General Principles Concerning Measures for the Aging Society

On publishing the English version of
the "General Principles Concerning Measures for the Aging Society"

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Part 1 Objectives and Basic Concepts

1.Objectives in Drawing Up General Principles

Japan is facing rapid population aging. This, together with the undulating changes in our economic societies, has an extensive influence on the people.

In the beginning of the 21st century, Japan expects to become a genuine aging society. In order to build, without delay, an affluent society full of solidarity and vitality where each and every one can feel that they are happy to live long and are in perfect harmony with one another, it is vital to promote sound development of the economy as well as stable improvement of people's living conditions. This can be accomplished by continuously reviewing socio-economic systems so that they meet the needs of the new society,

support the independence of individuals and the role of families, maintain and promote the vitality of the people, and assure peaceful living by appropriately combining self-support with mutual and public support.

To help achieve this goal, general principles, which the government should implement, have been drawn up as a basic and comprehensive policy for the aging society in accordance with the provisions in Article 6 of the Basic Law on Measures for the Aging Society (Law 129, 1995, hereafter referred to as the "Law.")

2.Basic Concepts

In principle, measures for the aging society should be implemented with the goal of building the following society as prescribed in Article 2 of the Law:

1) A fair and energetic society where people can be ensured that they have the opportunity of participating in diverse social activities or working throughout their lives.
2) A society where people are respected as important members throughout their lives and where local communities are formed based on the spirit of independence and solidarity.
3) An affluent society where people can live peacefully and with fulfillment throughout their lives.

In order to achieve these basic principles, it is vital to implement measures for an aging society under a system in which all members of the society can help and support one another. This can be achieved through mutual exchange and cooperation among all members of the society, such as the national government, local governments, corporations, local communities, families, individuals and volunteers, as well as their active involvement in achieving this goal.

To facilitate such efforts, the governmental measures for the aging society have been drawn up based on the fundamental concepts described below and will be implemented across various sectors, such as working and income, health and welfare, learning and social involvement, living environments, and promoting research.

(1)Emphasis on the independence, participation and choices of the elderly

Considering the diversity of the elderly, they will be supported so that they can live peaceful lives independently and conditions will be improved so that they can actively participate in diverse social activities by utilizing their experience and abilities as important member of the aging society. In addition, private service providers will be utilized in providing services, so that the elderly can independently choose their life-styles based on their own values. Consideration will also be given to diversity of choice by actively utilizing private insurance for extra benefits, while publicly assuring the provision of fundamental benefits.

(2)Systematic implementation of measures throughout people*s lives

Systematic implementation of measures for the aging society will be promoted by effectively combining various measures. In other words, the measures will be implemented effectively to meet the needs of individuals at various stages of life, from infants to the elderly and will focus on the independence of individuals and the role of families.

(3)Respect for regional autonomy

Necessary environments will be developed to promote regional autonomy and effective measures, such as the utilization of existing facilities and community development will be taken, considering the degree of aging and socio-economic conditions in the region, urban and rural areas alike.

(4)Effective implementation of the measures

An increase in people's future burdens will be mitigated as much as possible and a fair and appropriate sharing of burdens among different generations can be achieved by optimally utilizing social resources, including the private sector, and effectively developing and implementing measures for the aging society.

(5)Cooperation among the administrative bodies concerned

In order to promote measures for the aging society effectively and comprehensively, current measures will be subject to stringent reviews, thorough coordination among the measures will be carried out and close cooperation among the administrative bodies concerned will be promoted.

(6)Use of technology concerning medical care, welfare, information and communication

The research, development and utilization of technology concerning medical care, welfare, information and communication will be promoted so that the results can be also enjoyed by the elderly.

In addition, as basic conditions for promoting measures for the aging society, efforts will be made to achieve sustainable economic development by maintaining stable price levels and promoting creative technology research and development activities and reforms, while promoting balanced development of national land through infrastructure developments, focusing on improving the quality of the life of people.

Part 2 Basic Measures by Sector

1.Working and Income

In response to the aging working population as we approach the 21st century, employment and working environments will be improved to achieve sustainable economic development and allow working people to show their abilities to the fullest up to the old age, thereby rejuvenating the aging society.

