



# Japan National Council of Social Welfare

## Annual Report 2020-2021

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### FEATURE ARTICLE

#### **COVID-19 and Social Welfare -community society where people interact and support each other-**

COVID-19 pandemic has steeply spread all over the world since the end of January 2020, and it still has a big long-lasting influence on society, economy, and social welfare. The total number of positive has reached 1,725,901, and that of the dead has recorded 18,336 (as of November 18, 2021).

To prevent the spread of epidemic, many political measures were taken, and because of the effect of the request to voluntarily refrain from business mainly for restaurants, etc., many people lost their jobs, and consequently, became poor. Social distancing and restrictions of outing reduced the relationship of people in a community, and mutual aid among community residents declined.

Even under such severe situation, social welfare workers in Japan continue their hard working to protect life and daily life of people in need, people who need various support, and people who use social welfare services. Facing risk at the front line, they provide essential services and accompany people with difficulties. That's their work, and that's their mission.

### Welfare Life Fund Special Loan

#### ~Welfare Life Fund Special Loan for people in need due to COVID-19 pandemic

Welfare Life Fund is a loan system originally for people with low income, people with disabilities, or the elderlies. Its purposes are to support life of those people financially, and to promote their social participation and home welfare service.

This loan system is implemented by council of social welfare in prefectures as a main body, and operated by municipal councils of social welfare as a point of contact. It is a loan system for any households of low income, the elderlies, or people with disabilities in need of financial support to cover various kinds of expenses; for example, the cost for vocational training, scholarship to study at a high school or a university, cost for home care services, living expenses during unemployment, etc. It depends on the situation and needs of that household. In some cases, community welfare volunteers (*Minsei-iin*) of that community may take care of those households along with the financial support by this loan system, which is a very special feature of this loan system.

For people (household) who became poor because of unemployment or shutdown of business due to COVID-19 pandemic, prefectural/municipal councils of social welfare started Welfare Life Fund Special Loan on March 25, 2020. In this Special Loan, loan conditions of Welfare Life Fund (emergency small loans, total support loans) were mitigated. According to the strong intention of Japanese government, its term was extended for six (6) times (as of November 15, 2021). The number of application for this Special Loan is over 2.9 million, and the total amount of application reached 1.29 trillion yen (as of October 23, 2021). Unprecedented response is required.

It is true that a lot of people in need were saved by this Special Loan. On the other hand, it is also a big challenge for us how to support staff members of councils of social welfare who are working day and night with firm sense of mission for the sake of people in need despite of their physical and mental fatigue.

In case of the Association of Community Workers of Councils of Social Welfare in Kansai, they conducted a national survey to grasp a situation of staff members of councils of social welfare who are in charge of Welfare Life Fund Special Loan. After that, they established “Voice of 1,000 Field Staff Members Working in Councils of Social Welfare Project” to contribute to the discussion on future image Welfare Life Fund, and conducted an urgent questionnaire. Its result was reported in July 2021.

### **Status of the implementation of Welfare Life Fund Special Loan**

(based on the data from March 25, 2020 to October 23, 2021)

	No. of Application	No. of Accepted	Loan Amount
Emergency Small Loans	1,445,000	1,423,000	265.48 billion yen
Total Support Loans	989,000	964,000	721.38 billion yen
Total Support Loans (repeat)	536,000	515,000	268.63 billion yen
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,970,000</b>	<b>2,902,000</b>	<b>1,255.49 billion yen</b>

### **Result of the Questionnaire about Work on Welfare Life Fund Special Loan**

(the Report on Questionnaires to Staff of Councils of Social Welfare about Welfare Life Fund Special Loan)

Question	(1) Absolutely Yes	(2) Yes	(1) + (2)
Do you feel any stress or danger?	38.3%	47.6%	85.9%
Do you feel any physical/mental disorders?	12.6%	36.4%	49.0%
Have you ever thought leaving your job?	6.1%	15.9%	22.0%
Do you feel that the work volume has increased?	30.6%	41.4%	72.0%
Are you anxious about the risk of infection?	30.9%	46.5%	77.4%
Have you experienced any abuse or insult from clients?	18.4%	44.6%	63.0%
Do you have a dilemma that you cannot take time to provide thoughtful consultation for clients?	32.4%	43.7%	76.1%
Have you every experienced any depression as you sympathized with your client?	12.2%	43.9%	56.2%
Do you have any doubt about the effectiveness of this system?	48.6%	41.9%	90.5%
Do you have any doubt about frequent changes of contents or ways of notification to the practical site?	53.0%	37.8%	90.8%
Do you have any anxiety and dissatisfaction as you cannot focus on your original work?	36.0%	41.2%	77.2%
Have you ever felt helpless as none of on-site issues or intentions were taken into account?	34.2%	38.3%	72.5%

From the result of the urgent questionnaire, the difficult situation at the site of consultation and support related to Welfare Life Fund Special Loan became clear as well as the emotional conflict of staff members working for the independence support of clients was unveiled.

