VIRTUAL CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT REGIONAL ACTION PLAN ON HEALTHY AGEING IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC

12 May–4 June 2020
Virtual Meeting
MEETING REPORT

Virtual Consultation on the Draft Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific

Convened by:

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC

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NOTE

The views expressed in this report are those of the participants of the Virtual Consultation on the Draft Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific and do not necessarily reflect the policies of the conveners.

This report has been prepared by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific for Member States in the Region and for those who participated in the Virtual Consultation on the Draft Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific from 12 May to 4 June 2020.
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KEYWORDS: 
Aging / Health services for the aged / Healthy aging / Regional health planning
SUMMARY

Population ageing is occurring worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific Region has one of the largest and fastest-growing older populations in the world. Further, the pace of demographic change is accelerating as many younger countries are experiencing population ageing at a much faster rate than already-aged countries. Population ageing has many societal implications. However, experiences from aged countries suggest that taking early action can turn challenges into opportunities.

Following a high-level panel discussion on ageing at the seventieth session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2019, Member States requested WHO to develop a regional action plan for healthy ageing. Since then, WHO has consulted with experts, partners and colleagues in the Region and globally to develop an initial draft of the Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific: Turning Silver into Gold.

A consultation on the draft Regional Action Plan, which was initially scheduled on 28–29 April 2020 in Manila, Philippines, was replaced with a series of virtual meetings with countries due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak and subsequent travel restrictions imposed in most countries. These virtual consultations took place between 12 May and 4 June 2020. During these meetings, the Regional Office presented proposed key messages in the draft Regional Action Plan, and countries provided feedback to inform the next iteration of the document.

Overall, Member States agreed with the proposed action areas and recommendations. They especially supported the lifelong, multisectoral approach to promoting healthy ageing and changing the narrative of becoming old. To improve upon the comprehensiveness of the Regional Action Plan, some countries suggested adding recommendations to support older people with more complex health-care needs, including end-of-life care. Many countries also stressed the importance of fostering age-friendly environments and requested further guidance in this area. Finally, countries pointed out the importance of highlighting the diversity that exists among older people in terms of functional ability as well as their needs, interests and social environment.

Moving forward, the Regional Office will revise the draft Regional Action Plan to incorporate feedback received from the Member States. The next iteration of the document will be circulated to Member States for further comments.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Meeting organization

A series of virtual meetings were held from 12 May to 4 June 2020 to discuss the draft Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific. Countries and areas in the Region were grouped based on their time zone. For each meeting, opening remarks were provided by Dr Gundo Aurel Weiler, Director, Data, Strategy and Innovation (DSI) or WHO representatives. A pre-recorded keynote speech from Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, Chief Health Scientist, Ministry of Health, Singapore, was shown. Dr Hiromasa Okayasu, Coordinator, Healthy Ageing (AGE/DSI), provided an overview of the Regional Action Plan (Annex 1), followed by a discussion with participants.

The meeting agenda is available in Annex 2, and the list of participants is in Annex 3.

1.2 Meeting objectives

The objectives of the meeting were:

(1) to agree on key priorities and action points, especially how to implement the transformation of health systems and improvement of social environments in resource-limited settings;
(2) to exchange experiences from Member States on preparing for a healthy ageing society and include possible actions in the plan; and
(3) to collect feedback from Member States on the draft Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific and address any concerns regarding this plan.

2. PROCEEDINGS

2.1 Feedback from Member States

Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia and Singapore, 12 May 2020

- Some of the challenges associated with population ageing include the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), lack of support for family members to care for older people adequately, lack of appropriate social security systems to support older people and the shrinking workforce.
- Countries highlighted the importance of supporting older people to remain engaged in their communities, through either paid work or other forms of social participation.
- Countries noted that the initial draft of the Regional Action Plan was tailored to supporting “healthy” older people. More guidance may be needed to support people with more complex health-care needs.
- Countries agreed with taking a lifelong and multisectoral approach to promoting healthy ageing.
- Successful implementation of the Regional Action Plan would depend on obtaining political commitment and leadership, ensuring appropriate coordination across different levels of society, engaging the public in the decision-making process and changing the narrative on ageing.

