

Promoting Healthy Ageing



Booklet



There are enormous opportunities – both social and economic – to be gained from promoting healthy ageing. Ensuring people remain healthy into old age by developing policies to promote healthy ageing fosters well-being and independence, and supports the labour force participation of older people. Creating an environment that helps people prevent poor health, engage actively in their communities, and supports older people when they do get sick or need care is critical to ensuring countries can achieve healthy ageing.

However, population ageing and the rising share of old people in our societies will require many changes in our labour markets, cities, social policies, and particularly in our social care and health systems. Whilst population ageing should be embraced as one of the greatest achievements of modern life, failure to adapt policies appropriately could lead it to slow economic and social progress.

Promoting healthy ageing: What can G20 countries do?

Support prevention policies to avoid unhealthy behaviours before they take hold

- Promote targeted health and digital literacy interventions.
- Implement comprehensive policy packages to reduce harmful alcohol use, smoking, and overweight / obesity.

Develop and strengthen health and long-term care systems to provide good care to those who require it, while protecting them from excessive costs

- Strengthen the role of primary care systems to improve prevention efforts, co-ordination of care, and enable greater access to health services.
- Move towards universal health coverage (UHC) among countries that have not yet achieved it, ensuring adequate financial protection across the population.
- Better integrate health and social care services to improve care for people at home.

Encourage active participation in the community through age-friendly community initiatives and demand- and supply-side policies to encourage a healthier, longer working life

- Work across health and other sectors – including housing, transportation, and security services – to develop services and programmes that promote the autonomy of older people living at home, including those with dementia.
- Promote training and volunteer programmes that raise awareness and reduce stigma about dementia and other age-related issues throughout the broader society, including individuals, public services, and private business.
- Reduce incentives to retire early, promote lifelong learning and reward longer working lives, and promote age-diverse work cultures to tackle demand-side barriers to longer employment.

Population ageing: Transforming economic and social systems

More than one in eight people in the G20 is now 65 or older. In the coming decades, ageing will continue, and in many cases, accelerate. The share of the population aged 80 and older will nearly triple by 2050, rising to nearly one in twelve people in the G20.

Figure 1. The G20 is ageing fast



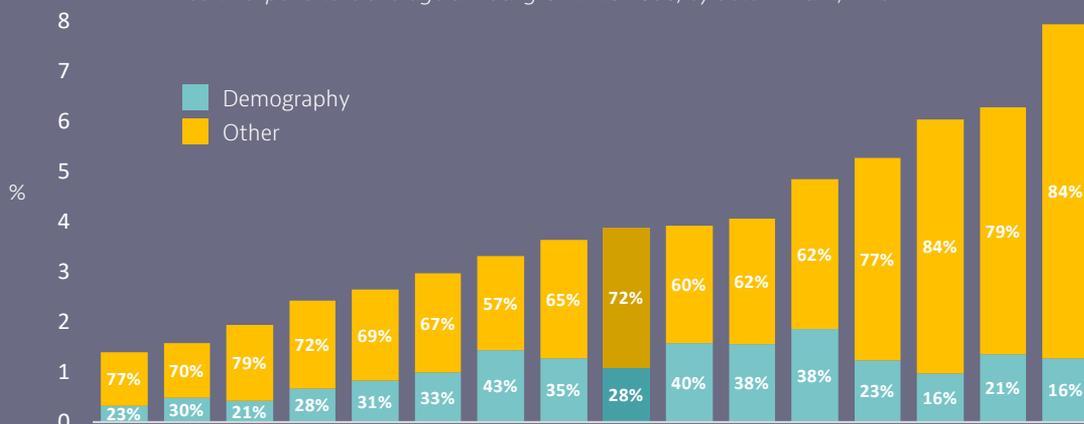
Population ageing and low birth rates mean that some countries, including Japan and Italy, have already begun to experience population decline. Current estimates suggest that Russia, Germany and China will join them by 2030, and South Korea and Brazil by 2050.

Expenditure on health is projected to continue to increase over the coming years. By 2030, health expenditure as a share of GDP across 15 G20 countries will increase from 8.7% of GDP in 2015 to 10.3% in 2030 if current trends continue.

