

Global Ageing Network calls for action on ageing and long-term care

A new report from the Global Ageing Network (GAN) has warned of the impact of aging populations, combined with declining numbers of caregivers and insufficient government support for services older adults, and calls for governments to provide greater policy focus on the issue. In this article, GAN Chairperson and European Ageing Network (EAN) President and CEO, Jiří Horecký, highlights some key points from the report.



Jiří Horecký



Background to the report

On 16 February 2023, the Global Ageing Network (GAN) issued a "Call to the Governments of the World on Long-term Care and Ageing" demanding urgent attention to and reform of long-term care systems for older people. For over a year, experts from around the world have been working on this document in response to the increasing risk of future inaccessibility and unaffordability of long-term care services, with at least half of all older adults expected to need long-term care services at some point in their lives. An increasing number of older people need daily, often demanding care, in part due to the increase in the number of people with dementia.

The report has been distributed and disseminated to social and health care ministries and other relevant stakeholders across all the countries and continents, including Europe.

Action by governments all over the world is

needed now, say the report authors, as the demographics of global ageing are driving a need for attention to and prioritisation of policies, programmes and infrastructure to ensure access to care and services. Issues including approach to care, funding, workforce development and training, also must be addressed.

The report was authored by Dr Jiří Horecký, President of the European Ageing Network (EAN), and Board chair, GAN; Stuart Kaplan, CEO, Selfhelp Community Services in New York, NY; Dan Levitt, Professor and CEO, KinVillage, Delta, British Columbia, Canada; Katie Smith Sloan, Executive Director, Global Ageing Network; Megan Davies, PhD, University of Basel and Maastricht University; Dr Freek Lapre, Professor, TIAS Business School, Tilburg University, Netherlands, and Donald Macaskill, PhD, CEO, Scottish Care.

The impact of COVID-19 on older adults around the globe, and abundant lessons that became apparent from that experience, such as the negative effects of longstanding neglect of infrastructure needed to serve older adults as they age, served as the impetus for GAN's action. Katie Smith Sloan explains: "Chronic underfunding, understaffing, low prioritisation of aging services by governments around the globe revealed how urgently the long-term care sector does need attention, reforms, changes, and support.

The sector has been overlooked and underappreciated – and the collective work of GAN members is needed, now more than ever."

Following an overview of long-term care practices in countries around the world, the paper addresses major challenges, from an overreliance on informal caregivers, the growing challenge of dementia among older adults and workforce challenges to long-term care infrastructure and policy needs. A roadmap of opportunities, challenges and action includes sustainable funding models, reshaping long-term care systems and country-specific needs assessments.

Older people living with dementia represent a huge care strain for formal and informal caregivers. In the professional care sector, in some countries, the majority of new residential settings being built are special nursing homes for people mainly with dementia.

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Challenges of caring for someone with dementia

Informal caregivers sometimes have great difficulty caring for family members until the end of their lives, especially without professional support, help, and relief. These caregivers often need adjustments to their living environment. They often do not know how to communicate with and understand people with dementia or how to provide care and support for them. In addition, caregivers face the extreme mental demands of watching their loved one’s personality change due to dementia.

Older people with dementia represent a big care responsibility for society at large, health and social systems, families, and caregivers. It has a significant impact on what long-term capacities are needed now and in the future and how the social protection and social services systems should be organised and focused.

While governments are proposing long-term care systems reforms or modifications, they must take into account this significant group of people living with dementia that is projected to grow in large numbers.

Therefore we have to keep in mind three main aspects:

1. Public budgets, including costs for social services, health care services, social protection etc.
2. Informal caregivers, mostly family members facing reduced quality of life,

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increased costs, impacts on their physical and mental health, withdrawal from the labor market, etc.

3. Human resources, as the rising number of people with dementia will require more and more caregivers, nurses, social workers, and other related professionals.

A number of countries, whether at the level of professional associations, professional societies or governments, are addressing the challenges of sustainability of long-term care systems because of the increasing number of older people who need daily, often demanding care – not only because of the erratic increase in the number of people with dementia, but also because of critical shortages of staff in social services.

Australia is calling for changes in the long-term care system, the Netherlands is announcing possible long-term unsustainability of the current system and capacity and England is talking openly about the crisis in the long-term care system. Additionally, all EU countries have workforce shortages, with a need of more than one million workers in Europe, whilst the care workforce continues to age.

Dignity for people with dementia

The Call to the Governments of the World on long-term care and ageing contains not only a description of the major problems and current challenges of long-term care, an emphasis on the importance of providing care and support to older people as a guarantee of their fundamental right to live with dignity, but also concrete directions for solutions and important principles.

A number of countries are addressing the need for changes and reforms in the systems of support and long-term care for the elderly, and many countries are still developing such systems. Among other things, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has shown how fragile, undervalued, underfunded and unprepared for the future the current systems are globally.

We have not only described the main risks, challenges and current issues related to long-term care provision, including the



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accessibility of long-term care as one of the element human rights to live independently and with dignity, we have also outlined potential solutions.

This activity is in accordance and complementary with other recently introduced initiatives like the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021 – 2030, the World Health Organization’s framework for an integrated continuum of long-term care, as well as the EU’s recently developed Care Strategy.

The full Call to Action paper is available at: <https://www.ean.care/en/articles/gan-call-to-the-governments>