

2/12/2024

Strategy Group
Ministry of Health
Manatū Hauora
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Feedback on Unlocking the Potential of Active Ageing

Tēnā koe

Age Concern New Zealand (ACNZ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed topic for the Ministry of Health's Long-term Insights Briefing.

About Age Concern New Zealand

Age Concern New Zealand is a trusted charity working in local communities throughout Aotearoa New Zealand to support older people, their friends and whānau. We have 29 local Age Concerns operating in 40 locations throughout the country and a national office based in Wellington.

Our strategic goal is:

Every older person feels connected, has positive choices and can age well.

Our values of Dignity. Wellbeing. Equity and Respect for older people are our guiding lights and underpin everything we do.

Our core services include advocacy and public awareness, social connection, health promotion, elder abuse and neglect prevention, and providing support through expert information, advice and referrals.

Our responses to the feedback questions:

1. ***Do you think 'active ageing' is a critical topic to explore in a Long-term Insights briefing? Why or why not?***

Age Concern New Zealand **fully supports** *Unlocking the Potential of Active Ageing* as a critical topic to be explored. Active ageing is critical to the health and wellbeing of all New Zealanders and crucial for the sustainability of our health and community sectors.

Increasing age comes with increasing rates of disability and health need in the over 65 age group. Forty-six percent have mobility problems, 28% agility problems, 11% have sight issues and 10% have trouble remembering. ¹ Among over 75-year-olds 21% have ischemic heart disease, 11% have diabetes, 52% have arthritis and 15% have a mood or anxiety disorder. Most of the older people that receive home and community support services are over 75, with 50% of the over 85 group living at home receiving home and community support.

Active ageing will improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, enabling them to live independent, connected and healthy lives. It will also help to reduce demand and costs within the health, community and aged care sectors, making them more sustainable.

Active ageing aligns with Māori and Pacific models of health, which is vital as Māori and Pasifika people have poorer health outcomes than other New Zealanders.

2. *What are the main risks of not further enabling 'active ageing' over the next 20 years?*

Without an additional focus on active ageing there are several key risks:

- A significant increase in the number of older people with multiple long-term conditions impacting on their daily lives, including isolation and reduced mobility
- Overwhelmed health services and high costs across primary, secondary and tertiary care
- Increased demand in the aged residential care sector
- Workforce shortages across many key industries as well as health, social and community services
- Increased pressure on rehabilitation and allied health services that help people recover after surgery or adapt to the health impacts of reduced function. As people age it takes more time to recover from illness or injuries. A full return to health may not always be possible and older people may have to adapt their strategies for staying active, for example, through seated exercise.

¹ https://www.tewhatoruora.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Health-status-reports/HNZ-TWO-Health-Status-Report_FULL.pdf

3. *What health-promoting and supportive environments would better enable ‘active ageing’?*

We agree with a focus on active ageing, however, that alone, will not improve the health and wellbeing of older New Zealanders. We would like to see recognition of the role of the wider determinants of health across the lifespan in the Long-term Insights Briefing.

Housing, income, ethnicity, education, employment, and social connection play a huge role in how well we age. Across government and across party action in these areas is essential to improve the health and wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

Health promoting and supportive environment strategies to encourage active ageing could include:

- Early intervention to keep people well and support them to remain active
- Age friendly and accessible towns, cities and neighbourhoods that work for people of all ages and abilities
- Urban and neighbourhood design that makes it easy for people to access local amenities and green space that support their wellbeing, mentally and physically
- Councils providing low-cost fees for swimming pools and council owned facilities
- The provision and promotion of ways to be active in local communities that are free or low-cost, do not require special equipment or clothing, and that allow people to connect with others
- Accessible and well-lit paths in parks, safe walkable streets, community gardens
- Workplaces encouraging staff of all ages to be active, for example, by providing exercise equipment, subsidised gym and swimming pool memberships and supporting people to be active during the workday through flexible working hours
- Providing covered walkways to offer shade from the sun and protection from the rain, which may be as simple as promoting shopping malls as places to be active
- Recognising that older people are not a homogenous group. Different activities will be required to appeal to a wide variety of people, cultures and gender identities.
- Offering group as well as individual activities to meet different people’s preferences
- Providing opportunities for people with sensory and cognitive impairments to be active
- Using action research to reduce the time it takes to apply what research tells us will positively impact active ageing

4. *What barriers to active ageing do you see in our environment and society?*

- Ageist attitudes impacting on what older people themselves and society believe is possible regarding active ageing

- Older people may lack confidence about being active due to a fear of falling or losing their balance
- Perceptions about safety in some neighbourhoods may contribute to older people not feeling safe outdoors
- Some older people may lack the technological skills to access online activities within their own home
- Limited access to parks and green spaces, public transport and healthy housing
- Poorly maintained footpaths and poor lighting creating unsafe walkways
- Insufficient seating and shade for people to have a rest during physical activity

5. Considering the list of potential focus areas below, do you think these focus areas are the most important for enabling or demonstrating the impact of active ageing? If not, what other areas would you propose?

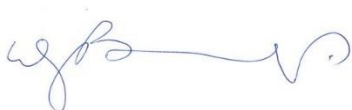
- Social connectedness, including marae-based positive ageing
- Age-friendly housing and urban development
- Age-friendly neighbourhoods and environments
- Age-friendly transportation
- Supporting health-protective factors and behaviours
- Supporting active ageing in the health workforce so that older workers can continue to contribute to it

We agree with the list of potential focus areas and have no other suggestions at this stage.

Closing comment

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Ministry of Health's proposed Long-term Insights topic. We look forward to hearing the outcome of your consultation process and providing comments on the Long-term Insights Briefing Paper in 2025.

Nāku noa, nā,



Karen Billings-Jensen
Chief Executive
Age Concern New Zealand