

Northern Dimension Institute Policy Brief 4 - January 2019

Healthy Ageing Calls for a Holistic Approach

Population ageing is becoming a critical socio-economic challenge in the Northern Dimension (ND) area. This is due to exponentially increasing health and social care costs related to ageing, and the simultaneously reducing number of people in working age.

The ND Future Forum on Health¹ highlighted recent research results and evidence-based approaches related to the promotion of healthy ageing. The forum concluded that

*Healthcare and policy measures should build on a holistic understanding of health that considers simultaneously the physical, mental and social dimensions of health and well-being.

*Promotion of healthy ageing needs an inclusive and participatory approach that supports the elderly to contribute to their own quality of life and well-being, engages them in the design of supportive environments, and encourages them to be active members of the society.

*Transforming research knowledge into policies and practices requires active and continuous dialogue and co-creation among the researchers, professionals, and policy-makers.

¹ The Forum, organized by the Northern Dimension Institute, took place on 28 November 2018 in Vantaa, Finland. It brought together top researchers and policy- and decision-makers to discuss the future challenges of ageing societies and particularly managing healthy ageing. For more information visit <http://www.northerndimension.info/news/news/824-bridging-the-gap-between-the-evidence-based-knowledge-and-implementation-in-promoting-healthy-ageing>

EXPLORING THE NORTHERN DIMENSION

Ageing is a challenge and an opportunity

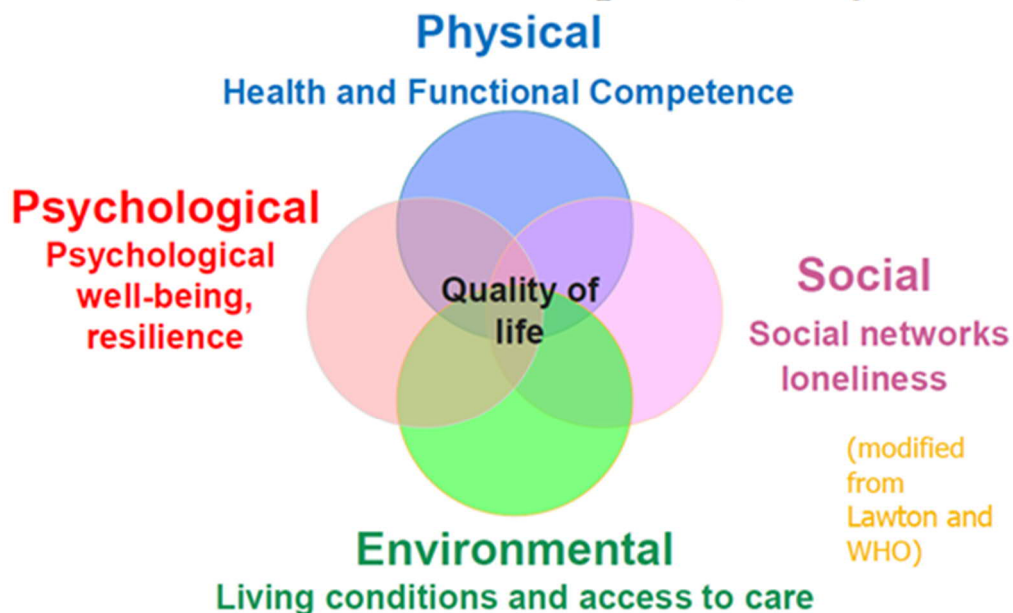
By 2020, the number of people aged 60 years and older will outnumber children younger than 5 years globally². This challenges ageing societies with increasing costs related to population ageing and with a growing need for health and social services, including those related to age-related diseases.

The maintenance of health and well-being of the ageing population is a burning policy issue in countries in the ND area, which are among the first ones to face this challenge. Solutions are needed to produce high-quality and cost-effective services for the elderly, and to encourage the citizens to take responsibility of their own health and wellbeing.