Considering the elderly's positive will to work, continuous employment up to the age of 65 will be promoted with the aim of allowing the elderly to work regularly until they are 65 if they wish, utilizing the knowledge, experience and abilities which they have acquired over many years. In addition, diverse opportunities will be provided so that the elderly can find jobs, depending on their will and abilities.

Various measures will be promoted, such as professional ability development, working hour reduction, further assurance of equal employment opportunities and labor conditions, and the propagation of child-care leave and care leave for the elderly, so that working people can exhibit their abilities throughout their professional careers while they are coping with their profession, family, and community life.

The income of the elderly after their retirement will be mainly secured by public pensions, which are based on social solidarity among the people, properly combining corporate pensions, retirement allowances, personal pensions and assets, which are based on company and personal efforts.

(1)Securing employment and working opportunities for the elderly

a.Promoting continuous employment until the age of 65

Employment and working environments for the elderly will be improved, centering on continuous employment until the age of 65.

With respect to the retirement system at the age of 60, which serves as the basis of continuous employment until the age of 65, companies that have not implemented this system will be urgently instructed to do so as soon as possible before April 1998 when the system becomes compulsory.

In order to promote continuous employment until the age of 65, the introduction of post-retirement continuous employment systems will be encouraged and directed. Consultation and assistance concerning fair wages and personnel management will also be promoted. Furthermore, various subsidies concerning the employment of the elderly will be utilized.

For those elderly people whose wages have declined considerably since they were 60 years old, allowances for continuous employment of the elderly, which is part of employment insurance, will be utilized to respond to their will to work.

Considering physical and psychological changes associated with aging, efforts will be made to prevent industrial accidents and improve workers' health and working environments.

b.Securing diverse employment and working opportunities

As people get older, health and physical strength condition differs among individuals and their needs for working diversify. It is, therefore, necessary to provide diverse working opportunities while maintaining close cooperation among the parties concerned.

To help the unemployed elderly find new jobs, labor demand and supply coordinating functions of public employment security offices will be enhanced by promoting professional ability development, exploiting job offers, providing employment information and implementing reemployment assistance measures. Reemployment assistance programs offered for retired people by private organizations will also be promoted.

In addition, to help the elderly work at their own discretion, the special exemption system for labor dispatch programs concerning the elderly will be implemented appropriately and labor dispatch programs, which will be carried out by the Center for the Utilization of the Professional Experience for the Elderly, will be promoted.

Furthermore, in order to provide temporary and short-term employment opportunities after retirement on a regional basis, silver human resource center programs will be enhanced, including the expansion of target areas.

So that working people can prepare for their lives when they get old or after retirement, assistance programs, such as information services, provided by private organizations, etc. will also be promoted.

(2)Helping working people exhibit their abilities throughout their lives

a.Ability development over long professional careers

To help working people exhibit their professional abilities over a long time, support for company education and training and individuals' voluntary efforts to develop professional abilities will be promoted by providing diverse information and consulting services, and utilizing lifelong ability development allowances. Vocational training offered at public professional ability development centers will also be promoted.

b.Realizing a comfortable vocational life

Shifting to the 40-hour week system, which is scheduled to be carried out on a full scale from April 1997, will be facilitated. Working hours will continue to be reduced positively to achieve and maintain total annual working hours of 1,800 by popularizing the five-day workweek system, encouraging annual paid vacation and reducing overtime work. This

will in turn contribute to harmonizing professional careers with family and community life as well as maintaining and expanding employment opportunities.

Additionally, refreshing vacations will be encouraged and health care for working people will be promoted through health improvement programs implemented at workplace levels.

c.Helping women exhibit their abilities in terms of employment and working

To help women exhibit their abilities in terms of employment and working, further efforts will be made to assure equal opportunities and labor conditions. In addition, referral services and vocational training that meet the needs of women will be promoted and women's involvement in the sectors of agriculture, forestry and fishery will be facilitated.

d.Promoting measures to help working people cope with both professional careers and family life

Measures to help working people cope with both their professional careers and family life will be promoted comprehensively and systematically.