Population ageing has significant implications for current economic and social structures: with a growing number of older people, the population needing greater medical and long-term care support is rising at the same time that the number of retirees per worker is also increasing. Keeping people healthy throughout their lives will reduce demand for health and long-term care services, while also allowing people to avoid leaving the workforce early due to poor health.

Figure 2. Demographic change is a contributor to rising health spending

Health expenditure average annual growth to 2030, by determinant, in %



OECD analysis based on data from UN World Population Prospects 2019 [Figure 1] and data and methodology from Lorenzoni et al 2019 [Figure 2]



Promoting healthy ageing has significant payoffs – for well-being and for the economy

Good health can extend the working lives of older adults by reducing the time spent out of work in poor health and health-related early retirement. Obesity, smoking, heavy alcohol use, and chronic diseases are all associated with lower rates of employment: OECD work shows that non-obese older adults between the ages of 50–59 are 22% more likely to be employed than those who are obese (OECD, 2016).

Healthy ageing strategies also help to mitigate some of the inequalities that develop and widen over the life course by preventing poor health before it begins. Recent OECD work showed that over the course of a career, bad health reduces lifetime earnings by 33% for men with low levels of education (OECD, 2017).

Successful risk reduction efforts can mitigate the serious and growing challenge dementia poses to G20 countries. Nearly 40 million people in the G20 live with dementia today – a number that will rise to more than 100 million by 2050 without effective prevention efforts and treatment breakthroughs.

Multisectoral interventions promoting age-friendly initiatives, including dementia-friendly communities, help to make communities more inclusive for all ages and can allow people to live more independently at older ages, improving quality of life while also reducing demands on formal long-term care systems.

Much poor health is preventable. New analysis from the OECD demonstrates that just halting any further rise in obesity would have a striking impact on health and economic outcomes. G20 countries could reduce premature mortality among people aged 50–70 by 1.3% annually between 2020 and 2050. Put in other terms, more than 4.3 million premature deaths could be averted across G20 countries between 2020 and 2050 if a further rise in obesity rates were halted.

Substantial savings to the health system could also be generated through preventing a further rise in obesity rates. Per-capita health expenditure would be on average 0.5% lower per year across G20 countries – resulting in annual health expenditure savings across G20 countries of more than USD PPP 11 billion per year.

Achieving sustainable and inclusive societies for all requires a life course approach

Implementing comprehensive policy packages that address health interventions as well as fiscal and regulatory measures are cost-effective and critical to generating behavioural changes and preventing non-communicable diseases. For example, a comprehensive policy package to tackle harmful alcohol use would avert roughly 10% of the entire burden of disease associated with harmful alcohol use in Germany while generating yearly savings to the health system of more than USD 300 million (OECD, 2015).

Currently, fewer than one in ten adults 75 years or older use the internet to search for health information in high-income G20 countries. Addressing barriers to health literacy among older populations and preventing the digital divide from compounding existing health inequalities will be essential to prevent unhealthy ageing.

Much more can be done to improve the quality of life of people living with dementia even in the absence of an effective treatment or cure. Initiatives such as dementia-friendly communities that take a whole-of-society approach reduce ageism while ensuring community-based services are accessible to those who need them. Many of these initiatives are still nascent, and there is considerable scope to scale up further initiatives.

Even with effective healthy ageing policies, not all poor health can be prevented, and health and long-term care services must be equipped to care well for older people if they do get sick. While some progress has been made, countries can do more to ensure health and social care services are available and better coordinated for people living at home, and the availability and quality of care facilities must also be improved.

The average number of retirees (those 50 and over not in the labour force) could increase by nearly 60% by 2050 if entry and exit patterns in the labour force do not change (OECD, 2019). A substantial proportion of this increase could be mitigated by strengthening older-age employment, delaying retirement, and encouraging employers to hire and retain older workers. Programmes that promote lifelong learning and skills development encourage people to stay engaged in their communities and work lives and are important to combatting social isolation, maintaining engagement, and preserving brain health.



References

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