

Centering Life Course Immunization in 21st Century Health System Transformation

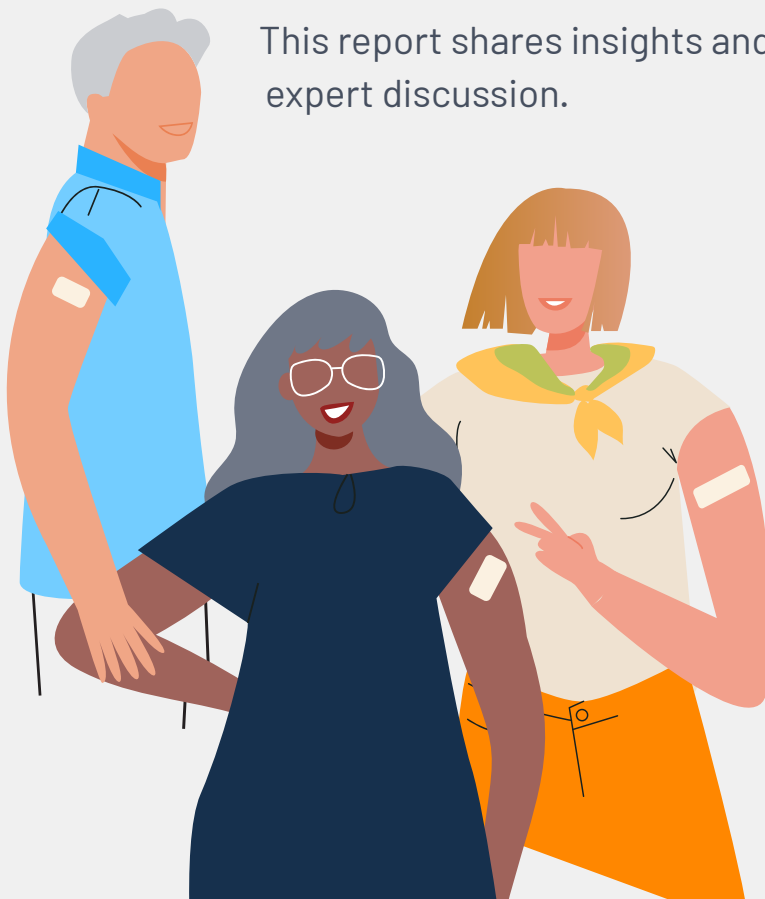
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Introduction

On June 12, 2023, the Global Coalition on Aging organized a panel session at the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics Asia/Oceania Regional Congress 2023. The session brought together experts across a range of sectors for a discussion on the importance of life course immunization and the need for health systems to shift towards a focus on prevention and the growing role for integrated person-centered care. This transformation of health systems, including a greater prioritization of life course immunization, could ensure better responsiveness, better quality of care, greater efficiency, and, ultimately, improved sustainability for health systems and support for health aging.

This report shares insights and key takeaways from the expert discussion.



Speakers

Michael Hodin	CEO, Global Coalition on Aging
Yuka Sumi	Medical Officer, Ageing and Health Unit, World Health Organization
Ninie Wang	Founder & CEO, Pinetree Care Group
Susana Harding	Senior Director, International Longevity Centre-Singapore

Key Takeaways

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- 01 As populations age, 21st century health systems must evolve to deliver prevention-focused, person-centered, integrated care to improve outcomes, safeguard system capacity, and remain fiscally sustainable.
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- 02 Routine immunization is one of the key drivers of healthy aging—along with improvements in sanitation and advances in antimicrobials—and is crucial to the success of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing.
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- 03 Centering and empowering older people within their communities through an integrated care approach, like the WHO integrated care for older people (ICOPE) approach, provides an accessible framework to advance adult immunization.
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- 04 Helping adults access vaccines that can protect their health and reduce rates of vaccine-preventable diseases can support the goals of integrated care, while synergizing efforts to combat ageism and build on the WHO Age-Friendly Cities and Communities network.
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- 05 Older people should be encouraged to be their own health advocates and the frontline ambassadors communicating on the importance of vaccination.

Integrated Care and Life Course Immunization: A Healthy Aging Framework

Many health systems around the world are in the process of reorganizing and reorienting themselves to respond to the dynamics of rapidly aging populations. Chief among these changes is a shift towards more integrated and person-centered care, with health promotion and prevention at the forefront. The benefits of life course immunization in promoting health and preventing illness are undeniable, yet this approach is still underutilized in many health systems.