Employment and working environment will be improved so that working people can cope with both their jobs and child-care and care for the elderly by creating an atmosphere where it is easy to take leave for nursing and elderly care and return to work, or continue to work while caring children and the elderly alike. The popularization of the child-care leave system will continue to be promoted and the early introduction of care-leave for the elderly systems, the implementation of which will become compulsory in April 1999, will be encouraged.

e.Creating an environment where diverse ways of working are available

The creation of an environment where diverse ways of working, such as part-time and temporary employment, can be chosen will be facilitated and the development and popularization of ways to work far away from company offices, utilizing communication technology, will be encouraged.

(3)Stable operation of the public pension systems

With regard to the public pension system, appropriate benefit levels, as well as employment levels, will be maintained so that public pensions will continue to play a core role in assuring incomes for the elderly. In view of the reforms that took place in 1985 and 1994, measures, such as balancing the benefits and burdens, will be taken to assure long-term stable operation of the public pension system. Since the public pension system requires intergenerational support, consideration will be given so that excessive burdens will not be exerted on future generations. In addition, to stabilize and justify the system in response to the changes in employment structures and the maturity of the system, the reorganization of the public pension system will be facilitated.

(4)Support for securing incomes for the elderly through self-help

a.Stable operation of corporate pension system

Since corporate pension systems complement the public pension system, it is vital to ensure their stable operation even under harsh economic conditions. The Employee*s Pension Fund System, which serves as the core of corporate pension systems, will be subject to drastic reviews. Additionally, deregulation, etc. will continue to be considered so that the fund will be used more efficiently.

Furthermore, consideration will be given to the need for the review of qualified retirement allowance systems.

b.Improving retirement allowance systems reflecting the needs of the aging society

Consideration will be given to desirable company retirement allowance systems to cope with an increase in retired people and labor shifts due to changes in industrial structures.

In addition, the introduction of external reserve systems will be encouraged. Consideration will also be given to developing measures to secure the payment of retirement allowances as part of the retirement allowance preservation measures. Moreover, the popularization and improvement of retirement allowance systems among small and medium-sized enterprises will be pursued.

c.Promoting asset accumulation, etc. for the elderly

To help the elderly live better-off lives, the development of financial products with the aim of stabilizing incomes of the elderly and self-help asset accumulation through the improvement of various financial services will be promoted. Further support will be provided to help working people systematically accumulate their assets while they work regularly and their employers are making efforts to support this.

In addition, to facilitate self-help by people in response to their needs for more affluent and peaceful lives when they become old, the popularization and utilization of personal pensions and the National Pension Fund will be promoted by improving over-the-counter consultation services, etc.

Furthermore, to help the elderly to utilize their assets, consideration will be given to the reverse mortgage system in which loans will be provided for the elderly on the security of their own houses. Moreover, as part of the effort to help the elderly manage their assets, systems to protect the rights of the senile dementia elderly will be developed.

2.Health and Welfare

Lifelong comprehensive health improvement will be promoted in order to help people improve their health while they are still young and maintain their health when they get

old or when they get ill, in their daily life, as well as helping them live a peaceful and fulfilling life, enjoy longevity.

With respect to health, medical and welfare services, a system, in which someone who needs support can easily be provided with services necessary for their independence, will be established by steadily implementing the "New Gold Plan" which was drawn up in 1994, following the review of the "Ten-Year Strategy to Promote Health Care and Welfare for the Elderly."

In addition, a system will be established, in which medical care will be provided. With regard to long-term care services, a mechanism, with which necessary financial resources can be secured toward the future based on the principle of solidarity between the elderly and working people, will be established through extensive understanding and cooperation among the people. When establishing such a system or mechanism, it is important to ensure the consistency in the overall social security systems.

In order to provide a variety of services, help provided by private enterprises will be used. To do so, it is vital to ensure that services will be provided based on the users' choice.

To construct an aging society, it is of paramount importance to cope with the decline the of fertility. In consequence, comprehensive and intentional measures to support child care will be promoted.