China and Hong Kong SAR (China), 14 May 2020

- One of the challenges associated with population ageing is the growing number of people who require health-care services, which places a greater demand on the health-care system.
- Population ageing offers an opportunity for society to benefit from the contributions of people who are living longer, are healthier and are better educated.
- The needs of older people can be quite diverse as the functional capacity of older people can vary significantly. Therefore, the interventions proposed need to account for this diversity.
• Important areas of concern include the prevention and management of dementia (training of health-care providers, public education, improving referral and management systems) as well as promoting social participation (volunteer programmes, social clubs).
• Requested guidance and support on obtaining political commitment and implementing multisectoral action to promote healthy ageing.

Cambodia, Viet Nam, Mongolia and the Philippines, 21 May 2020
• Existing health and social systems may not be adequate to support an increasingly older population with an expected increase in NCDs.
• The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a significant societal transformation. Implications for older people need to be considered in developing the Regional Action Plan. For example, policies that restrict the movement of people may create barriers to accessing health and social care for older people.
• As people grow older, they may develop functional impairments. Therefore, environmental adaptations need to be made to ensure that the built environment is accessible to older people.
• Advancing research is important to determine appropriate actions to take to promote healthy ageing. This includes collecting data on subgroups of older people to provide tailored services and supports to meet the needs of different subpopulations.
• It is important to empower not only communities but also individuals to take ownership of their own health.

Palau, 25 May 2020
• Changing the public perception about ageing is a challenge given that views about ageing are often tied to culture. Further education is needed to address this challenge.
• Currently, there is a lack of research on older people. However, Palau is working to address this need by including questions related to the challenges that older people experience in their Community Health Assessment that will be rolled out this year.
• The Regional Action Plan should include additional guidance on promoting healthy living to people who do not have a chronic condition so that they can maintain their good health.
• In developing social innovations, it is important to identify local champions who can sustainably implement them in the community.
• Palau supports the lifelong approach to promoting healthy ageing and highlighted the importance of starting with younger age groups, given that ageing is a result of experiences accumulated over time.

Australia and New Zealand, 29 May 2020
• Addressing health inequities that exist across subpopulations is a priority, particularly through addressing the social determinants of health.
• New Zealand’s current healthy ageing strategy covers financial security and economic participation, health and social services, housing, social participation and connection as well as accessibility and age-friendly cities.
• Australia is currently looking at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services delivered through its primary health network, particularly for those at risk of poor health outcomes. This involves bringing together different sectors as well as people from the community to co-design solutions to address local problems.
• Countries highlighted the importance of taking a lifelong approach to promoting healthy ageing and starting the discussion with younger age groups.
• To promote multisectoral collaboration, data are needed to build a case and show different sectors the value of this approach and the importance of their various contributions. Identifying champions in different sectors is also helpful.

Marshall Islands, 4 June 2020
• The Marshall Islands has a relatively young population, but the rising burden of NCDs is a concern. Many people are ageing in poor health and cannot enjoy life after retirement.
• Improving the delivery and access of health-care services is a priority. Currently, the Marshall Islands does not offer universal access to health care, which can create financial barriers to accessing care.
• To better understand the needs of older people, it would be important to collect data on the proportion of older people in the outer islands compared to the urban centre and look at how their needs differ.
• The Marshall Islands, as well as other Pacific island countries, have a strong sense of community, an asset that should be leveraged.
• Including examples of healthy ageing initiatives from Pacific island countries in the Regional Action Plan would make the recommendations more relevant to Pacific island countries.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Conclusions

Overall, Member States agreed with the proposed action areas and recommendations in the current draft of the Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific. They especially supported the lifelong, multisectoral approach to promoting healthy ageing. To improve upon the comprehensiveness of the Regional Action Plan, some countries suggested adding recommendations to support older people with more complex health-care needs. Some countries asked for further guidance on fostering multisectoral collaboration. These recommendations will be considered in the next iteration of the Draft Regional Action Plan.

3.2 Recommendations

3.2.1 Recommendations for Member States

(1) Member States are encouraged to review the draft Regional Action Plan that was shared and send additional inputs to the Regional Office by the end of May.

