

Experts on aging: UN Sustainable Development Goals discriminatory, ageist

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One of the main health targets proposed by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is to reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases such as cancer, stroke and dementia. The goals for 2016-2030 define premature mortality as deaths occurring among people aged 69 years old or younger.

The proposed SDG target sends an unambiguous statement to UN member states that [health](#) provision for younger groups must be prioritised at the expense of people aged 70 or more, according to the international group of signatories of the letter published in *The Lancet*. The implication for all countries, the UK included, is that resources allocated to conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease should be diverted from older people in order to comply with this global target.

Prof Peter Lloyd-Sherlock, professor of social policy and international development at UEA and lead author of the letter, wrote it in response to research about the SDGs, which was also published in *The Lancet* in January 2015. Other authors and signatories of his letter include representatives from The Alzheimer's Society, Age UK, and HelpAge International.

Prof Lloyd-Sherlock said: "This [premature mortality](#) target is highly unethical, since it unjustifiably discriminates against older people and is explicitly ageist. Also, it lacks any scientific validity."

The letter said the SDG target 'has the potential to undermine cherished, fundamental principles of universality and health as a right for all. Put simply, it tells policy makers, particularly in poorer countries that older people do not matter.

'This target will inevitably reinforce the ageist bias that pervades many aspects of [health care](#) decision-making.'

Baroness Sally Greengross, former director of Age Concern England and a signatory of the letter, said: "If adopted, this UN target could lead to institutionalised discrimination against [older people](#) in health care, both here in the UK and globally."

The letter calls on the UN to urgently reconsider the framing of this health target in order to avoid setting 'policy priorities that blatantly exclude those people who are often in the greatest need and face the most hardship.'

Prof Lloyd-Sherlock said: "The SDGs are not quite set in stone yet, so we have a final opportunity to impress upon the UN the need to alter this explicitly ageist health target. If this doesn't happen, people aged 70 and over will become second-class citizens as far as health policy is concerned."

More information: Comment: 'A premature mortality target for the SDG for health is ageist' is published in *The Lancet* on 29 May 2015.

Provided by University of East Anglia

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