



Global Coalition on Aging

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Life-Course Immunization

A DRIVER OF HEALTHY AGING

AS THE WORLD'S POPULATION AGES — WITH ONE BILLION OVER 60 BY MID-CENTURY — there is a surge of attention around strategies that can promote and enable healthy aging. Throughout all sectors of society, in both public and private realms, leaders have become focused on creating social, health, and economic policies that will drive disease prevention and healthy aging. One promising but underutilized strategy is a “life-course” approach to immunization – an approach that stresses vaccination throughout all stages of one’s life.



“WE ARE REMINDED, with the long, tortured history of the vaccine, that they...are worthless if they are not used.”

WILLIAM H. FOEGE, LEADER OF THE GLOBAL VACCINE STRATEGY THAT ERADICATED SMALLPOX

To an extent, global organizations have begun to recognize the importance and potential of vaccines for adults. The World Health Organization, for example, has called for 2011-2020 to be the “Decade of the Vaccine.” Other organizations – such as the International Federation on Ageing and the International Longevity Center – have also publicly recognized that life-course vaccination must become a priority to promote healthy aging. Yet, for all the promise, adult vaccination rates remain below target levels.

There is a growing body of scientific evidence to support the usage of adult vaccination, both with regard to health outcomes and cost-effectiveness. A recent study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, for example, examined influenza vaccination over a 10-year period and found a 27 percent reduction in the risk of pneumonia or influenza as well as a 48 percent reduction in the risk of death. Another study, which measured the value of various preventive services, found that influenza immunization and pneumococcal immunization rank among the best preventive health services, as highly as smoking cessation and cancer screening.

To bring adult immunizations into healthy aging initiatives

and create mechanisms that will increase our understanding of the potential and usages of adult immunizations, this paper suggests the following policy priorities:

1. Increase awareness regarding the health benefits of life-course immunization among healthcare professionals, employers, employee groups, and unions.
2. Establish or enhance existing surveillance systems to determine and monitor the burden of vaccine-preventable diseases in adults.
3. Create alignment on adult vaccination schedules.
4. Integrate adult immunizations into Electronic Medical Records (EMRs) and create an adult immunization registry.
5. Integrate adult vaccination in public and private payer access programs.
6. Embed adult vaccination in core preventive services for adults.

Childhood vaccinations are one of the great health stories of the 20th century. Now, as we embark on the 21st – a century that will be defined by aging populations – adult vaccinations are great health, social, and economic policy.