Tackling the challenges of ageing calls for viewing it not only as a burden but also as an opportunity. The concept of healthy ageing is about "*optimizing opportunities for good health, so that older people can take an active part in society and enjoy an independent and high quality of life*"³.

The promotion of healthy ageing calls for new types of research-based solutions that ensure access to individual health and social services, social activities, and engagement of the elderly in the design of age-friendly environments.

The multi-dimensional concept of Quality of Life



UEF // University of Eastern Finland

Marja Vaarama 21.11.2018

Picture 1

² World Health Organization. Ageing and health, key facts. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>

³ Swedish Institute of Public Health 2006: Healthy Ageing - A Challenge for Europe. <http://www.healthyageing.eu>

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Evidence-based solutions for promoting healthy ageing

The ND Future Forum on Health⁴, which gathered researchers, professionals, policy-makers and members of parliament, focused on evidence-based approaches on promoting healthy ageing. Such approaches have been developed, tested and trialed to address issues such as loneliness and mental health, and age-related diseases, and to create environments supportive for healthy aging.

Loneliness and mental health problems among elderly can be tackled with measures that ensure primary prevention and with meaningful activities that enhance self-efficacy, mobility, social contacts and healthy lifestyle. Such evidence-based measures include

- training medical staff to assess mental health of elderly in primary care,
- participatory group-based practices in care management, and
- enabling active participation of elderly in the society through volunteering activities.

Age-related diseases such as Type 2 diabetes and dementia can be prevented by holistic measures that support healthy lifestyles. Such measures proved as effective include

- For diabetes: A multi-level approach that combines the identification of individuals at risk, lifestyle interventions and environmental interventions that stimulate healthy choices
- For dementia: Multi-domain interventions that include healthy diet, exercise, cognitive training and vascular risk monitoring

Environments supportive for healthy ageing can be developed by measures that develop not only physical but also social environments of the elderly, including

- New intergenerational practices to engage elderly and young, and foster families for elderly
- Human-centered approach to the development of new technologies for elderly care
- Participatory approaches in age-friendly urban governance and planning

These evidence-based solutions developed in different countries have potential for multiplication and application throughout the ND area.

⁴ Swedish Institute of Public Health 2006: Healthy Ageing - A Challenge for Europe. <http://www.healthyageing.eu>

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Concrete and holistic policy solutions are needed

Tackling future societal challenges related to ageing calls for a holistic approach on healthy ageing and the design of concrete measures.

The holistic healthy ageing approach calls for rethinking the very concepts of health and quality of life, and the role and resources of the elderly in the society:

- Healthcare interventions need to consider simultaneously the physical, mental and social dimensions of health. This helps identifying individuals at risk at early stage.
- Health and wellbeing should be promoted by an inclusive and participative approach that acknowledges the elderly citizen as an active actor who can contribute to his/her own wellbeing rather than as an object of care. Providing opportunities for meaningful activities such as volunteering is important.
- Promotion of healthy aging implies not only measures targeting the individuals and their well-being, but also developing supportive physical and social environments. Urban planning needs to engage the elderly, and social integration of the elderly must be supported.

The design of concrete measures requires an active dialogue and co-creation among researchers, professionals, policy-makers, and engagement of the elderly. It should emphasize

- Human needs in the development of innovative technological solutions for healthcare to assist the care staff, not to replace them.
- Financial feasibility of research-based solutions and policy measures to ensure their practical applicability.
- Sustainability of evidence-based solutions through effective dissemination of knowledge on good practices to ensure their future application and multiplication in other contexts.

The ND Future Forum on Health participants will continue working toward contributing to these aims.

Further information

Presentations and summary of the Northern Dimension Future Forum on Health are available at <http://www.northerndimension.info/news/news/824-bridging-the-gap-between-the-evidence-based-knowledge-and-implementation-in-promoting-healthy-ageing>

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