Originally, the feature of Welfare Life Fund is its system in which both financial support and consultation support are combined to help independence of people (household) in need; however, in this Special Loan, the financial support is more emphasized than consultation support, and consequently, the function of consultation support is almost ignored. That is why more than 90% answered “Yes” to the questions of “Do you have any doubt about the effectiveness of this system?” and “Do you have any doubt about frequent changes of contents or ways of notification to the practical site? From this questionnaire, it became obvious that many of them were struggling with responding to repeated changes as well as a dilemma of not being able to take time to provide thoughtful consultation.

Further, the result of the questionnaire also revealed:

- 85.9% felt some stress or danger.
- 72.0% felt that the work volume had increased too much.
- 77.4% were anxious about the risk of COVID-19 infection.
- 21.1% said that there were some staff members who got physical/mental damage during the Special Loan work.
- 5.9% said that there were some staff members who left their job during the Special Loan work.

They are all serious matters.

In the future, management of loan and calling of loan repayment of approx. 3 million cases will be significant challenges. JNCSW has petitioned Japanese government for several times about the management of Special Loan based on opinions from workers of councils of social welfare all over Japan, and especially about the repayment exemption, JNCSW requested to the government to clarify the condition of the repayment exemption as soon as possible for the sake of independence support for debtors. Finally in February 2021, it was suggested that any households exempted from resident tax at the time of repayment deadline would be exempted the repayment.

Based on these recent efforts related to Special Loan, it can be said that it is certainly an urgent challenge to discuss the way of income compensation in an emergency, the way to develop measures to support the independence of people in need, etc., and then, to reflect them in policy. In October 2021, “A study Group on How to Support People in Need Based on the Special Loan during COVID-19 Pandemic,” was established under JNCSW Policy Committee in which social welfare workers all over Japan participate. It will be responsible for supervision of Special Loan, and will discuss the following things so that it can make necessary recommendation or petition:

- ① how to support people in need in an emergency,
- ② ideal support for people in need in the future (recommendation to the government, etc.).

### **Promotion of Social Welfare Activities under COVID-19 Pandemic**

**~to maintain relationship and to support people’s life**

In February 2020, JNCSW addressed JNCSW Social Welfare Vision 2020 as the common compass of all social welfare workers in Japan for 10 years, in which “the prosperous welfare society where we live together” was advocated as our common goal. To realize this Vision, concrete activities of JNCSW was formulated as “JNCSW Action Policies (7 important items)” in September 2020. They are now under promotion.

Incredible effect of COVID-19 pandemic on economy and society hasn’t ceased yet, and it is time to create and realize social welfare activities in the era of “with COVID-19” as well as “post COVID-19.” Today, social distancing is required everywhere, and it makes person-to-person activities/service less or almost none. Consequently, community welfare activities and volunteer activities have to be discontinued or voluntarily refrained. Under such circumstances, councils of social welfare all over Japan have begun various activities/measures to maintain relationship among people, and developed new efforts to establish novel relationship in communities together with community residents, volunteers, NPOs, Minsei-iin/Jido-iin (community/child welfare volunteers), social welfare foundations, social welfare institutions, etc. towards the realization of “a prosperous welfare society where we live together.”

For the restarting of activities, JNCSW organized some points to keep in mind as “How to promote social welfare activities and volunteer activities by community residents considering the infection control of COVID-19” in July 2020. Also, together with ten (10) national organizations working for life support in communities as well as promotion of volunteer/civil activities, JNCSW collected and distributed information about various efforts during COVID-19 pandemic through “National Action for the sake of prosperous “relationship” in the future.” Further, JNCSW Community Welfare Promotion Committee published *Practical Case Studies of Councils of Social Welfare for the Sake of Keeping Relationship even under COVID-19 Pandemic*, in which valuable cases of twenty-four (24) councils of social welfare were introduced, as a reference to lead more inventive activities in each community in line with the actual situation of that community.

