

Roadmap to improve the health and well-being of the ageing population



NDPHS

Northern Dimension
Partnership in Public Health
and Social Well-being

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Seed money project funded by the Swedish Institute and the German Ministry of Health.



Federal Ministry
of Health

SI. Svenska
institutet

PREAMBLE

People are living longer than ever before, which is one of the greatest health-related achievements in the Northern Dimension area. In a matter of less than 30 years, the life expectancy at birth has increased on average by six years, standing at nearly 79 years as of 2018. The prosperity of the Northern Dimension area depends on people's health and wellbeing. Maximising the healthy life years for all into old age is a corner stone for flourishing societies.

As a result of the demographic change, the Partners of the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) have called for joint action to promote active and healthy ageing in the Northern Dimension area. It has become evident that the topic touches upon the work of all the NDPHS Expert Groups from alcohol and substance use to primary health care. As a result of this call for action, the seed money project "Roadmap to improve the health and wellbeing of the ageing population in the Baltic Sea Region (AgeFLAG)" was born.

The aim of the AgeFLAG project was to contribute to the health and wellbeing of older adults and, therefore, to make the societies more inclusive. Through national and regional needs assessments, the project identified the most important issues in relation to active and healthy ageing that the NDPHS partner countries face. Based on these issues, the project partners and the new NDPHS Task Force on Active and Healthy Ageing proposed joint activities that could be undertaken within the NDPHS context to address the regional needs. This roadmap presents a selection of these activities that the Partnership has committed to undertaking in the upcoming 2-3 years. These activities initiate and contribute to the flagship process on active and healthy ageing of Policy Area Health within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

BACKGROUND

In 2020, our project partners in Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden brought together the most relevant national stakeholders to identify the top five national needs for improving active and healthy ageing. The national assessments gave rise to four themes that recurred across the countries and were prioritised regionally, namely:

1. Healthy ageing, well-being, social environment, and social connections
2. Health, social and integrated care
3. Education, knowledge, and life-long learning
4. Labour participation

To turn these four regional needs into actions, the project partners along with other regional experts from the field met in two joint workshops, dubbed Policy Labs, to generate ideas for joint activities in the NDPHS context. In the Policy Labs, the participants first explored the specific regional challenges that could be addressed and then brainstormed possible activities to tackle these issues.

The following region-wide challenges received significant attention during the policy labs, and taking action on them were prioritised:

- Ageism (i.e. negative mindsets and behaviour towards older people and ageing)
- Deterioration of health and functional ability
- Inaccessibility of digital services and health IT systems' fragmentation
- Digital illiteracy
- Exclusion of older people and their families from policy-making, decision-making in healthcare and service design
- Insufficient knowledge of the needs of older people in healthcare
- Lack of accessibility of health and social services, particularly in remote areas and at home
- Fragmentation of health and social care services and systems
- Low recognition of primary health care
- Personal and organisational health illiteracy
- Social exclusion
- Inflexibility of labour market
- Outdated occupational safety and health services
- Generations as silos
- Social and financial insecurity

During the two Policy Labs, a wide range of different kinds of projects, processes, outputs and tools were envisioned:

Projects	Processes	Outputs	Tools
Study on organisational health literacy and development of recommendations	Leading by example and becoming a more inclusive and representative organisation for people of all ages	Scientific publications and studies	Mapping existing practices, identifying best practices and gaps
Encouraging intergenerational contacts	Involving older people into decision-making processes	Policy briefs	Participatory research (e.g. surveys, case studies, focus groups etc.)
Promoting healthy ageing in workplaces	Creation of a working network of doctors, NGOs, older adults and other relevant professionals for joint discussions and co-creation	Toolkits, models and guidelines for practices	Cooperation with NGOs and international and national public health organisations
Mapping care needs of older people (division to 3rd age, 4th age – more dependent)		A repository of promising interventions/best practices	Translations to local languages
Promotion of empowerment and self-responsibility of people through tools like health coaching		E-tools	Funding grass-roots initiatives
Study on ageist stereotypes in the Northern Dimension area		Infographics and other communication materials	Sharing evidence-based knowledge
Mapping digital literacy initiatives for older population		Literature reviews	Creating networks and connections to new stakeholder
Studying and promoting social capital throughout the life course		Conferences, symposiums and policy level events	Linking activities to international health days, e.g., World Health Day and the International Day of Older Persons
		Awareness raising campaigns	Supporting older people's own initiatives

The activities and actions presented in this roadmap arise from the outcomes of the policy labs. They were selected based on feasibility, existing needs within the NDPHS, available and prospective funding as well as interest indicated by the policy lab participants.

