

ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CONVERSATION ON AGEING TOWN HALL SUMMARY

The IFA “Asia Pacific Regional Conversation on Ageing” Town Hall served as an important and informative vehicle for cross-regional discussions around key drivers of social and economic inequality for older people.

The discussions centered on three main themes:

1. The importance of task responsibility;
2. A need to challenge ageist narratives; and
3. The emerging challenges of health financing and health literacy in regions within Asia.

The Importance of Task Responsibility: A Divided Front

Contributors: Christie Gardiner, Kathleen Brasher, Kate Spurway, Mark Tucker-Evans

“Individual’s autonomy is a fundamental pillar of the decade of healthy ageing but there is a lack of definition on what individual autonomy means, how it is protected and what policies and laws can promote or inhibit individual autonomy” – Christie Gardiner, Legal Academic, New Castle Law School Australia

Healthy ageing is most often seen as the responsibility of the health system and its practitioners; however, professionals may not necessarily understand what it is to live in an environment that enables people to be fully engaged as they grow older.

A collaborative effort is needed to bridge the gap in knowledge and action to build age-inclusive environments. This can begin with academia taking the necessary steps to break down different silos of research and approach the issue collectively.

Further to this, the voices of older people need to be present and reflected in policy and decision-making. It is only through keeping older people at the center of discussions on equity, autonomy and access that we can accurately represent their rights and include them as active agents.

The Ageist Narrative

Contributors: Diedre Timms, Geoff Pearman, Mark Venning, Amal Abou Rafeh

“The narratives we use will define how we think about age and influence our understanding of the ageing process” – Geoff Pearman, Managing Director, Partners in Change

Ageing should be discussed at every stage of life as an ongoing process that occurs through out the life-course. While it is important to focus our action and activism on older people, it is equally necessary to shift our language and rewrite the narrative on ageing from, “what does it mean to be older” to “what does it mean to have a better later life.”

Putting things into perspective, by 2030 the first millennials will be turning 50. This is not only a conversation, therefore, about representing the rights of older people now, but of updating our language, policies and service models of care to reflect the ongoing process of ageing and build an environment that supports the rights of all people as they age.

It is important to recognize that the 2030 deadline for many of the SDG goals and action plans for the Decade of Healthy Ageing coincide with another important milestone; that is older people worldwide will be outnumbering youth. It is therefore crucial to not only target those policies and legislations that excludes older people, but also to incorporate a life course approach in all future policies.

Despite their collectively expressed desire to live longer and to continue contributing to society, many member states do not acknowledge older people as active agents. Policies rarely reflect older people as powerful economic and social drivers, and many member states broach the topic of age inclusive environments with a fiscal sustainability lens, positioning sustainable measures to support ageing populations as the “economic burden of ageing”.

“For the first time people were taking my age and were deciding which part of society I fit into.”

- Diedre Timms, CEO, Advocare

Health Financing and Literacy

Contributors: Thelma Kay

“There needs to be a push for universal health coverage”- Thelma Kay, Senior Advisor for the Ministry of Social and Family Development, Singapore and former Chief of the Social Development Division, UNESCAP

Older people throughout Asia are facing the combined burden of infectious diseases and chronic illnesses. Alongside the increased incidence of comorbidity in this population is the gradual decline in family sizes and the loss of traditional support systems. With many health systems ill-adapted to accommodate these changes, there is an unprecedented need to build the social, healthcare and economic systems in support of an ageing population.

Promoting sustainable preventative strategies can help positively influence older people to live healthier lives. The strongest among these would be health promotion and literacy initiatives that leverage existing cultural practices such as yoga and tai chi, and exercise more broadly, and concurrently reduce dependency on individuals and health systems.

Closing

IFA is honoured to have hosted its first ever Town Hall alongside those organizations and individuals with such diverse knowledge and experience and who are driven to create an environment that empowers older people.

To keep this conversation centered on the issues truly important to older people, we invite you to inform IFA’s next Town hall by completing this survey:

<https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/5417937/IFA-Post-Asia-Pacific-Town-Hall-Survey>

Upcoming Global Events on the Rights of Older People

6-9 April 2020 | The 11th Working Session for the United Nations Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing | New York, USA <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/eleventhsession.shtml>

This working group is considering the existing international framework of the human rights of older persons and identify possible gaps and how best to address them, including the feasibility of further instruments and measures.

1-3 November 2020 | IFA 15th Global Conference on Ageing | Niagara Falls, Canada

IFA’s biennial global conference is a unique gathering of thought leaders, experts and advocates interested in helping to drive the agenda of the world’s ageing population. This year’s theme, “Rights Matter” is aligned with the launch of the Decade of Healthy Ageing and the call for older people to play a critical role in the social and economic capital of a nation. To learn more about the conference, click here: <https://ifa2020.org/global-conference-on-ageing/about/conference-themes/>