

World Health Organization Combats Ageism With a Global Campaign

By Sharon Cohen

The World Health Organization has launched a global campaign to combat ageism seeking to build a world for all ages by changing the way people think, feel, and act toward age and aging. The initiative in part has been spurred by a need to act now to generate a positive effect on individuals and society as populations around the globe age rapidly.

By 2050, the world's population aged 60 years and older is expected to double to nearly 2 billion people, up from about 900 million in 2015. Today, 125 million people worldwide are 80 years and older. By 2050, there will be approximately that many people, or about 120 million, in that age group living in China alone and 434 million people 80-plus worldwide. WHO, a United Nations agency focusing on promoting international health work and research, wants to address issues of ageism related to this expanding segment of the world population.

As part of its efforts, WHO has been investing in three areas:

- Gathering evidence on ageism (i.e. what it is, how it is experienced, how it is measured, its consequences and strategies to tackle it), and also on how to campaign to tackle ageism (i.e. what works, what doesn't work);
- Building a global coalition of stakeholders to lead the way towards a non-ageist world; and
- Raising awareness about the need to tackle ageism.

"A longer life brings with it opportunities, not only for older people and their families but also for societies as a whole," according to WHO. "Additional years provide the chance to pursue new activities such as further education, a new career, or pursuing a long neglected passion. Older people also

contribute in many ways to their families and communities. Yet the extent of these opportunities and contributions depends heavily on one factor: health."

WHO defines ageism as the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination toward people on the basis of age. "Ageism is highly prevalent, however, unlike other forms of discrimination, including sexism and racism, it is socially acceptable and usually unchallenged because of its largely implicit and subconscious nature," according to the WHO campaign.

The pace of populations aging around the globe are increasing dramatically. For example, France had 150 years to consider how it would adapt to the rise from 10 percent to 20 percent in its over-60 population. But Brazil, China, and India only have about 20 years to deal with similar growth in their populations' older adults.

The international group adopted a global strategy and action plan on aging and health in May 2016, encouraging its 194 member states to participate and share their progress on 10 indicators. In May 2018, WHO de-

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veloped a mid-term progress report focusing on those indicators and how countries have been addressing them. It found that 112 countries have a national focal point on aging and health, 45 percent of countries have a national policy on the issue and 88 countries have national legislation and enforcement mechanisms against age-based discrimination. (See chart below for the global status on these 10 metrics for progress.)

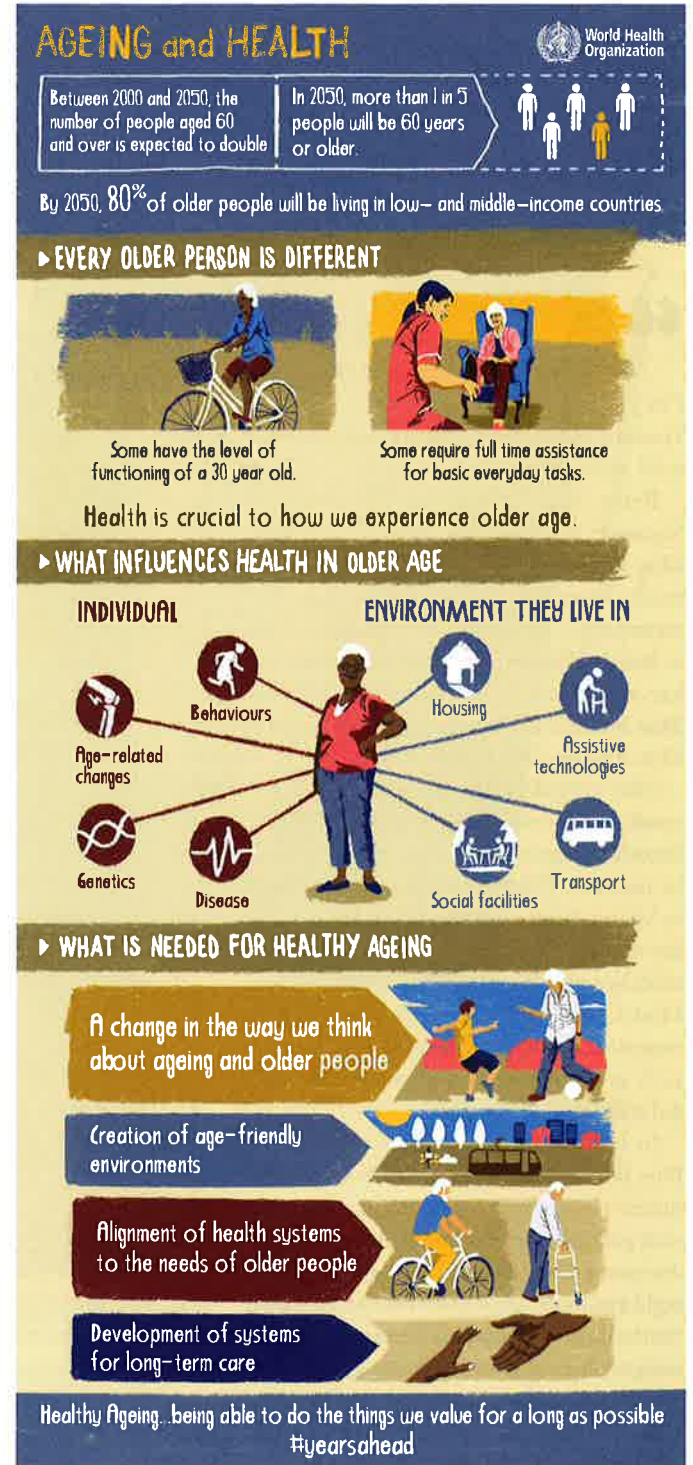
The group is set to discuss its global strategy and action plan on aging and health, including the campaign, during the 2019 World Health Assembly in May.

