holders the availability of the following channels for making enquiries and lodging complaints at least through their company website –
- (a) VHIS Office of HHB – for issues specific to the VHIS including product availability, features of Certified Plans and compliance with this Code;

¹³ Companies should provide an annual premium statement showing all premium payment and refund records for the year of tax assessment ending March to the Policy Holders on request, despite the issue of premium receipt for each payment.

¹⁴ In the event of premium refund, Companies should remind the Policy Holder to notify the Commissioner of Inland Revenue of such refund within three months from the date of refund if the Policy Holder has claimed tax deduction of the refunded premium.

- (b) IA – for issues concerning the general conduct of insurance companies and intermediaries; and
- (c) Inland Revenue Department – for issues concerning claims for tax deduction.

6.16 Companies should also make known to their Policy Holders the availability of alternative dispute resolution means, including but not limited to mediation and adjudication through the Insurance Complaints Bureau, and other means of mediation and arbitration as mutually agreed between Policy Holders and Companies, before a dispute is referred to a Hong Kong court.

Annex A - Details of disclosure of cooling-off rights and cooling-off period

1. Calculation of cooling-off period

The cooling-off period is the period of 21 days (or longer if offered by the Company) immediately following the day of the Delivery to the Policy Holder or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder, of :

- (a) the policy; or
- (b) the cooling-off notice,

whichever is the earlier. For the avoidance of doubt, the day of Delivery of the policy or the cooling-off notice is not included for the calculation of the 21 day (or longer if offered by the Company) period. However, if the last day of the 21 day (or longer if offered by the Company) period is not a working day, the period shall include the next working day.

2. Statement in relation to cooling-off period in the policy application form

The statement in relation to cooling-off period in the application form is as follows –

“Cancellation Rights and Refund of Premium(s) within Cooling-off Period

I understand that I have the right to cancel the policy and obtain a refund of any premium(s) and levy paid by giving a written notice to [the name of the Company]. I understand that to exercise this right, the notice of cancellation must be [signed by me and] received directly by [name of the Company] at [address of the Company’s Hong Kong Main Office] [see Notes (a) and (b) below] within the cooling-off period. I understand that the cooling-off period is the period of [insert a period of not less than 21 days] days immediately following either the day of delivery of the policy or the cooling-off notice to me or my nominated representative (whichever is the earlier). I understand that the cooling-off notice is a notice that will be sent to me or my nominated representative by [name of the Company] to notify me of the cooling-off period around the time the policy is delivered.”

Notes

- (a) Companies may adjust the above wording and specify the manner in which the written notice to cancel the policy is to be given by a Policy Holder. For example, a written notice may be sent by the Policy Holder to the Company by email.

(b) The address of the Company must be a Hong Kong address.

3. Cooling-off notice

- 3.1 In order for the cooling-off period to commence within an appropriate time-frame of the date of issue of the policy, Companies are required to deliver the cooling-off notice directly to the Policy Holder (or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder) within 9 days of the date of issue of the policy (extend to the next working day if the last day of such 9-day period is not a working day) (“9 day period”). “Date of issue” under this section means the date on which the Company having accepted an application for insurance by the Policy Holder, creates the document that is Policy Holder’s policy.
- 3.2 Companies should include the following information in the cooling-off notice –
- (a) the availability of his/her policy and the expiry date of the cooling-off period¹⁵;
 - (b) the right to re-consider his/her decision to purchase the Certified Plan within the cooling-off period;
 - (c) the right to obtain a refund of premium and levy paid if the policy is cancelled within the cooling-off period;
 - (d) the contact information of the customer service department of the Company (including the address, service hotline number and email address); and
 - (e) a reminder that if the Policy Holder (or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder) does not receive the policy within 9 days after Delivery of the cooling-off notice, he/she should contact the Company.
- 3.3 In the event that the cooling-off notice is delivered with the policy to the Policy Holder (or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder) by the Company directly, such cooling-off notice may be considered as have served as the reminder of cooling-off period as stated in Section 4 of this **Annex A**.

¹⁵ The expiry date can also be a description that clearly informs the Policy Holder of when the Cooling-off Period shall end.

4. Reminder of cooling-off period at policy issuance

- 4.1 A clear reminder of the cooling-off period must be given to the Policy Holder together with the policy at the time the policy is delivered.
- 4.2 The Policy Holder must also be advised of the right to call the Company direct if he/she wishes to further understand the cooling-off period.
- 4.3 Guidance on the appropriate wording which may be used for this reminder is given below:

“Your Right to Change Your Mind

If you are not fully satisfied with this policy,
you have the right to change your mind.

We trust that this policy will satisfy your needs. However, if you are not completely satisfied then you should –

- (a) return the policy, if applicable, and
- (b) provide us with written notice, [signed by you], requesting cancellation.

The policy will then be cancelled and the premium(s) paid and levy will be refunded.