(1)Comprehensive promotion of health improvement

a.Promoting lifelong health improvement

Through the dissemination of health-related information, lifelong improvement through well-balanced nutrition, exercise and recreation will be promoted. People should become aware of their health, thereby improving their health, preventing diseases and encouraging early diagnosis and detection of illness. Moreover, eating habits which contribute to health improvement will also be encouraged.

With respect to health improvement for the people in the prime of their lives or in their old age, a system, in which regional health services will be provided at municipal levels with the support of prefectural governments, will be developed, which will be complemented and enhanced by the use of private services and communication technology.

b.DeveIoping health improvement facilities

In order to facilitate lifelong health improvement, necessary facilities, including regional health facilities, will be developed so that sick people can improve their health in a friendly environment.

(2)Enhancing health, medical and welfare services

a.Improving regional systems to provide comprehensive services

In order to meet the needs of the elderly while coordinating systems and using private service providers, certain systems will be developed so that user-oriented services can be provided in areas where residents feel most familiar, such as their municipalities.

b.Improving in-home services

In view of the importance of homes/families in living and psychological terms, in-home services will be improved so that the elderly can live at their own homes or in their communities as long as they want even when they require care.

To support such elderly people and families, home help, short-stay and day services and home-visit nursing programs will be improved. In addition, the development of in-home care support centers will be promoted.

With regard to home help services, 24-hour service systems, including holidays, will be established.

Furthermore, comprehensive in-home health and medical care will be promoted through the enhancement of the functions of family doctors, in-home terminal care and day-care.

c.Improving facility services

Facility services will be enhanced to allow the elderly to receive appropriate services when they have difficulty to live in their own homes.

To achieve this, the development of special nursing homes for the elderly, health services facilities for the elderly to provide medical and living services, living welfare centers for the elderly in depopulated areas, and care houses (moderate-fee homes for the elderly) where the elderly can continue self-supported lives, utilizing wheelchairs and other essentials will be promoted. In addition, recuperation bedrooms with complete recuperation environments and care services will be developed.

While considering original functions of such facilities, existing facilities will be effectively used, including combined development with other public facilities and conversion of medical facilities.

d.Implementing comprehensive support measures for the independence of the elderly who need assistance

In order to positively support the independence of the elderly by preventing them from being in bedridden conditions that require personal assistance, regional rehabilitation

systems will be enhanced and comprehensive measures, such as health care programs to prevent cerebral apoplexy, fractures and hypofunction due to aging, will be implemented.

e.Implementing comprehensive measures for senile dementia

With respect to senile dementia, consultation and information services will be promoted through the development of senile dementia treatment centers. Moreover, senile dementia prevention and early detection/treatment systems will be upgraded by providing trained qualified personnel for treating dementia.

In addition, to improve medical and care systems, day service centers and group homes for the senile elderly will be developed and institutionalized. The development of medical care and recuperation wards and health service facilities specializing in the treatment of dementia will be facilitated.

(3)Implementing comprehensive support measures to improve long-term care foundations

a.Promoting measures to train and secure staff to care for the elderly

In order to train and secure staff to care who have the responsibility of providing care services for the elderly, such as staff to care of social welfare facilities, nurses and home helpers, measures will be taken to improve training systems, including training centers, better qualifications, and working environments.

In addition, labor demand and supply coordination between public employment security offices and the private sectors will be enhanced.

Moreover, volunteer activities concerning welfare for the elderly will be highly promoted.

b.Popularizing technical aids

In order to encourage appropriate use of technical aids, practical health care training and dissemination centers will be developed to provide opportunities for equipment display and consultation. The popularization of technical aids will also be promoted through donation and lease programs. Furthermore, support systems will be developed for technical aids manufacturers and dealers to ensure provision of technical aids.

c.Comprehensive development of user-friendly service provision systems

To allow residents to seek for advice and obtain necessary information about care in areas to which they are familiar, specific measures, centering on in-home care support centers, will be taken. Care management systems will also be enhanced to properly understand the needs for care and link them to necessary services.

