Approaches to Improve the Well Being of the Older Population

Dr Nabil Kronfol
President, Lebanese Healthcare Management Association

The purpose of this memo is to propose a series of actions that would contribute to promoting the welfare of the older population and raise their participation – and that can be implemented in relatively modest means – and in collaboration with all sectors of society.

I- To maintain, improve and manage physical and mental well being

1. Promote the concepts related to healthy life style and the social determinants of health, in schools, and include the concept of healthy living in the curricula of all health professionals.
Target: The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, Universities and Colleges, Orders of health professions, Syndicate of private schools.
2. Efforts to promote the health of individuals across the life course through encouraging physical activity, healthy life styles, no smoking, moderate drinking (if desired) – in an effort to curb chronic illnesses, disability and mental wellbeing later in life.
3. Address the barriers to accessing health facilities.
4. Address the stigma surrounding mental health.
Work with universities and health professional colleges to highlight the importance of mental health.
5. Introduce in health centers, health facilities including private clinics a comprehensive model of care for older people based on a 'geriatric philosophy.
6. Hospital care
Integrate geriatric care and rehabilitation within the acute hospital system to address the complex needs of older persons.
7. Special medical needs - Pay increased attention to the medical needs of the older population in the special senses such as vision, hearing, musculo-skeletal ailments.
8. Long term care
Implement national credentialing requirements for old people homes.
Transform the current LT facilities for the older people into retirement homes that are attractive to this population.
9. Dental health
Raise awareness on the need to provide dental care to the older population in cooperation with the Order of Dentists and within the "geriatric-friendly" PHC centers.
10. National Program of Immunization:
Add to the National program of immunization to include older people as well (pneumonia, herpes zoster, influenza vaccines).
11. National Screening programs for cancer affecting the old (Prostate, colon, breast, cervix, lung, etc.)
Screen for optical nerve pressure as it can cause blindness without any earlier symptom: important for the older people to have it checked on a yearly basis or even every 6-monhs.
Screen for aortic and cerebral aneurysm, glaucoma, retinal degeneration.
12. Develop home care services
13. Education and Training
To assess current supply and current and projected demand for different types of workforce.
Geriatric medicine needs to be included and highlighted in most medical or nursing curricula.
Lack of social workers, nurses, physiotherapists, nutritionists and psychologists specialized in gerontology and the needs of older adults.

Training of home-based caregivers.

II- Fostering social inclusion

1. There is a need to develop a culture of inclusion and solidarity to support and enable people of all ages and capabilities to participate actively and feel part of the community.
2. Initiate concrete measures to change the prevalent social perception of older people as old, frail, with severe physical and mental handicaps.
3. Loneliness promotes depression whereas social connectivity and inclusion leads to better health outcomes. Raise awareness of the concept of active citizenship. Start a national movement to promote senior volunteerism.
4. Encourage the formation of lobby and pressure groups for the older people to promote the rights of the older population and put pressure on political parties to highlight the rights of the elderlies within their electoral programs. *"Nothing for us without us".*
5. Create and Strengthen opportunities for the social engagement of the old
Raise awareness on the potential of retired older workers as mentors and counselors transferring their experience to younger employees.
6. Encourage learning and capacity building amongst the seniors
Offer specialized training courses on technology and digital competences.

III- Support Intergenerational solidarity

1. Promote public education about inter-generational solidarity.
2. Encourage and support caregivers and home care.
Family caregiving promotes 'ageing in place' (one of the core principles of MIPAA).

IV- To adopt the vision of Age-friendly dwellings and neighborhood

1. The field of "environmental gerontology" is mounting on the relationship between health and the built environment and senior-friendly design.
Promoting and developing physical built environments and urban infrastructure.
2. Promote the essential pillars of the "age Friendly cities" program
Urban designers need to plan safe age-friendly outdoor spaces. This includes the provision of public amenities and public buildings compatible for senior citizens and easy for wheelchair access, wide pedestrian lanes with gentle ramps, benches and senior-friendly toilets, safe pedestrian crossings and pedestrian bridges that are consistent with the capabilities of senior citizens, signage and warning road signs with wordings in bigger fonts.

V- Economic security & Social Protection

1. Encourage employment
Incentivize employers to adapt flexible retirement policies and practices and identify barriers to continued employment.
2. Strengthen poverty reduction programs
Mainstream ageing issues into poverty reduction strategies and women empowerment programs.
Educate and encourage the public to build additional savings throughout their life course

VI- The marginalized and vulnerable older adults

Older people and neglect, violence and abuse:
Create the necessary legal structures to address, protect, support and empower vulnerable older adults.
Older people in emergencies
Ensure that the rights of older persons are protected in conflict and emergency situations.

Parties and Institutions concerned
The parties involved include the public sector agencies, the civil society organizations, the private sector, the municipalities and most importantly the older population itself.

There is a need to promote **participation of older persons** in development of national policies, legal, institutional and administrative frameworks.
Mainstreaming ageing is a strategy, a process and multi-dimensional efforts of integrating ageing issues into all policy fields.
Establish a National Observatory on Ageing in association with universities, research centers.
Develop and encourage a "culture" that promotes the rights of the older population in all sectors of society.