These cancellation rights are subject to the following conditions –

- (a) Your request to cancel the policy must be [signed by you and] received directly by our office at [address of the Company’s Hong Kong Main Office] within [21, or longer if offered by the Company] days immediately following the day of delivery of the policy or the cooling-off notice to you or your nominated representative (whichever is the earlier). (The cooling-off notice is the notice sent to you or your nominated representative (separate from the policy) notifying you of your right to cancel within the stated 21 (or longer if offered by the Company) day period.
- (b) no refund can be made if a claim payment under the policy has been made prior to your request for cancellation.

Should you have any further queries, you may contact [contact information of the Company (including the address, service hotline number and email address)] and we will be happy to explain your cancellation rights further.”

Note : Companies may adjust the above wording and specify the manner in which the written notice to cancel the policy is to be given by a policy holder. For example, a written notice may be sent by the policy holder to the Company by email.

4.4 The reminder –

- (a) may be provided by way of a letter from the Company delivered directly to the Policy Holder (or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder) with the Delivery of the policy, or a statement included by the Company on the policy jacket or policy cover, taking into account the specificities of the medium used;
- (b) must be communicated in the same language(s) as the policy and other communications/documents which are (or have been) provided or sent to the policy holder in relation to the policy; and
- (c) must be prominently displayed using a legible font size.

5. Obligations of Company

- 5.1 Before a prospective Policy Holder signs the policy application form, the Company should inform him or her of the right to cancel the policy within the cooling-off period and the expiry date of the cooling-off period¹⁶. The Company should ensure the licensed insurance intermediary to inform the prospective Policy Holder the same if the policy application form is to be signed via the licensed insurance intermediary.
- 5.2 Where the policy is to be delivered by the Company directly to the Policy Holder (or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder), the Company should deliver the policy within 9 days of the date of issue of the policy. “Date of issue” under this Section means the date on which the Company having accepted an application for insurance by the Policy Holder, creates the document that is Policy Holder’s policy.
- 5.3 Where the policy is to be delivered to the Policy Holder (or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder) via a licensed insurance intermediary,
 - (a) the Company should provide the policy to the licensed insurance intermediary sufficiently in advance of the end of the 9 day period, to enable the licensed

¹⁶ See note 14.

insurance intermediary to deliver the policy to the policy holder (or the nominated representative of the policy holder) within the 9 day period; and

- (b) on receipt of the policy, the licensed insurance intermediary should use all reasonable endeavours to deliver the policy to the Policy Holder (or the nominated representative of the Policy Holder) within the 9 day period.

5.4 Specify in its licensed insurance intermediaries' training materials and internal guidelines that its insurance intermediaries must comply with the requirements set out in this **Annex A**.

5.5 Devise internal control measures to ensure and provide proof that –

- (a) policies are delivered to Policy Holders (or the nominated representatives of Policy Holders) within the 9 day period; and
- (b) cooling-off notices are delivered to the Policy Holders (or the nominated representatives of the Policy Holders) within the 9 day period.

If the last day of the 9 day period is not a working day, the period shall include the next working day.

5.6 Keep records of proof referenced in Section 5.5 (e.g. copies of the acknowledgements of receipt of policy Delivery, if applicable). In case of a complaint or dispute, the Company may be required to produce evidence to show that the policy or the cooling-off notice was delivered (and when the Delivery took place).

5.7 Maintain records in respect of any cases of complaints or disputes where Policy Holders have sought to cancel their policies and obtain refund of premiums after the cooling-off period has expired, but such requests have been refused.

5.8 Where a Company conducts insurance business through a digital distribution channel (e.g. webpage/mobile app), in relation to policies to which this Code applies which are promoted, offered or purchased through that digital channel, the Company should use appropriate tools to ensure compliance with the requirements of this Code.

Annex B - Glossary

1. Case-based Exclusion(s)

The exclusion of a particular sickness or disease from the coverage of Certified Plan that may be applied by the Company based on a Pre-existing Condition or factors affecting the insurability of the Insured Person.

2. Certified Plans

Individual IHIP certified by HHB as VHIS-compliant, including the Standard Plan and Flexi Plans.

3. Coinsurance

A percentage of eligible expenses the Policy Holder must contribute after paying the Deductible (if any) in a Policy Year. For the avoidance of doubt, Coinsurance does not refer to any amount that the Policy Holder is required to pay if the actual expenses exceed the benefit limits of the Certified Plan.

4. Deductible

A fixed amount of eligible expenses that, in a Policy Year, the Policy Holder must pay before the Company shall reimburse the remaining eligible expenses.

5. Delivery

The delivery of the policy and Policy Schedule or the cooling-off notice to the Policy Holder, or to nominated representative of the Policy Holder, by any the following means:

- (a) by hand;
- (b) by post (including registered post); or
- (c) by electronic means.

Regardless of the means of delivery is used, it is the responsibility of the Company, to have sufficient proof of delivery and the timing of delivery.

6. Flexi Plan

Any individual IHIP under the VHIS framework with enhancement(s) to any or all of the protections or terms and benefits that the Standard Plan provides to the Policy Holder and the Insured Person, subject to the certification by HHB. Such plan shall not contain terms and benefits which are less favourable than those in the Standard Plan, save for the exception as may be approved by HHB from time to time.

