

Societies, ageing and health?

The population in Europe is ageing rapidly: the proportion of people aged 65 and older is forecast to increase from 14% in 2010 to 25% in 2050. People in nearly every part of Europe are living longer, but their chances of spending these later years in good health and well-being vary within and between countries. For too many, old age brings a high risk of social isolation and poverty, with limited access to affordable, high-quality health and social services. Strong public policies are thus needed to ensure that positive trends can be sustained and the benefits of a longer life can extend to everyone regardless of where they live or the socioeconomic group they belong to. As the ageing segment of the population increases, there are concerns over how societies will meet older people's expected health and long-term care needs. Providing better care for patients with multiple chronic diseases, including disabled older persons who live longer at home, is a growing challenge for the health and social care sectors.

With gradually ever older average age, elderly people are increasingly lonely for reasons of loss of friends and family, changes in family structure and mobilisation. The feeling of loneliness adversely impacts on life quality; it negatively affects the health of older people and increases the mortality rate. Elderly women are more likely to experience loneliness because women tend to live longer than men. Studies presented at this conference show that there is a need for integrated nursing principles which combine physical, mental and social elements of health. Many studies on elderly health focus on only one of these aspects.

In promoting good health throughout the life course, European societies should:

- build supportive, well-adapted physical and social environments;
- provide access to high-quality, tailor-made, well-coordinated health and social services;
- support older persons in maintaining maximum health and functional capacity; and
- empower them to live and die in dignity.

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The European Public Health Association, or EUPHA for short, is an umbrella organisation for public health associations in Europe. Our network of national associations of public health represents around 20,000 public health professionals. Our mission is to facilitate and activate the strong voice of public health networks by enhancing visibility of the evidence and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals. EUPHA contributes to the preservation and improvement of public health in the European region through capacity and knowledge building. We are committed to creating a more inclusive Europe, narrowing all health inequalities among Europeans, by facilitating, activating, and disseminating strong evidence-based voices from the public health community and by strengthening the capacity of public health professionals to achieve evidence-based change.

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