
Written Statement Submitted by the International Federation on Ageing (IFA)

13th Session of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

3-6 April 2023

As an international non-governmental organization whose membership base comprises government, civil society, industry, academia and individuals, the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) appreciates the opportunity to provide a statement at the 13th Session of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing towards the focus area: right to health and access to health services.

The global population is rapidly changing, resulting in a shift in demographic distributions toward older ages. It is estimated that by 2050, 1 in 6 people in the world will be aged 60 years or older, with the proportion of this population and those 80 years or above doubling and tripling, respectively.¹ Occurring alongside this phenomenon is the increased prevalence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and the leading cause of death and disability, globally.^{1,2}

Age increases the risk of many health conditions, and these can have significant impacts on intrinsic capacity, defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as the composite of all the physical and mental capacities of an individual. Functional ability and intrinsic capacity can vary greatly across the second half of life ranging from periods of relatively high and stable capacity to declining capacity, and for some individuals, periods of significant loss of capacity and dependency. Older people and those with chronic conditions such as NCDs are at high risk of serious and life-threatening complications from communicable diseases if left without proper access to health services. This trend was shown extensively throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlights the need for aged-care policies and consideration of older adults when planning and funding healthcare services.³

Barriers to accessing care for older adults must be addressed globally, reflecting the urgent need for systemic changes to the way healthcare is administered. Included in this is a need to refocus healthcare on patient-centred care and move away from individual diagnosis-based care. Holistic, patient centred care is increasingly important in older adults due to the high prevalence of multimorbidity in this demographic.^{4,5} Cost also becomes a significant barrier, as the cost associated with healthcare increases with age and older individuals are more likely to be living on fixed incomes.^{4,6} Furthermore, societal challenges exist that limit the effectiveness and quality of care received. Ageism, lack of autonomy, and paternalistic treatment from healthcare providers can contribute to an individual's dislike of healthcare services which may cause them to delay seeking care when needed.⁷

¹ Ageing and health [Internet]. [cited 2023 Jan 18]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>

²World Health Organization. Noncommunicable diseases [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2023 Jan 17]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>

³ The Lancet Healthy Longevity. Care for ageing populations globally. *Lancet Healthy Longev.* 2021 Apr 1;2(4):e180.

⁴ Picco L, Achilla E, Abidin E, Ann Chong S, Ajit Vaingankar J, McCrone P, et al. Economic burden of multimorbidity among older adults: impact on healthcare and societal costs. 2016;

⁵ Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022.

⁶ Jacobson, G., Cicchiello, A., Shah, A., Doty, MM., Williams II, D. When care costs are a barrier to getting healthcare: reports from older adults in the United States and other high-income countries. 2021. [cited 2023 Jan 24] <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/surveys/2021/oct/when-costs-are-barrier-getting-health-care-older-adults-survey>

⁷ Sun JK, Smith J, Gillespie CW. Self-Perceptions of Aging and Perceived Barriers to Care: Reasons for Health Care Delay. 2017 [cited 2023 Jan 24]; Available from: <http://www.base-berlin.mpg>.



To ensure that older adults are able to overcome barriers in accessing healthcare services, systems need to prioritize a holistic care model, with professionals that are well-versed and knowledgeable in geriatrics and aged-care. Additionally, care should focus on maximizing autonomy, and empowering individuals to make informed decisions regarding their care whenever possible.

The right to health, economic and social security in later life requires formal acknowledgement through a legally binding instrument. The IFA is honoured to work alongside Member States to advocate for the rights of older people which must be respected and protected.