

# Increasing Cross-Sectoral Collaboration in Advocacy Efforts for Ear and Hearing Care Services

January 2025

Phase 1 Map: China





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## China

Currently, China has an approximate population of 1.4 billion people. Aligned with global trends, China's population continues to age with the median age forecasted to rise from 39.5 years in 2024 to 50.7 years by 2050.<sup>1</sup> According to the latest report released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, China's older adult population, aged 65 years and older, reached 209 million people in 2022, representing 14.9% of the population.<sup>2</sup> Based on projections by the United Nations (UN), the older adult population aged 65 years and older will rise to 366 million by 2050, accounting for 26% of the total population.<sup>3</sup>

As the population rises, there are concurrent trends of cognitive decline and hearing loss. These trends perpetuate ageist beliefs that diminishing hearing and cognitive abilities are inevitable aspects of ageing.

Consequently, in China the prevalence of varying degrees of hearing loss is on the rise and accounted for 426 million individuals in 2019.<sup>4</sup> In China, hearing loss is mostly attributable to age-related hearing loss (ARHL). According to a 2022 study, it was found that more than 30% of older adults aged between 65 and 75 years, and 50% of older adults aged >75 years, experience some form of hearing loss.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, as hearing loss is linked to an increased risk of dementia, it is found to be a modifiable risk factor necessary to prevent cognitive decline in older adults.<sup>6</sup> According to a national study from 2020, the prevalence of dementia in older adults aged 65 years and older was 5.6%.<sup>7</sup>

China's National Health Commission plans to launch a nationwide initiative from 2024 to 2027 to improve hearing health among older adults by promoting awareness, early screening, and enhanced services.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, newborn hearing screening (NHS) is extensively implemented and recommended for early detection and prevention.<sup>9</sup>

## National Aged Care Plan

### The Current Five-Year Plan

In 2022, China launched a comprehensive five-year care plan for older adults spanning 2021-2025 and designed to address the challenges of its ageing population while enhancing health outcomes. The plan prioritizes six key objectives: developing care infrastructure for older adults, fostering community involvement in care, promoting home-based services, upholding traditional values of filial piety, encouraging active ageing, and supporting the care industry for older adults. To achieve these objectives the plan focuses on expansion of institutions, training of personnel, enhancement of services, and implementation of supportive policies.<sup>10,11</sup>

Another focus of the plan is to improve preventive health services to reduce disability, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and delay the onset of conditions like dementia. To accomplish this, the five-year plan outlines strategies to enhance medical services, improve coordination between home-based and institutional care, and integrate traditional Chinese medicine into care practices for older adults. Specific initiatives include creating accessible environments, retrofitting residential buildings to be age-friendly, and installing assistive medical devices in public spaces.<sup>11</sup> There is no mention of hearing or ear care services.

## Silver Economy Plan

In January 2024, China's State Council (CSC) announced a series of measures to promote the "silver economy". The term silver economy relates to the economic activities of the ageing population and addresses their specific needs and preferences. The silver economy plan calls on both state-owned and private companies to cater to older adults by increasing public and private investments and innovations in equitable and attainable product and services. The plan aims to address four key areas: smart healthcare, financial planning, medical and cosmetic developments, and combatting NCDs. The plan focuses on targeting: care facilities for older adults, innovative medical technology including remote monitoring services and technologies, and culture and entertainment including social clubs and pottery workshops. Under innovative medical technology, the plan mentions the importance of assistive hearing devices.<sup>12,13</sup>

## Healthy China 2030

The Healthy China 2030 initiative was announced in September 2020 ensuring that the Chinese population including older adults have access to equitable healthcare by 2030. The plan has made healthcare almost 100% universally accessible to the Chinese population. The plan puts forward five strategies such as popularizing healthy life, optimizing health service, improving health protection, building a healthy environment, and developing the health industry. The aim is to prevent rather than treat, reducing the prevalence of NCDs. The plan integrates a multifaceted approach to health, from personal life and behaviour, health care and security, production, and the living environment. One of the major steps towards Healthy China 2030 is the national smoke-free law, which would significantly impact the prevention efforts of NCDs.<sup>14,15</sup> While hearing and ear care strategies are not currently specified, there is hope that they will be included in efforts aimed at improving health outcomes and reducing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) moving forward.

## National Dementia Care Strategies

### Healthy China 2030: National Dementia Plan

In 2020, China unveiled a comprehensive national dementia plan as part of its broader Healthy China 2030 Action Plan. This initiative represents a significant commitment to addressing the growing challenge of dementia within the country. The dementia plan aligns with several key components of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Action Plan on Dementia, which outlines seven crucial action areas aimed at tackling the issue on a global scale.<sup>16</sup>

These action areas encompass a range of strategies including efforts to reduce the risk of dementia and slow cognitive decline through preventive measures and early intervention. Additionally, the plan emphasizes the importance of providing respite for family caregivers, acknowledging the significant emotional and physical toll that caring for individuals with dementia can take on families. The creation and support of social service systems also form a core part of the strategy, aiming to offer comprehensive support and enhance the quality of life for both individuals with dementia and their caregivers.<sup>16</sup>

One of the primary goals of China's dementia plan is to raise public awareness about dementia and its prevention, particularly focusing on diseases such as Alzheimer's. This objective builds upon global awareness campaigns like World Alzheimer's Month and World Mental Health Day, which aim to educate the public and reduce stigma associated with dementia-related conditions.<sup>16</sup> Despite these robust strategies, it is noteworthy that the current national dementia plan does not specifically address hearing or ear care strategies.

