

Decade of Healthy Ageing Demystified

JULY 2022



Global Coalition on Aging

The Corporation
and The Decade
of Healthy Ageing:
Global Aging
Inspires 21st Century
Business Life

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY:

The Decade of Healthy Ageing Opportunity

In January 2021, the UN formally launched The Decade of Healthy Ageing to address global aging, one of the most powerful and pervasive mega-trends of our 21st century, already transforming people's lives, from how they work and care for family members, to how they save, invest, and spend. The impact on any company will be as profound as other more recognized issues as climate change, equity, diversity and inclusion or technology.

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No other force is likely to shape the future of national economic health, public finances, and policymaking as the irreversible rate at which the world's population is aging.”

S&P Global

WHAT ARE WE
TALKING ABOUT,
ANYWAY:

The Unprecedented Scale and Speed of the Demographic Change Across All Societies

At the center of the Decade of Healthy Ageing are two of the most pervasive, clear, and undeniable facts of 21st century life: modern longevity and the demographic transition.

2-Billion Over-60 by Mid-Century

The number of people 60+ is set to double from 1 billion today to more than 2 billion by mid-century.¹ This is enabled by dramatic advances in the average global lifespan over the past century, and it will profoundly transform the age-demographic make-up across the planet.

Of course, longevity has always existed. To take just a few examples, Michelangelo never retired and lived to 89 at a time when life expectancy barely reached 40. Leonardo de Vinci, the great innovator and entrepreneur, lived to his mid-sixties, while Cicero, the Greek scholar, also lived to be 63 and wrote "On Old Age" as a treatise on why growing old should be a time of celebration and happiness.

Yet today we have reached a milestone that for the history of humanity has been unimaginable: growing old into our eighties, nineties, and beyond has become the norm. The UN Declaration on the Decade of Healthy Ageing recognizes, celebrates, and offers the pathways for further extending longevity across the planet, as a cornerstone of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this construction, the Decade of Healthy Ageing is about extending as much healthy and active aging to as many of the 2 billion across the planet as possible. And setting the stage for healthier aging for all generations to come.

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Mike Hodin, CEO,
Global Coalition
on Aging

This unprecedented demographic transition means every company needs an ‘aging strategy,’ reaching across powerful corporate social positioning, engagement of employees, customers, and all stakeholders, with the ability to link to commercial opportunity.”

More Old Than Young for The First Time in The History of Humanity

The percentage of “old” is more than the percentage of “young” in every society across the planet as it modernizes. This fact is already true globally and dramatically in evidence among OECD countries, led by Japan, where their 60+ population will shortly be close to 40%, followed by much of Europe, South Korea, China, Australia, and the U.S.²

This shift defines the most powerful fact of where markets are headed and the parallel need for basic public policy changes in areas from pensions and healthcare to education and fiscal management.

WHERE ARE WE,
AND HOW DID WE
GET HERE:

Global Leadership on Aging

The Decade of Healthy Aging is the culmination of nearly a decade of work by the UN and the WHO, itself built on the valuable Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) framework even earlier.³ This more recent timeline of work includes several key milestones that have laid the foundation:

2014

World report on ageing and health:

The WHO Ageing and Life Course Unit, led by Dr. John Beard, created *The World report on ageing and health: a policy framework for healthy aging in 2014*.⁴ The report focuses on the idea that: “To date, the response [to global aging] has largely been lacking. To provide a public health framework for action...this report considers ageing from a life-course perspective, but focuses on the second half of life” that encourages engagement with older persons, on “their terms” to help enable a healthier and more active aging.

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“Longer life is an incredibly valuable resource. ...Yet, the extent of the opportunities that arise from these extra years of life will be very heavily dependent on one key factor: health.”

The World Report
on Ageing and Health

2016-2017

Expansion of report into global strategy:

Governments across the planet and experts in the WHO recognized the seminal nature of these observations, which led to transforming the 2014 report into the *Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health*.⁵ This was formally published by the WHO and effectively endorsed by all 194 member States in January 2017. This was a significant step forward in establishing a framework for Member States, the WHO Secretariat, and its partners to contribute to achieving the vision that all people can live long and healthy lives.

2016-2020

Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health:

The global strategy (2016-2020) had two goals: “five years of evidence-based action to maximize functional ability that reaches every person; and by 2020, establish evidence and partnerships necessary to support a Decade of Healthy Ageing from 2020 to 2030.” It also included five strategic objectives: “commitment to action on Healthy Ageing in every country; developing age-friendly environments; aligning health systems to the needs of older populations; developing sustainable and equitable systems for providing long-term care (home, communities, institutions); and improving measurement, monitoring and research on Healthy Ageing.”

2021-2030

The Decade of Healthy Ageing:

The final step in this process was to translate the global strategy into a WHO Resolution, agreed to by all 194 Member States at the World Health Assembly of 2020, followed by the United Nations itself passing the Declaration of the Decade of Healthy Ageing, as one of the central pieces of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On December 16, 2020, Member States of the UN proclaimed 2021-30 as the **UN Decade of Healthy Ageing**, following that endorsement from the WHO at their 73rd Assembly.⁶

WHAT'S NEXT:

The Decade's Four Action Areas & The Role of Business

The Decade of Healthy Ageing has established four action areas as the basis for cross-sector focus and collaboration. They provide a lens for companies to plan and assess their contributions to the WHO's campaign and the aging mega-trend overall.

