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Future Trends Series - GR:REEN Project

Title of the report

Global Health and Aging

Area

Demography

Reporter

World Health Organization (WHO)

Type of the Reporter

International Organisation

Periodically updated?

No

First issued year

2011

Latest update

/

Official website

<http://www.who.int/en/>

Language available

English

Short summary

The report attempts to address population aging as a powerful and transforming demographic force, which has just begun to show the impacts it can have at the national and global levels. Looking ahead, it stresses on the changing relationship and critical link between global health and aging in order to raise awareness on a new demographic reality. This future scenario will require both rigorous and coordinated research to close gaps in our knowledge and action based on evidence-based policies.

Key trends

- Driven by falling fertility rates and remarkable increases in life expectancy, **population aging will continue, even accelerate**. The number of people aged 65 or older is projected to grow from an estimated 542 million in 2010 to nearly 1.5 billion in 2050 (188 per cent increase), with most of the increase in developing countries. The 85-and-over population is projected to increase 351 per cent between 2010 and 2050, while the population under age 65 is expected to reach a 22 per cent increase.
- **The global number of centenarians is projected to increase 10-fold between 2010 and 2050**; this group's longevity may increase even faster than current projections assume – previous population projections often underestimated decreases in mortality rates among the oldest old.

- The transition from high to low mortality and fertility is also meaning a **shift in the leading causes of disease and death**. By 2030, non-communicable diseases (such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes) are projected to account for more than one-half of the disease burden in low-income countries and more than three-fourths in middle-income countries. Infectious and parasitic diseases will account for 30 per cent and 10 per cent respectively, in low- and middle-income countries.
- **The potential economic and societal costs of non-communicable diseases** rise sharply with age and **have the ability to affect economic growth**.
- **115 million people worldwide will be living with AD/dementia in 2050**, with a markedly increasing proportion of this total in less developed countries.
- **The annual number of new cancer cases is projected to rise to 17 million** by 2020, and reach 27 million by 2030; a growing proportion of the global total will be found in the less developed world.
- **Aging is taking place alongside other broad social trends that will affect the lives of older people**, such as globalisation, the fact that people are more likely to live in cities, the evolution of technology and, finally, demographic and family changes, which means that there will be fewer older people with families to care for them.

Suggestions

- “The health and economic burden of disability can be alleviated by environmental characteristics that can determine whether an older person can remain independent despite physical limitations.” Indeed, the longer people can remain mobile and care for themselves, the lower are the costs for long-term care to families and society.
- Ensuring good child health can yield benefits for older people.
- With appropriate policies and programs people can remain healthy and independent well into old age and can continue to contribute to their communities and families.
- With declining support from families, society will need better information and tools to ensure the well-being of the world’s growing number of older citizens.

Methodology

Research from secondary sources and modelling

Reference to other trends reports? If yes, which reports?

LAFORTUNE G, BALESTAT G. Trends in Severe Disability among Elderly People. Assessing the Evidence in 12 OECD Countries and the Future Implications. OECD Health Working Papers 26. Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2007.