In 2021, JNCSW developed its activities under seven (7) priority items of its “Action Policy” based on “Social Welfare Vision.” To promote them, it is indispensable to collaborate more with our members, i.e., councils of social welfare, Minsei-iin/Jido-iin (community/child welfare volunteers), social welfare foundations, social welfare institutions, etc. Also, it is expected to facilitate effective/multilayered cooperation and alignment with health workers, medical workers, educators, legal personnel, business enterprises, NPOs, volunteers, etc.

### **Social Welfare Foundations and Institutions Standing against COVID-19 Pandemic** **~to protect service users, and to maintain community welfare**

While the fury of COVID-19 pandemic was sweeping all over Japan, social welfare foundations and institutions tried hard to maintain community welfare by continuing their services for anyone who needed them with strong commitment despite of their difficulties. Many of social welfare foundations and institutions severely implemented infection control to prevent the occurrence and spread of COVID-19, and even though it occurred, they could cease it in a short time. On the other hand, it was also reported that it would be difficult to take additional infection control.

According to the data of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) based on information materials from local governments, the total number of cases in which more than two (2) persons were infected in one (1) place reached 12,468 as of November 15, 2021, and among them, 3,430 cases (27.4% of the total) occurred in social welfare institutions.

### 3,430 Cases in Social Welfare Institutions

Classification	Number of Cases
Social welfare institutions for the aged	2,046
Social welfare institutions for people with disabilities	361
Social welfare institutions for children	1,023

※ Number of cases reported as of 0:00, November 15, 2021, MHLW)

A survey by National Council of CEOs of Social Welfare Corporations, targeting its members, revealed that the most important point of countermeasures for COVID-19 was the infection control measures. In general, the risks of infection and aggravation are rather high among users of social welfare services. Therefore, in addition to thorough hand washing and disinfection, all social welfare foundations and institutions concentrated to conduct on their infection control mainly through health management of users and staff members. As a result, comparing to other countries, the spread of infection of COVID-19 in social welfare institutions in Japan is rather low.

On the other hand, while the effect of COVID-19 pandemic has been prolonged, the anxiety about the crash of social welfare service including nursing care or childcare has been amplified, and the fatigue of social welfare workers dedicating themselves to their workplace has become serious. Further, harmful rumor or misinformation about institutions, where infection occurred, has spread, and consequently, some complain or accuse those institutions, and some treat people working for those institutions or their families discriminately without any reasons. Against these tendencies, National Council of CEOs of Social Welfare Corporations takes several measures as follows;

- to appeal to the press about the damage caused by harmful rumors,
- to appeal how social welfare foundations/institutions and their workers contribute to the well-being of users and community,
- to appeal the necessity of correct understanding and warm support.

The Mission of Social Welfare Foundations under COVID-19 Pandemic (examples)
As “main bearers” of social welfare services, social welfare foundations will support service users as well as “life” of community residents to survive this national crisis, COVID-19 pandemic.
Efforts to support life of users
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Despite of various difficulties, social welfare services, including residential care service, day care service, home visit, etc. are continued. Support for users is provided with strong sense of mission to protect their lives.</li> <li>➤ To continue social welfare services, collaborating with medical workers, etc., hygiene management, health management of staff members and their families, etc. are conducted strictly.</li> <li>➤ To promote QOL of users and to reduce physical/mental stress as much as possible, virtual visit utilizing ICT or open-air visit in a garden are introduced for family visit.</li> </ul>
Efforts to support “life” of community residents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Social welfare services are continuously provided as a part of indispensable social infrastructure, especially to support childcare or care for family members of essential workers and others who devote themselves to support social life.</li> <li>➤ Support for families with various problems including DV, child abuse, etc.</li> <li>➤ Monitoring service or safe confirmation for the elderlies or people with disabilities living alone by home visit or phone calling.</li> </ul>

Under COVID-19 pandemic, many of social welfare foundations and institutions found a difficulty in management as well as many of social welfare workers found various difficulties in their job. Yet, despite facing difficulties, social welfare foundation and institutions continue to provide social welfare services for anyone who need them, and to support safe and sound life of users and community people. That’s their role, that’s their mission.

JNCSW will do its best to support those who work on the frontline of social welfare service, and to protect community welfare. For that, JNCSW will deepen the relationship and widen the collaboration with its member organizations including classified councils more. Also, JNCSW will appeal strongly to various government organizations including MHLW to convey the voice of social welfare workers so that it will be reflected in political measures.