6 QUESTIONS SHAPED THE ANTI-AGEISM CAMPAIGN

1. What is the global prevalence of ageism?
2. What are the causes or determinants of ageism?
3. What are the consequences of ageism at an individual and at a societal level?
4. What strategies exist to effectively tackle ageism?
5. What are the available metrics to measure the different dimensions of ageism and its implicit and explicit expressions?
6. What are the most effective ways of building public understanding and expanding thinking about age and ageing?

10 MID-TERM PROGRESS INDICATORS PERCENT OF WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION'S 194 MEMBER COUNTRIES WITH:

1. **58%** A focal point on aging and health in the Health Department
2. **45%** National plans, policies, or strategies on aging and health
3. **45%** A national multi-stakeholder forum or committee on aging and health
4. **45%** National legislation and enforcement strategies against age-based discrimination
5. **19%** Legislation and regulations providing older adults with access to assistive devices from the WHO Priority Assistive Products List (who.int/phi/implementation/assistive_technology/low_res_english.pdf)
6. **14%** A national program to support activities in line with the WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities
7. **14%** National policies to support comprehensive assessments of the health and social care needs of older people
8. **41%** Long-term care policy, plan, strategy, or framework (stand-alone or integrated within an aging and health plan)
9. **28%** Cross-sectional, nationally representative, publicly available and anonymous individual-level data on older persons and their health status and needs collected since 2010
10. **18%** Longitudinal, nationally representative surveys (cohort or panel) on older persons and their health status and needs available in the public domain



AGEING and HEALTH World Health Organization

Between 2000 and 2050, the number of people aged 60 and over is expected to double. In 2050, more than 1 in 5 people will be 60 years or older.

By 2050, 80% of older people will be living in low- and middle-income countries.

▶ EVERY OLDER PERSON IS DIFFERENT

Some have the level of functioning of a 30 year old. Some require full time assistance for basic everyday tasks.

Health is crucial to how we experience older age.

▶ WHAT INFLUENCES HEALTH IN OLDER AGE

INDIVIDUAL (Behaviours, Age-related changes, Genetics, Disease) **ENVIRONMENT THEY LIVE IN** (Housing, Assistive technologies, Social facilities, Transport)

▶ WHAT IS NEEDED FOR HEALTHY AGEING

- A change in the way we think about ageing and older people
- Creation of age-friendly environments
- Alignment of health systems to the needs of older people
- Development of systems for long-term care

Healthy Ageing...being able to do the things we value for as long as possible #yearsahead

The World Health Organization rolled out a global campaign to combat ageism, including digital and printed educational materials to promote messages about aging and health.