## National Hearing Care Strategies

### Health Insurance

China's healthcare reform plan launched in 2009 and focuses on a national reimbursement scheme for medical care. The plan ensures that funding is allocated for individuals with hearing loss including older adults, and that they are afforded access to cochlear implantation promptly after identification of hearing loss. Schemes to train surgeons, audiologists, and rehabilitation specialists are being developed since training and education for these specialties are limited in China.<sup>17</sup>

### National Health Commission's Implementation of the Hearing Health Promotion Action for the Elderly (2024-2027)

From 2024 to 2027, China's National Health Commission has plans to implement a nationwide initiative to enhance hearing health among older adults, responding to national policies on ageing. The Health Promotion Action directly recognizes that hearing loss not only leads to a decreased quality of life and social integration, but also increases the risk of mental illness and Alzheimer's disease. The initiative has the objectives to: 1) Guide older adults to enhance their hearing health awareness and maintain their health, 2) Promote early screening, detection, and intervention, to reduce the occurrence of hearing loss in older adults, and 3) Improve the control of hearing loss in older adults and strengthen the function and capacity of hearing health services for older adults. To achieve these objectives, the Health Promotion Action highlights four action areas, which include: 1) Strengthening the awareness and social perception of hearing loss through the development of educational social media toolkits, posters, brochures and videos, and celebrating National Ear Care Day and Elderly Health Publicity Week; 2) Carry out hearing screening and early intervention for older adults, including through the promotion of self-test software; 3) Strengthen the special training and team building for the prevention and control of hearing loss, through research and increased standardized training; 4) Mobilize relevant professional institutions, academic organizations, volunteer organizations, charitable organizations, caring enterprises and other social forces to rely on professionals and institutions to carry out public welfare activities for the health of hearing for older adults. The National Health Commission will oversee the initiative, with the Chinese Geriatrics Society managing specific tasks related to education and public welfare.<sup>8</sup>

# Civil Society Organization Engagement

## Age Care-Related CSOs

### The Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation

Established in 1959, The Hong Kong Society for Rehabilitation (HKSAR) is a charity specializing in rehabilitation services in Mainland China. As of today, the HKSAR provides one-stop services for individuals in need of rehabilitation, health management, accessible transport and travel, and services for older adults. HKSAR aims to provide rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities and chronic illnesses, including older adults. Their mission is empowering individuals with disabilities and health conditions to live a fulfilling life with dignity. HKSAR has multiple projects under development including development of local and cross-border services for older adults and advocating for a community-based rehabilitation network for individuals with chronic illnesses. The HKSAR does not specifically mention hearing and ear care services, however given that they support individuals with disabilities and chronic illnesses as well as older adults, it is hopeful that they will develop initiatives towards those services.<sup>18,19</sup>

### Ageing China Development Centre

The Ageing China Development Centre (ACDC) was established in 2014 in the Shaanxi Province. ACDC is a non-profit organization (NPO) working with local authorities, CSOs, and communities to transfer knowledge, share best practices, mobilise resources, and raise awareness on the issues of population ageing and development in China. There is no mention of hearing or ear care strategies.<sup>20</sup>

### Helping Hand Hong Kong

Founded in 1978, Helping Hand Hong Kong's mission is to meet older adult's need for housing and care in Hong Kong. Their aim is to enable older adults to live with dignity by promoting their sense of belonging and security. Since its inception, Helping Hand has organized and founded several care centres while promoting events on ageing in Hong Kong. The organization's main efforts are focused on providing residential care services including care homes, enabling older adults to have access to occupational therapists, physiotherapists, social workers, and nurses. Each care home can provide rehabilitation, social, recreational, educational, and developmental activities. The care homes are available to anyone 65 years or older who is in poor health or with disabilities. Hearing and ear care strategies are not mentioned but given their support for older adults with health issues and/or disabilities, it is hopeful that Helping Hand Hong Kong will initiate efforts towards strategies moving forward.<sup>20</sup>

## Dementia-Related CSOs

### Alzheimer's Disease Chinese

Alzheimer's Disease Chinese (ADC) was founded in 2002 and is a non-profit, non-governmental organization based in Beijing. The ADC are involved in Alzheimer's disease medical care, Alzheimer's disease publicity, education and social services, and have a huge network of social workers, patients, patient's families, and caregivers.

Their aim is to raise awareness through publicity and education, knowledge translation, and medical skills training opportunities. The ADC discusses dementia and Alzheimer's prevention methods, however hearing or ear care was not included.<sup>21</sup>

### **Hong Kong Alzheimer's Disease Association**

Established in 1995, The Hong Kong Alzheimer's Disease Association (HKADA) is a non-governmental organization (NGO) providing dementia-specific services. The HKADA provides non-pharmacological interventions and services to individuals living with dementia and their family caregivers through day cares in-home care, and memory clinics. The HKADA provides education on brain health to the public, as well as training to medical practitioners. The HKADA are involved in dementia-related projects such as Dementia Friends, which is a global movement to change people's perceptions of dementia to tackle the stigma surrounding those with dementia. Although the HKADA discuss prevention methods for dementia, including protecting brain and mental health, there is no mention of hearing or ear care strategies.<sup>22,23</sup>

### **Kin Chi Dementia Care Support Service Centre**

The Kin Chi Dementia Care Support Service Centre was established in 2014 as a service centre in Hong Kong operating on a self-finance basis. Kin Chi Dementia Care Support Service Centre provides one-stop comprehensive assessment services, care services, diversified activities, therapeutic training, and psychological counselling services. Their objective is early detection and intervention. They are involved in several dementia-related projects including brain health and dementia screening within the community.<sup>24,25</sup> There is no mention of hearing and ear care services.

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