(4)Service costs

a.Medical expenses

In order to provide appropriate medical care suitable for the aging society, comprehensive measures, including drastic reform of medical insurance systems and the improvement of medical care provision systems, will be implemented on a medium to long-term basis. This will facilitate the optimization of medical expenses including medical care expenditure for the elderly and justify intergenerational burdens and a balance between benefits and burdens within and among different insurance systems.

b.Securing long-term care expenses through social solidarity

In order to establish a mechanism, with which necessary financial resources can be secured toward the future based on the principle of solidarity between the elderly and working people through extensive understanding and cooperation among the people, positive efforts will be made to establish a new long-term care system for the elderly, incorporating adequate public money and social insurance systems.

(5)Utilizing private service providers

To meet the increasing and diversifying demand for health and welfare services as well as to provide such services more efficiently, private service providers will be used, regulations on care service providers will be eased, measures to foster private service providers, including loan systems, will be taken with the aim of expanding long-term care related markets and employment.

In order to ensure service quality, service evaluation systems will be established.

(6)Promoting comprehensive measures to support child care

To help create an environment where people can raise their children, comprehensive measures to support child care, such as the improvement of child care services and mother-and-child health and medical care systems, will be implemented systematically. In doing so, five-year programs, such as emergency child care services, will be put into practice and sound development of private child care services will be provided through market mechanisms.

3.Learning and Social Involvement

In an aging society where people's values increasingly diversify, it is vital to provide people with opportunities to seek fulfillment in their mind and daily life and continuously learn new knowledge and technology. It is our aim to create a lifelong learning system in which people can freely choose their learning opportunities and their efforts can be appropriately evaluated.

In addition, to help the elderly have something to live for as important members of the society, their social involvement, including volunteer activities, should be facilitated and environments in which the elderly can make the most of their free time and live fulfilling lives should be developed.

Furthermore, since volunteer activities help the elderly to achieve their own goals, participate in local communities, contribute to enhancing community welfare and promote a spirit of social solidarity and mutual support, social foundations need to be developed so that anyone can freely participate in volunteer activities while their own initiatives are respected.

(1)Creating a lifelong learning system

a.Improving systems and foundations to promote lifelong learning

With the aim of creating a lifelong learning system and achieving structured improvements in learning opportunities, a comprehensive system to promote lifelong learning will be developed, in cooperation with the public and private bodies concerned, such as social educational facilities and institutions of higher education. Symposiums and conferences will be organized to ensure regional cooperation. Master plans that are necessary for comprehensive implementation will also be developed.

In addition, to strengthen the foundation of providing lifelong learning opportunities, lifelong learning will be propagated, information and consultation services will be improved, instructors will be trained and learning results will be appropriately evaluated.

b.Ensuring diverse learning opportunities at school

At institutions of higher education, such as colleges and universities, to provide adults with advanced and practical learning opportunities, efforts will be made to implement special enrollment systems for adults, establish night graduate schools, offer day and night courses, and expand through the country the University of the Air.

Moreover, school functions and facilities will be opened to the public for open seminars for local residents and the utilization of unused classrooms for social education.

c.Providing diverse learning opportunities

In order to meet people's diversifying and demanding need for learning and provide diverse lifelong learning opportunities, social education at community centers, libraries and museums , cultural activities at art museums, and sports will be promoted, while ensuring the sound development of private service providers and utilizing communication networks.

d.Supporting working people's learning activities

To develop a system in which working people can study while leaving their workplace for some time, paid-vacation systems for education and training will be popularized and measures will be developed to directly support individual workers who try to improve their professional abilities on their own initiative.

(2)Promoting social involvement

a.Promoting involvement of the elderly in social activities

In order to build energetic local communities as well as to help the elderly play an active role in them with something to live for, the elderly's involvement in social activities will be facilitated.

To achieve this goal, opportunities will be provided for the elderly and young generations to promote mutual exchange, and voluntary activities of the elderly will be supported. Moreover, the social involvement of the elderly will be propagated, information and consulting services will be improved and instructors will be trained.

In addition, to help utilize the elderly's abilities overseas with the advance of international exchange, systems will be developed so that expertise and skills of the elderly and retired people can be utilized for overseas technical cooperation and so on.

