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Adapting health, economic and social policies to address population aging in China

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Abstract

The World Health Organization has introduced a Healthy Ageing framework for 2021-2030, emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive actions across various sectors to ensure the continued contribution of older adults to their families, communities, and economies. Despite its rapid economic rise over the past four decades, China now grapples with the challenge of accommodating its expanding ageing population. In 2020, 18% and 2.5% of its population were 60+ and 80+, and these populations will grow to 34% and 8% by 2025. This demographic shift places China at the forefront of diverse challenges affecting individual, familial, economic, and societal dimensions. There have been many breakthroughs in basic and translational research, shifts in healthcare paradigms, evolving socio-economic-political dynamics, and noteworthy developments in policy frameworks, and it is time to summarize together. China's ageing strategy views older adults as valuable human resources rather than passive recipients of social benefits. Here, we discuss China's current policies in promoting healthy longevity in the general population, focusing on social health insurance, long-term care insurance (LTCI), community and home-based care, palliative care, gerontological research, public health prevention, as well as nutritional and medical interventions. While China's population ageing occurs within a distinctive socio-political and cultural context, learning from the experiences of other countries offers valuable insights. We also include experiences and insights from other Asian countries and regions (Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong) and the Nordic countries who have been facing similar situations. The historical experiences and recent strategies of these countries may inform China's efforts to address ageing-related challenges and promote a more inclusive, resilient, and healthy ageing society.

Keywords: population ageing; policy discussion; social health insurance; long-term care; healthy ageing; healthspan; lifespan.