It is through prevention strategies that we will be able to achieve the Decade of Healthy Ageing goals.

Mike Hodin, CEO of Global Coalition on Aging

The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) Goals

1. Age-friendly Environments
2. Combatting Ageism
3. Integrated Care
4. Long-term Care

National immunization programs have had tremendous success ensuring that infants, children, and women of reproductive age are protected against vaccine-preventable disease, contributing in large part to the healthy longevity that societies across the world now enjoy. However, older populations have not typically been prioritized in these programs, in part due to ageism. As global population aging increasingly transforms the dynamics and demands on our societies, economies, and health systems, governments must confront and redress entrenched ageism that, left unaddressed, threatens fiscal sustainability and broad economic growth. Prioritization of routine immunization across the life course, including for adults, is an accessible lever for governments to keep their populations healthy and productive as they age.

Two prominent global platforms offer frameworks for prioritizing and integrating immunization for adults into 21st century health systems. The World Health Organization's Immunization Agenda 2030 sets a unified vision for immunization over the next decade that strives to leave no one behind—integrating immunization into touch points across the life course, including within the primary healthcare system and within other public health interventions. Likewise, the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing has an action area on integrated care, which can be utilized to strengthen immunization of older people. Integrated care is a holistic approach of organizing

care that seeks to reorient health and social services towards greater coordination, placing individuals at the center. The objective of the WHO integrated care for older people (ICOPE) approach is to maximize intrinsic capacity and functional ability toward the improvement of health and wellbeing among older people.



COVID-19 brought us lessons and learning how to reach older people with vaccines.

Yuka Sumi, Medical Officer, Ageing and Health Unit, World Health Organization

The ICOPE approach is a useful framework for the promotion of life course immunization. For example, ICOPE's focus on delivering healthcare to older people in their communities can create opportunities to ensure that older populations can be screened and referred to vaccination services. Furthermore, efforts to immunize older adults align with the goals of integrated care: preventing disease through vaccination can help optimize intrinsic capacity.

Integrating Immunization Into Integrated Care: Three Guiding Principles

The principles guiding the integrated care approach include empowering older people in their healthcare decisions, rethinking healthcare delivery and infrastructure to better address the needs of older people, and mobilizing communities to improve care and access to support older people. Together, these principles provide a framework for communities and countries to strengthen adult immunization programs. The following section explains how the guiding principles of integrated care support life course immunization.

01

Empowering Older People

Integrated care requires a whole-of-society approach that engages all stakeholders in the health and wellbeing of older people. Personalized care requires the development of care plans with a person at the center, meeting them where they are in their own communities. In doing so, older people are empowered by being involved in their own care plans, including with regard to immunization and knowing their immunization status. Care providers are also empowered to know that infrastructure and community exists to support them and individuals in their care. In addition, technology, such as telehealth and digital health platforms, can be harnessed to empower, educate, and manage one's own health.

02

Rethinking Care Delivery and Infrastructure

Most people, not least older people, do not want to have to travel far for their care, whether due to simple preference, mobility, or transportation and cost. It is important to strengthen community and primary healthcare services—including immunization access points—within neighborhoods to support the ability to age in place, and to have access to the care they need. Community pharmacies and pharmacists are an increasingly important resource to

strengthen adult vaccination. WHO's Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities offers a supportive infrastructure that can be leveraged to support integrated care and adult immunization efforts.

03

Mobilizing Communities for Care

One of the central ideas of integrated care is the engagement and mobilization of communities for health and healthcare, both a success and a failure seen with COVID-19 efforts. Addressing the pandemic required the participation of more than just healthcare professionals, and widespread and successful mobilization efforts across sectors and society provided proof of concept to the general public that public health work can and should be a multi-disciplinary effort. However, 82% of COVID-19 deaths occurring among people aged 65 and older, highlighting their particular vulnerability and the need for communities to actively prioritize prevention of infections, especially respiratory infections, in older people. Healthy aging should be approached in a similar manner, with communities coming together to promote healthy aging through built environments, social participation, and other infrastructure complementary to health services. The training of caregivers and others in the community to support the health and wellbeing of older people can also help to expand the cadre of those in a community who are mobilized to support and authorized to give vaccinations. Reflecting again back to COVID-19, COVID vaccination rates were increased not solely because there were increased numbers of health care professionals, but also because the broader community was mobilized to understand the urgency and importance of vaccination, particularly for older people.