Furthermore, to help the elderly live fulfilling lives through recreation, sightseeing and hobbies, leisure facilities for the elderly will be improved, existing facilities will be utilized, availability information will be provided and broadcasts with subtitles will be upgraded.

b.Improving the basis of volunteer activities

The basis of volunteer activities will be improved in effective cooperation with the regional bodies concerned.

To do so, volunteer bases will be secured, volunteer activities will be propagated, information, consultation, registration and referral systems will be developed, introductory seminars and hands-on programs will be organized, and volunteer leaders and coordinators will be trained. Extensive educational opportunities concerning volunteering and welfare will also be provided.

In addition, the social appreciation of volunteer activities will be promoted and measures will be taken to facilitate the introduction of volunteer vacation systems and support corporate philanthropy.

4.Living Environment

Since houses serve as the basis of peoples' living, housing environments will be improved so that people can choose their houses based on their life plans, thereby ensuring lifelong,

stable and comfortable residential lives. To achieve this goal, housing standards will be improved, the rationalization of housing production will be promoted and housing styles will be diversified so that people can live with or neighbor to their parents. In conjunction with welfare measures, moreover, the provision of houses equipped with life-support systems that allow self-support or care for the elderly will be promoted.

To ensure safe and smooth activities of the elderly, public transportation systems, sidewalks and public buildings will be made barrier-free, and comprehensive measures will be taken to facilitate community development that takes the elderly into consideration.

In addition, measures will be taken to protect the elderly from traffic accidents, crimes and disasters so that they can live with peace of mind.

Furthermore, considering the status and socio-economic features of the aging society, living environments will be developed to create comfortable urban atmospheres by the use of water and green, and energized agriculture, forestry and fishery villages.

(1)Ensuring stable and comfortable housing

a.Promoting the provision of high-quality houses

To provide high-quality houses which serve as the basis of a stable and comfortable life, efforts will be made so that half of the households nationwide can achieve the target housing standards by FY 2000 and half of the households in all major cities can achieve the same goal as soon as possible after that. In particular, measures will be taken to ensure that there will be no more households that are below the minimum housing standards, focusing on apartment residents in major cities.

To achieve this goal, support will be provided for young people to acquire or improve their own houses. With respect to apartments, support systems will be implemented to facilitate the supply of high quality private and public apartments.

In addition, housing production, distribution systems and consumer consultation services will be improved.

b.Diversifying housing styles

The construction and extension of houses will be facilitated by the use of loan systems to allow people to live with their parents in their own homes.

Moreover, public rented house or apartments will be supplied, giving priority to households with the elderly as well as meeting the needs for living together with, neighboring and group homes which do not involve blood relations.

c.Developing houses for self-support and care

Through the propagation of the Design Guidelines for the Aging Society and loan systems, the construction and renovation of houses suitable for self-support and care for the elderly will be provided. In particular, new public rented house or apartments will be constructed in accordance with certain specifications, giving consideration to the functional deterioration associated with aging.

In addition, by coordinating housing and welfare measures, the supply of residential buildings which are equipped with daily assistance and care systems for the elderly, and the development of housing complexes with life-support systems will be promoted.

(2)Community development for the elderly

Community development for the elderly will be promoted to help the elderly move easily in barrier-free living spaces.

Public transportation systems will be made barrier-free by installing elevators in traffic terminals, such as train stations and airports, and facilities and vehicles will be improved to ensure the convenience of the elderly. Continuous walking space will be secured by widening sidewalks. Road traffic will also be improved so that the elderly can drive or go out with peace of mind.

In addition, buildings that are open to the general public, such as hospitals and theaters, will be made barrier-free. Governmental facilities that provide over-the-counter services will be converted to meet specifications focusing on the convenience of the elderly.

Furthermore, in conjunction with welfare measures, welfare and medical facilities will be systematically located in urban areas, together with the development of parks and other infrastructures. In rural areas, sites for welfare and medical facilities, together with farms and other facilities, will be developed.

(3)Protecting the elderly from traffic accidents, crimes and disasters

In cooperation with the bodies concerned and local residents, an environment, where the elderly, especially those who live alone or are handicapped, can live peacefully, will be developed.