3.2.2 Recommendations for WHO

(1) The WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific is requested to revise the draft Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific based on input from Member States and share the updated document with Member States by July.
ANNEXES

Annex 1. Draft structure of the Regional Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guiding principles</th>
<th>Future-oriented</th>
<th>Lifelong approach</th>
<th>Equity and gender</th>
<th>Multi-sectoral approach</th>
<th>Leveraging existing assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective 1: Transforming societies as a whole to promote healthy ageing through changing public perception and policies.</td>
<td>☐ Advocacy to eliminate age-based discrimination and create positive culture around ageing, by engaging older people in the decision making and implementation</td>
<td>☐ Advocacy for social transformation to address social determinants of health</td>
<td>☐ Health promotion including addressing the risk factors for NCDs</td>
<td>☐ Professional health systems to improve disease prevention and management and “accompany” people</td>
<td>☐ Research using disaggregated data to understand demographic trends, health status of subpopulations, impact of SDH and the needs of older people</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Monitoring and evaluation of healthy ageing programs, policies and health systems to understand impact, cost-effectiveness and sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 2: Transforming health systems to address chronic disease and factors contributing to health across the life</td>
<td>☐ Health care: services should ensure specific consideration of the needs of older people</td>
<td>☐ Long-term care services should be grounded in community to allow for ageing in place</td>
<td>☐ Social groups and services: opportunity for older people to participate socially in their communities</td>
<td>☐ Social innovation to promote age-friendly environments and inclusive societies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objective 3: Empowering communities to provide supports and services to older people</td>
<td>☐ Health care: services should ensure specific consideration of the needs of older people</td>
<td>☐ Long-term care services should be grounded in community to allow for ageing in place</td>
<td>☐ Social groups and services: opportunity for older people to participate socially in their communities</td>
<td>☐ Social innovation to promote age-friendly environments and inclusive societies</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 4: Fostering technological and social innovation to enable the health and social participation of older people</td>
<td>☐ Technological innovation to support older persons to maintain functional ability and social and labor participation</td>
<td>☐ Social innovation to promote age-friendly environments and inclusive societies</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective 5: Strengthening evidence on older people to inform programs, services and policies</td>
<td>☐ Research using disaggregated data to understand demographic trends, health status of subpopulations, impact of SDH and the needs of older people</td>
<td>☐ Monitoring and evaluation of healthy ageing programs, policies and health systems to understand impact, cost-effectiveness and sustainability</td>
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VISION

Healthier older people in the Western Pacific Region are thriving and contributing in their society (Turning Silver into Gold)
Annex 2. Meeting agenda

90-MINUTE VIDEO CONFERENCE

- Opening remarks (10 min)
- Video message by Professor Tan Chorh Chuan, Chief Health Scientist, Ministry of Health, Singapore (10 mins)
- Introduction and presentation from WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (30 min)
- Discussion (50 min)
- Summary and closing remarks

Discussion points:

- What are the societal implications of population ageing? (10 min)
  - What are the key challenges that population ageing imposes on society? How can these challenges be addressed/mitigated?
  - What are the key opportunities that population ageing may offer society? How can these opportunities be leveraged?
- What actions can be taken to promote the health of older people and foster greater social participation? (30 min)
  - How can society be transformed to realize the full potential of a growing ageing population? What are required policy changes?
  - How can the health system be transformed to ensure that people are ageing in good health?
    - What are key social determinants of health that impact healthy ageing and how can they be most effectively addressed?
    - What are some effective interventions for reducing NCD risk factors throughout the life-course?
    - How can we transform the health system to “accompany” people throughout their lives, rather than focusing on treatment of diseases?
  - How can older people be better supported to age in their homes and/or communities?
    - How to improve health services to meet the needs of older people?
    - What is the most feasible and effective way to provide long-term care support?
    - What kind of social services and activities should be offered?
    - How can the community engage older people in decision-making processes? How does the community coordinate different activities?
  - What kinds of social and technological innovations could be adopted to support ageing in place and foster social participation among older people?
  - What are the current gaps in data collection and research for older people? How can these be addressed?
- How can countries successfully implement actions outlined in the Regional Action Plan? (10 min)
  - What are some potential barriers to implementation?
  - What are key enablers to successful implementation?
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