The NDPHS Task Force on Active and Healthy Ageing will revisit the outcomes of the policy labs biennially to design activities for the upcoming two years.

RATIONALE

Words and language that we use have power beyond description. They can shape reality and prescribe the world we live in. Journalists, politicians, health care workers and people at large use words, such as elderly, old age pensioner and boomer, daily to describe an older person without much attention paid to the negative connotations to dependence, frailty and outdatedness these words carry. Similarly, words, such as silver tsunami and demographic timebomb, describe demographic change as an impending, catastrophic event. As a result, the narratives presented around us are filled with frightful stories about ageing and demographic change. But what if these narratives are flawed, lacking real evidence base? What if population ageing presents an opportunity, not a threat?

While age and ageing remain important factors in the debate on health expenditure growth, ageing itself is not a major driver of health spending trends, and older people are not a burden to the society after retirement. There is also no evidence to believe that ageing implies signification deterioration of health and well-being and, with that, the quality of life. There are as many ageing trajectories as there are people – no older adult is the same. The negative narratives presented daily are purely products of ageism – that is, age-based stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

Ageism is all around us and presents the biggest obstacle for realising active and healthy ageing. The negative language we use to talk about age shapes the way we feel about our own ageing and how we treat people in different age groups. Ageism impacts every aspect of our health and wellbeing and is associated with premature death, poor mental health, cognitive decline, chronic conditions and an increase in medical events and hospitalisation. As a result of internationalisation of ageist attitudes and narratives, generations are bided against each other, competing for public resources, and negative stereotypes are turned into self-fulfilling prophecies. Therefore, the health and well-being of people require action against ageism.

As an established actor in the field, the NDPHS as a Policy Area Health Coordinator for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region is in the unique position where it can define its contribution to active and healthy ageing. Echoing the findings of the national and regional needs assessments, action to promote active and healthy ageing begins from action against ageism. The NDPHS is aiming to establish itself as a champion against ageism, advocating a life-course, person-centred approach to ageing.

GOALS

Through acting on ageism, the goal of the flagship process initiated by this roadmap is to systematise the Policy Area Health's work in the field of active and healthy ageing. Through this, the ambition is to establish the NDPHS, as the Policy Area Coordinator for Health, as a thought leader in the field of active and healthy ageing in the Baltic Sea Region.

As a flagship, achieving this goal is a long-term process, consisting of multiple activities and projects contributing to its realisation. To initiate the process towards this goal, two projects have arisen from the seed money project phase, aiming at:

- Driving discourse on age and ageing
- Encouraging intergenerational contacts and decreasing intergenerational conflicts

The former project will culminate in a handbook and a course for non-discriminatory, ageing-positive language targeted at decision- and policymakers. The latter will empower local-level actors to pilot intergenerational initiatives to undermine ageism in societies.

PLAN FOR ACTION 2022-2023

Objectives	Expected outcomes	Timeline
1. To explore and study the roots and manifestations of ageism in the Northern Dimension area.	A symposium is held to dig deeper to the roots of ageism.	Q3-Q4 2022
2. To guide the rhetoric and discourse on age and ageing in policy- and decision-making by preparing a handbook and a course for non-discriminatory age(ing)-positive language.	A methodology for a course on non-discriminatory and age(ing)-positive language is prepared. A handbook on non-discriminatory and age(ing)-positive language is prepared.	Q1-Q2 2023 Q1-Q2 2023
3. To pilot local-level intergenerational initiatives to undermine ageism in societies.	5-10 local level intergenerational initiatives related to the themes arising from the AgeFLAG needs assessments are (co-)funded and piloted. A guidebook for working intergenerationally and promoting intergenerational solidarity is drafted based on the experiences of the local initiatives.	Q2 2022 – Q2 2023 Q3-Q4 2023
4. To accelerate the impact of the NDPHS activities on ageing populations' health and well-being through: → Deepening cooperation with local, national and international level actors established in the field of active and healthy ageing; → Upscaling communication efforts to increase the outreach of the flagship process; → Initiating contacts with representatives of national parliaments to advance knowledge transfer to responsible policies.	New partnerships with current thought leaders in the field of active and healthy ageing, e.g., WHO, European Observatory and Age Platform, are established in the dissemination of the outputs. The visibility of the NDPHS work on active and healthy ageing is increased in social media, including exploration of new modes of communication (e.g., podcasts). Project outputs are disseminated and promoted among national parliamentarians using, e.g., Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference as a vehicle for outreach.	Q2 2022 – Q1 2023 Q2 2022 – Q4 2023 Q1-Q4 2023



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