Measures, such as offering traffic safety seminars and developing traffic safety facilities for the elderly, will be taken to prevent the elderly from being involved in traffic accidents, as well as to protect the elderly from crimes, dangers associated with wandering due to dementia, human right infringements, and vicious traders. Moreover, disaster measures will be strengthened to protect the elderly who are vulnerable to disasters.

(4)Developing comfortable and energized living environments

To create comfortable urban environments, urban park development, roadside tree planting and public access-oriented waterfront development will be promoted.

In addition, to revitalize rural villages, measures will be taken to allow the elderly to exhibit their abilities in production activities, help their successors become established and improve living environments, taking regional features into consideration so that they can live with peace of mind.

5.Promoting Research

The research, development and use of technology greatly contributes to resolving issues associated with aging societies. Research activities that help realize an affluent and active aging society, such as research into diseases peculiar to the elderly and technical aids, and the development of foundations will be promoted.

(1)Promoting a variety of research activities

a.Research into diseases peculiar to the elderly

Research into diseases peculiar to the elderly, such as dementia and osteoporosis, as well as adult diseases, such as cerebral apoplexy, will be promoted. Research into disease prevention, and medical and care for the elderly, as well as basic research into aging will also be facilitated.

b.Research and development of technical aids

In order to support the independence of the elderly and reduce care burdens, research and development of technical aids and medical equipment for the elderly will be promoted.

c.Research and development of safe and easy-to-use household articles

The research and development of household articles, foundations for living and safe and easy-to-use systems for the elderly will be promoted.

d.Research and development of communication technology

The research and development of new communication technology, including both hardware and software technology, to be used for working, health and medical care, welfare, learning, social involvement, and living environments for the elderly, will be promoted.

(2)Improving the basis of research activities

a.Improving systems to facilitate research activities

Systems to facilitate research, such as longevity science research institutes and support institutions, will be enhanced.

In addition, to facilitate research and development, a database on physical characteristics of the elderly will be developed and a technical aids evaluation system will be established, thereby standardizing technical aids for the elderly. Moreover, research will be made more efficient by creating a research information network.

b.Personnel development

Professional researchers will be trained, and research and personnel exchange will be encouraged.

International collaboration, such as joint research and information and personnel exchange, will also be promoted.

Part 3 To Promote Measures for the Aging Society

1.Important Points in Promoting Measures for the Aging Society

When promoting measures for the aging society, the following points should be attended to:

(1) The role of families and local communities in supporting individuals' self-help efforts and maintaining living conditions will be emphasized. In particular, consideration should be given to the importance of volunteer activities which support the elderly. In addition, the public and private sectors should share appropriate responsibilities. Measures should be implemented efficiently by making the most of creativity and flexibility of private service providers based on the principles of competition. Moreover, local administrative bodies should be utilized.
(2) To obtain the understanding and cooperation of people in promoting measures for the aging society, people's opinions should be reflected, and effective public relations and education should be implemented.
(3) Information about changes in economic societies associated with aging should be continuously collected and analyzed. Necessary systems should be developed so that the elderly and local residents may have easy access to this information as well as other information about the use of measures for the aging society.
(4) Measures should be implemented steadily, giving consideration to training and securing necessary personnel, based on plans with goals that are made as clear as possible.
(5) Measures which can be trusted by people should be promoted through administrative reforms, such as deregulation, decentralization and the disclosure of administrative information.

(6) Consideration should be given to resolving governmental issues that are closely connected with measures for the aging society, such a gender-equal society and the normalization of the disabled.

2.Systems to Promote Measure for the Aging Society

In order to implement measures for the aging society selectively and efficiently, these general principles will be reviewed and important subjects, such as the preparation of annual reports to be submitted to the Diet, will be discussed at the Aged Society Policy Council. The Cabinet Office should further cooperate with the administrative bodies concerned.

3.Revision of the General Principles

These general principles will be reviewed in approximately five years since they are medium to long-term guidelines for governmental measures for the aging society. However, they should be reviewed immediately in the event that any significant changes should occur in socio-economic conditions.