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Older people denied right to health and at risk of being left behind in global push towards Universal Health Coverage – new report

As the global population ages, health systems need to adapt to ensure older women and men can realise their right to health. New research from HelpAge International and American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), analyses older people's right to health in the context of current demographic, epidemiological and health systems transitions.

Key findings from *Global Age Watch Insights 2018*:

- Data systems¹ designed to inform the planning and delivery of health services systematically exclude older people.
- Although women are living longer, they live more years in poor health, and with disability, depression or dementia.
- Older people are prevented from accessing health services

The report highlights the systematic lack of data there is on older people's access to health services or their health issues, which means there is insufficient evidence to effectively inform the planning and delivery of health systems. As governments globally push for universal health coverage, older people risk being left behind unless these data gaps can be filled.

For example, there are 41 million annual deaths caused globally by non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes, high blood pressure and dementia, 32 million of which occur in low and middle-income countries, which is changing the demands being placed on health systems.

Yet the increasing prevalence of NCDs among older people, many countries do not include older people in their data collection. In fact, 34 of 40 countries in Africa that

¹ Data systems in this context refers to a network of data producers, publishers and users. These include variety of stakeholders ranging from national statistical offices, academia, civil society, data collaboratives, private sector, donors, multilateral agencies and campaigners.

have conducted a World Health Organization (WHO) survey on NCDs have not included anyone over the age of 64.

The *Global Age Watch Index* report also explores differences between men and women. Although women are living longer, the report shows they live 9.4 years in poor health, compared with 7.8 for men. Among people aged 70 and over in each of the 12 profile countries in 2016, dementia causes more years lived with disability in women than men.

It also highlights that in many countries, people aged 60 and over are unable to access health services, due to distance of medical facilities, cost, lack of information or discrimination by health workers, who are often untrained in working with older people.

Global Age Watch Insights 2018 calls for universal health coverage for all at all ages, in-line with the goals and targets set by governments around the world through the Sustainable Development Goals. The report also calls for improved access to services including prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease among older men and women to realise their right to health. Recommendations include:

- Training medical staff and health workers to understand older people's health issues and effectively treat them, and to end ageist attitudes that can deter them from seeking medical help.
- Making health facilities physically accessible.
- Taking steps to ensure the financial costs of receiving care should never be a deterrent from seeking help.
- Developing detailed high-quality data that means older people's experiences are accounted for when designing how health systems operate.

Debra Whitman, Chief Public Policy Officer at AARP, said: "Far too often older people are treated as invisible and left out of important developments on health and well-being. It is time for decision-makers in all sectors – government, multilateral agencies, national statistical offices and civil society organisations – to take coordinated action to ensure inclusivity and guarantee older people's right to health and quality, affordable health care."

Chris Roles, Managing Director at Age International, the UK member of the global HelpAge network, said: "This year, as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the founding of the World Health Organization, it is significant that older people are still being left behind. Older people have the right to health, and for this to be achieved, they have to be included in key data, and health services have to be adapted to meet their needs of older men and women."

"Health systems in low and middle-income countries are facing severe challenges, but the global drive towards universal health coverage is an opportunity to

strengthen these and meet the commitment of the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure healthy lives and wellbeing for all at all ages.”

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Notes to Editors

Global AgeWatch Insights 2018 is a new report by AARP and HelpAge International. [Download the report, country profiles and infographics.](#)

Visit the [Global Age Watch website](#) for more information.

About Age International

Age International is a charity focusing on older people in developing countries. It is a subsidiary charity of Age UK, a member of the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) and the UK member of the global HelpAge network.

Age International raises funds in the UK to support the relief and development work of HelpAge in over 30 developing countries. It also raises awareness in the UK about the needs of older people in developing countries. And it engages in influencing and campaigning work in the UK to change policies and approaches towards older people. For further information, please visit our website www.ageinternational.org.uk

About HelpAge International

HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives. Our mission is to promote the wellbeing and inclusion of older women and men, and to reduce poverty and discrimination in later life.

www.helpage.org

About AARP

AARP is the largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organisation in the United States dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence and nearly 38 million members, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to families: health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also produces the nation's largest circulation publications: AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit www.aarp.org or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.