Combatting Ageism: The Connection to DEI Efforts

Ageist perceptions negatively impact older people's health and well-being—leading *The Lancet* to **declare** ageism as a social determinant of health.⁷ The UN and WHO aim to uncover and reverse these perceptions, including through the recent *Global report on ageism*.⁸

To contribute to that goal, businesses should integrate age diversity into their diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies. This includes ensuring an age-neutral workplace and inclusive culture that welcomes workers of all ages, further acting as a driver for recruitment and retention. In fact, these **multi-generational teams** are often more productive, innovative, and engaged.⁹

Integrated Care: The Connection to Employee Benefits & Resources

The WHO is partnering with governments, health systems, and other stakeholders to ensure people have access to high-quality health services as they age. The WHO has published **resources and guidelines for integrated care for older people (ICOPE)**, including topics like declines in intrinsic capacity, chronic pain, and mobile health.¹⁰

Companies have steadily expanded their wellness offerings over the past several decades, from physical to mental to emotional health. The logical next step is designing benefits to help employees embrace healthy aging, as well as provide care to older family members.

Age-Friendly Enviroments: The Connection to Community Engagement

The WHO and its partners are working with communities to create physical, social, and economic environments that influence healthy aging. This builds on the long-standing efforts of the **Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities**.¹¹

Companies are already prioritizing how best to engage the communities where they operate. These efforts should also aim to ensure age-friendly communities, with initiatives like volunteering or adaptations to the built environment. Businesses can also explore the connection to the commercial and talent opportunities increasingly concentrated in cities.

Long-term Care: The Connection to Employee- Caregivers

The WHO seeks to create an **integrated continuum of long-term care**.¹² The goal is high-quality, person-centered care for a range of needs, while preserving ability, rights, and human dignity.

Companies could now consider elder caregiving benefits as a key resource for today's workforce. As populations age, a growing share of employees are also elder caregivers. Workplace policies like flexible work arrangements, inclusive leave practices, subsidized care, and support for legal and financial matters can help employees to balance their professional and family responsibilities.

WHAT'S IT
MEAN FOR OUR
COMPANY:

Five Questions for Aging Strategy

Today's businesses aim to serve a broad set of stakeholders beyond conventional shareholders. To deliver on this goal in our aging world, every business needs a strategy that leverages the framework of the Decade of Healthy Ageing. Five powerful questions point a way forward for how a company can serve:

Our Communities

Guiding Question: What are the specific challenges to healthy aging in the communities where our company operates—and how can we help to solve them?

Example: GCOA has played a leadership role in the Age Friendly NYC Commission, which has launched local strategies in New York City on topics like COVID-19 vaccination, financial wellness, caregiving, and senior centers.

Our Employees

Guiding Question: How can we evolve our company culture, policies, benefits, and job roles to attract and retain talent of all ages, including employee-caregivers?

Example: A range of companies are expanding benefits to support employee-caregivers, following on the successful model of parental benefits.

Our Customers

Guiding Question: How can we drive innovation in our products, services, and market strategy to pursue the \$17 trillion dollar opportunity of the “silver economy”?

Example: The UN’s World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) offers a **Healthy Ageing Innovation Prize** for technology innovations that “specifically address the needs of people 60+ to achieve and sustain an active and engaged life as they age.”¹³

Our Investors

Guiding Question: How can we integrate healthy aging into our CSR and/or ESG strategy, including metrics that quantify our impact and attract socially minded investors?

Example: A number of financial services companies have begun to offer thematic funds focused on the aging mega-trend, indicating investor demand for age-informed business strategy.

Our Partners

Guiding Question: How can we collaborate with other businesses and sectors to advance progress on the aging issues where we are best positioned to drive change?

Example: Many are already collaborating with policymakers to advance smart care policy, such as providing people with their choice of home care services.¹⁴

Conclusion and Actions

The Global Coalition on Aging (GCOA)—The World’s Leading Business Voice on Aging—and its Members are dedicated to partnering with the UN and WHO in helping to implement The Decade of Healthy Ageing as a framework for achieving healthier and more active aging across global society.

The launch of The Decade in January 2021 was quickly followed by their **Report to Combat Ageism**, which they and we see as the critical cultural, political and social barrier to overcome.

In the course of addressing this and the other key areas, GCOA Members will participate in collaborative efforts to ensure the strategy of healthy aging is fully appreciated to be in the interests of businesses as they operate daily to create and make available products and services for their customers, meet the needs of their employees and fill additional stakeholder obligations.

GCOA Companies can lead the global business community by taking three immediate steps that link to aging societies' demands reflected in the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing:

1.

Identify actions as employers that link to each of the four core areas of the Decade of Healthy Ageing: Community engagement aligned with the age-friendly cities goals; resources and information on elder caregiving that parallel existing childcare benefits, which would be part of long term care reforms; public health and wellness education in the context of the Integrated Care platform; and, changes in work and retirement consistent with combatting the culture of ageism, itself then part of ongoing diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

2.

Link existing corporate interests and values in areas of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to the newer framework of the Decade of Healthy Ageing: From impact investing to social responsibility, the Decade of Healthy Ageing offers a supplemental framework for corporate strategic action.

3.

Create strategic guidelines through the aging lens: Offering business development opportunities for products and services that will meet the growing needs of the \$17 trillion global silver economy. A first step would be internal company survey research to identify multiple corporate interests from employee benefits to commercial, social responsibility to impact investment.

Endnotes

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About GCOA

GCOA represents a cross-section of global business including technology, pharmaceuticals, healthcare, home care, financial, transportation, and consumer sectors. We engage global institutions, policymakers, and the public to drive debate on, create, and promote innovative policies and actions to transform challenges associated with the ageing of the global population into opportunities for social engagement, productivity and fiscal sustainability.

Contact

Melissa Gong Mitchell
mmitchell@globalcoalitiononaging.com

For more information, visit

www.globalcoalitiononaging.com

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