CASE
STUDY

ICOPE in China

The ICOPE approach has been piloted in a number of countries, including China, Singapore, and Indonesia. The results of these pilots have shown that ICOPE can be effective in improving the health and wellbeing of older adults and has the potential to elevate adult immunization and global public health through the Decade of Healthy Ageing.

The piloting of integrated care for older people takes evidence and best practices to create guidelines and care pathways that every country can use to localize and develop their own policies. The China pilot, led by Ninie Wang, aims to develop a common model of care to facilitate care coordination among different providers and stakeholders.

The China ICOPE pilot began in 2021, following an initial delay due to COVID-19. The pandemic required that Wang expand the scope and considerations defined for the initial pilot plan to include additional control measures and vaccine-related targets. For example, the program needed to screen for boosters and send vaccine reminders. The encouragement that the integrated care managers provided was simple, but it helped improve vaccination rates.

Reflecting on the first phase of the pilot, it is clear to Wang and others involved in the program how important it was to integrate immunization into the ICOPE model. Immunization rates for adult vaccines were very low, while hesitation rates were high, especially for the four major vaccine-preventable diseases—influenza, pneumococcal disease, herpes zoster, and pertussis. As Wang and her collaborators adapt the ICOPE pathways for China, they are proactively working with their national immunization program to more deeply integrate immunization into the next phase of the program and provide more education for older people and their family members. ICOPE presents a chance to make great strides on adult immunization coverage rates, in China and beyond.

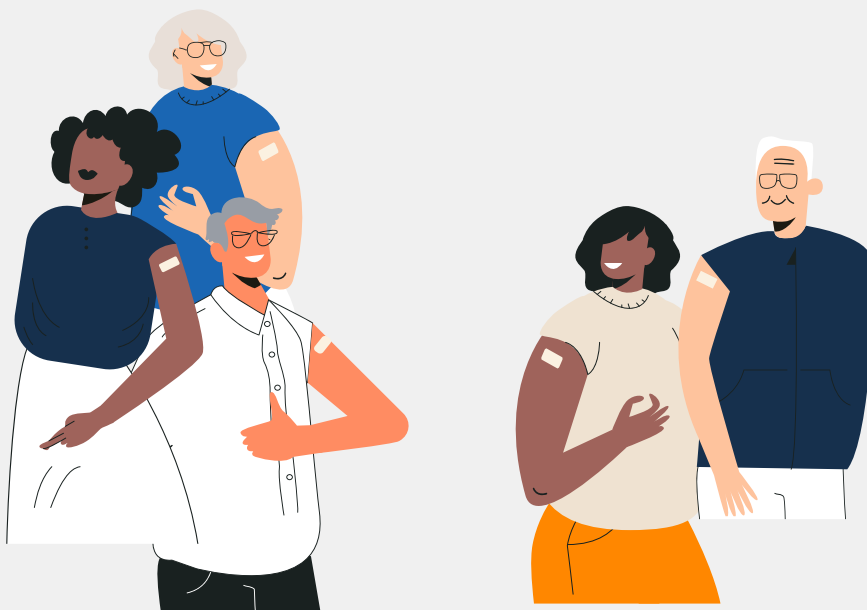
Conclusion

Recognizing and leveraging the linkages between greater prioritization of adult immunization and an integrated care approach for older people will synergistically strengthen both efforts and contribute to better outcomes, both for individuals and for populations. Healthcare systems that succeed in prioritizing prevention through initiatives like routine adult immunization, while delivering more person-centered care, will be more effective, efficient, resilient, and responsive to the challenges and demographic demands of the 21st century.



We need to empower older people to be advocates for their own needs at the community level.

Susana Harding, Senior Director, International Longevity Centre-Singapore



Policy Recommendations

01

Support and implement integrated care as part of strategies to transform health systems for greater resilience and sustainability.

02

Build routine immunization into integrated care approach, like the WHO integrated care for older people (ICOPE) framework, and leverage community resources like pharmacies and pharmacists to support greater access to immunization, education, and empowerment.

03

Align efforts to advance integrated care and immunization within existing program infrastructure and policy priorities wherever possible—such as combatting ageism and strengthening Age-friendly Cities and Communities—to leverage programmatic efficiencies and policy momentum.



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 aging of the global population into opportunities for social engagement, productivity and fiscal sustainability.

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