

Ageing and Health

The health of older people in selected countries of the Western Pacific Region



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Acronyms

BMI	body mass index
DALY	disability-adjusted life year
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific
GNI	gross national income
NHS	National Health Survey
OPA	older people's association
SAGE	Study on global AGEing and adult health
SARS	severe acute respiratory syndrome
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
WHS	World Health Survey

1. Introduction

Population ageing has important social, economic, political and cultural implications. On the one hand, the risk of chronic illness and disability increases with older age. On the other, older people represent a population of survivors who make significant contributions to their families and communities. Many opportunities exist to encourage optimal health and participation by older people and to maximize the potential for future generations to age well. However, improvements in older people's health cannot be achieved in isolation. It requires a multisectoral approach that promotes health capacity across the life-course, provides supportive environments as well as social policies, and ensures adequate and effective health and long-term care for those in need.

This report provides an overview of population ageing and the health of people aged 60 years and above in the Western Pacific Region. The report highlights the extent and pace of population ageing across a diversity of settings in the Region, and emphasizes some key health challenges and opportunities that accompany these changes. Policy implications are also discussed.

The report draws on a variety of sources of information, such as the World Health Organization, World Bank, the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, HelpAge International, scholarly reports and peer-reviewed journal articles. Specific information on health indicators for people aged 60 years and above in seven countries in the Region was obtained from a range of health surveys including the World Health Survey and other country-specific surveys.

Original data sources analysed for this report include the following:

- *National Health Survey (NHS), Australia (2007–2008)*. Available at: [http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4364.0Main%20Features120072008%20Reissue\)?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4364.0&issue=2007–2008%20\(Reissue\)&num=&view](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4364.0Main%20Features120072008%20Reissue)?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4364.0&issue=2007–2008%20(Reissue)&num=&view)
- *WHO Multi-Country Survey (2001)*. Available at: http://www.who.int/responsiveness/papers/MCSS_Analytical_Guidelines.pdf
- *WHO Study on Global ageing and adult health (SAGE) (2008–2010)*. Available at: <http://www.who.int/healthinfo/systems/sage/en/index1.html>
- *WHO World Health Survey (2002–2004)*. Available at: <http://surveydata.who.int/data.html>
- *WHO SAGE–INDEPTH Viet Nam (FilaBavi) (2007–2008)*. Metadata available at: <http://www.who.int/healthinfo/systems/sage/en/index2.html>
- World Health Organization (2008). *The Global Burden of Disease Report, 2004 Update*. Available at: http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/2004_report_update/en/index.html

Key points

Population ageing

- The populations of countries in the Western Pacific Region are ageing at different rates. Countries are at different stages of demographic transition.
- The fastest growth in the 60 years and above age group is taking place in low- and lower middle-income countries.
- Women appear to outnumber men in older age groups.
- Older people are a significant social and economic resource. They make valuable contributions to their communities by providing paid and volunteer work and/or caring for family members. Longer life expectancy provides opportunities to participate and contribute to society in older age.

Health of older people

- The burden of disease from noncommunicable diseases such as ischaemic heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes has increased and presents a significant economic burden for countries across the Region.
- The burden of disease from communicable diseases, unintentional injuries and disability remains high in many settings.
- Health inequalities among people 60 years or over exist both within and between countries.
- Significant opportunities exist to reduce exposure to risk factors for chronic diseases and improve health and participation in older age.

Policy implications

- The health of older people cannot be addressed or analysed in isolation, but must be approached through a broader population-wide, multisectoral response that recognizes the influence of social determinants on health across the life-course.
- Achieving optimal health for older people requires a cross-sectoral response including health-care provision, age-friendly environments, housing and transport, social protection, and other supportive policies and structures.
- Policies must ensure that adequate social and economic infrastructure, as well as health, social and financial resources are available to support diverse populations as they age.
- The provision of equitable, affordable health-care, together with enhanced provision of disability aids, services, access to essential medicines, and palliative care for older people should be prioritized.
- Public health efforts to support lifestyle changes and prevent exposure to risk factors can improve health and decrease the disease burden of both middle-aged and older-aged adults.
- Priority must be given to developing new policies that recognize the impact of inequality across the life-course on health outcomes and the experience of ageing.
- The inclusion of ageing and health issues in both pre-service and ongoing training for health professionals is vital to increase the awareness and quality of appropriate practice in providing health services for older persons.

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