

# Healthcare systems must adapt to cope with escalating impact of ageing populations

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The head of The Innovation Group, Professor Rene Amalberti, has advised that healthcare systems must adapt in order to cope with our ageing populations. His editorial on the topic is published today in the *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*.

Professor Amalberti was speaking in [anticipation](#) of the publication of the [editorial](#) which discusses the impact of the current and escalating [tsunami](#) of ageing populations, which will present significant planning and budgetary challenges for global healthcare systems.

Since 1960, the [global population](#) has more than doubled to 7.2 billion. In developed countries, people aged over 60 make up more than 20% of the population and by the 2030s this will reach 40%. The paper warns that, given the chronic conditions associated with ageing and complex medical histories, these older cohorts present a significant planning and budgetary challenge for health systems across acute, primary and aged care.

At a symposium in Doha, Qatar in October, 2015, the Innovation Group of the International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua) invited representatives from 16 countries who collectively shared visions, diagnoses and solutions on this issue.

Professor Amalberti commented that, "many developed countries are taking steps to organize and provide care and services differently. That being said, significant reforms have not yet been realised. A perception

that change will be costly may be one factor that is inhibiting progress."

The paper examines countries with rapidly ageing populations (such as Japan, Canada and Switzerland) which are already adapting, and so offer some valuable insights. Steps such as a reduction of hospital beds and the consequent reallocation of acute care budgets to other areas such as day care and community healthcare and reforms in primary healthcare have begun, including reorganisation into communities of physicians for better coordination and coverage, and to help rein in costs.

Countries not ageing as rapidly (such as France, Denmark, Norway, Australia, Ireland and the United Kingdom) are following in the footsteps of the pacesetters, according to the paper. Given that their ageing trends are a decade behind, their politicians and healthcare leaders seem slower to respond.

Professor Amalberti went on to say that, "in low and middle income countries there is a growing awareness of the impact of ageing on healthcare. However, this is seen as a longer term issue when considered against the current priorities of expanding access to care and paying for costly new treatments within limited budgets."

In rich and poor [countries](#) alike, the real challenge is to balance the needs of the present with those of preparing for the future.

**More information:** René Amalberti et al. Preparing national health systems to cope with the impending tsunami of ageing and its associated complexities: Towards more sustainable health care, *International Journal for Quality in Health Care* (2016). [DOI: 10.1093/intqhc/mzw021](https://doi.org/10.1093/intqhc/mzw021)

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