7. Government

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government.

8. Indemnity Hospital Insurance Plan

An insurance plan with classification of contract of insurance which –

- (a) falls within Class 2 (sickness) of Part 3 of Schedule 1 to the Insurance Ordinance (Chapter 41) (or simply Class 2(sickness)), which provides for benefits in the nature of indemnity against risk of loss to the Insured Person attributable to sickness or infirmity; or
- (b) combines long term business and additional business of the nature in relation to Class 2 (sickness) following paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 1 to the Insurance Ordinance (Chapter 41), for example by writing an insurance policy with both life and medical coverage or writing a medical rider attached to and forming part of a life insurance policy.

9. Insured Person

Any person whose risks are covered by the Certified Plan, and named as the “Insured Person” in the Policy Schedule.

10. Migration

The process for existing individual IHIP policy holders and insured persons to transfer their plans to Certified Plans voluntarily.

11. Place(s) of Residence

The jurisdiction(s) in which a person legally has the right of abode. A change in the Place(s) of Residence refers to the situation where a person has been granted the right of abode of additional jurisdiction(s), or has ceased to have the right of abode of existing jurisdiction(s). For the avoidance of doubt, a jurisdiction in which a person legally has the right or permission of access only but without the right of abode, such as for the purpose of study, work or vacation, will not be treated as a Place of Residence.

12. Policy Effective Date

The commencement date of the part of policy issued under the Certified Plan which is specified as “Policy Effective Date” in the Policy Schedule.

13. Policy Holder

The person who is a legal holder of the Certified Plan policy and is named as the “Policy Holder” in the Policy Schedule.

14. Policy Issuance Date

The date of first issuance of the Certified Plan.

15. Policy Schedule

A schedule which sets out, among others, the Policy Effective Date, renewal date, the name and the relevant particulars of the Policy Holder and the Insured Person, the eligible benefits, premium and other relevant details.

16. Policy Year

The period of time the Certified Plan is in force. The first Policy Year shall be the period from the Policy Effective Date to the day immediately preceding the first renewal date as specified in the Policy Schedule (both days inclusive) within one year period; and each subsequent Policy Year shall be the one year period from each renewal date.

17. Portfolio

All policies of the same terms and conditions and benefit schedule. As an illustrative example, if an existing IHIP has three levels of coverage, namely “General ward”, “Semi-private” and “Private”, and each with an optional supplementary major medical (“SMM”) rider, there will be six Portfolios as shown below –

- (a) Portfolio one – “General ward”;
- (b) Portfolio two – “Semi-private”;
- (c) Portfolio three – “Private”;
- (d) Portfolio four – “General ward + SMM”;
- (e) Portfolio five – “Semi-private + SMM”; and
- (f) Portfolio six – “Private + SMM”.

18. Pre-existing Condition

Any sickness, disease, injury, physical, mental or medical condition or physiological degradation, including congenital condition, that has existed prior to the Policy Issuance Date or the Policy Effective Date in respect of the Insured Person, whichever is the earlier. An ordinary prudent person should be reasonably aware of a Pre-existing Condition, where –

- (a) it has been diagnosed;
- (b) it has manifested clear and distinct signs or symptoms; or
- (c) medical advice or treatment has been sought, recommended or received.

19. Premium Loading

Additional premium on top of the Standard Premium charged by the Company to the Policy Holder according to the additional risk assessed for the Insured Person.

The level of Premium Loading is correlated to the risk class determined through Underwriting. One common form of Premium Loading is in a percentage of the Standard Premium.

20. Standard Plan

The insurance plan with terms and benefits equivalent to the minimum compliant product requirements of the VHIS, which are from time to time published and subject to regular review by the Government.

21. Standardised Policy Terms and Conditions for Certified Plans

The terms and conditions that apply to the Standard Plan and the part of Flexi Plans tantamount to the Standard Plan.

22. Standard Premium

The basic premium for the coverage under an insurance plan charged by the Company to the Policy Holder on an overall Portfolio basis, which may be adjusted in accordance with the age, gender and/or lifestyle factors of the Insured Person.

Standard Premiums also vary from one product to another and from one Company to another, depending on the cost factors and pricing strategy.

23. Underwriting / Re-underwriting

In the context of health insurance, the process by which a Company evaluates the risk of an Insured Person. The Underwriting result helps the Company decide whether to accept the application, and whether to introduce Premium Loading and/or Case-based Exclusion(s) in the insurance policy to manage risk.

Re-underwriting refers to the re-evaluation by a Company of the risk of an individual after he is insured with a policy.

24. Waiting Period for Unknown Pre-existing Conditions

A period after issuance of a VHIS policy during which the Policy Holder is not eligible for, partially or fully, benefit coverage of Pre-existing Conditions that the Policy Holder is not aware of and will not reasonably have been aware of. For the Standard Plan, the waiting period is set at three Policy Years, with reimbursement ratio at 0%, 25% and 50% for the first three Policy Years respectively. A shorter waiting period or higher reimbursement ratio is encouraged for Flexi Plans.