



Substantive Input to the Open-Ended Working Group, 13th Session

The Global Ageing Network is pleased to offer this written input to the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing 13th session. The Global Ageing Network is an international community of leaders in ageing services, housing, and long term care. Our purpose is to pave the way to improve access, affordability and best practices so that older adults everywhere can lead healthier, safer and more independent lives.

Right to Health and Access to Health Services

Access to health services must be a right not a privilege for people of all ages. Currently, too many older adults lack access – whether because of complexity, geography, financial security, awareness or stigma. Similarly, many providers who wish to provide services are unable to do so due to severe workforce shortages, lack of trained staff, inability to access needed supplies and lack of government support for the systems that serve older people. This is exacerbated by a critical shortage of practitioners trained in geriatrics. Therefore, when health care services are accessed, older adults are often left under the care of generalists with little knowledge of the health concerns associated with ageing. Sadly, in some situations and as clearly evidenced during the pandemic period, older adults are dismissed by healthcare providers, resulting in poor or delayed care, avoidable illness or premature death.

In health care, as with other services, older adults should have agency, including the ability to make their own decisions, offered choices and to be treated with dignity and respect. Until access to quality health care is protected as a right, older adults will continue to be underserved and will face discriminatory practices that diminish their health and well-being. Good health and good health care are fundamental. As a global society we must do better.

Social Inclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a fine point on the importance of social connectedness. We are social beings, and we need one another. But, even prior to the pandemic, lack of social inclusion was a scourge facing many older adults in communities across the world. This exclusion is borne from widespread ageism. It stems from false assumptions about older adults not contributing to society. It comes from barriers that are erected and institutionalized to prevent older adults from participating fully in the life of their communities.

Many older adults live with loss, leaving them isolated and alone. Family members and friends have moved away, the communities they have lived in for years have changed and loved ones may have died.

For this reason alone, our communities, our systems and institutions should be designed to counteract this reality. They should be designed to make an outsized effort to connect with older adults, engage them and allow them the opportunity to fully contribute and participate in the life of their community. The years of experience, the wisdom that comes with having lived a long life and the legacies they wish to leave are tremendous assets that will enrich our communities and contribute to the well being of all.

These two critical issues underscore the need for an internationally binding Convention to protect the Rights of Older People, to help empower and support older adults as contributing members of our society. It is time to take concerted action to promote equity, access, autonomy, and inclusion for all older adults, regardless of circumstances. This is not only our moral responsibility, it is an economic, political and practical imperative as we collectively face global ageing. We urge the United Nations to draft a Convention and Member States to ratify it with all due speed.

Respectfully submitted,

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February 16, 2023