

Experts call for World Health Organization to rethink 'unacceptable' plans

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The World Health Organization (WHO) has been accused of "washing its hands of older people" in its proposed priorities for future work.

In a letter published online in *The Lancet*, experts on ageing from the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) say the draft WHO 13th General Programme of Work makes no reference to older people or to conditions associated with later life, such as dementia.

This is despite people aged 60 or over making up more than 12 per cent of the world's population, a figure that will rise to 16.5 per cent by 2030. In less developed regions, they will make up 10 per cent of the population by 2030.

The General Programme of Work sets out the strategic vision for the activities of WHO, with the 12th and current one ending in 2019. It defines the key health areas where WHO aims to shape global health co-operation.

Peter Lloyd-Sherlock, professor of social policy and international development at UEA's School of International Development, said: "Older people account for a much greater proportion of the global burden of disease and of need for health care than do other age groups.

"This is part of a wider pattern of explicit discrimination against older people in global health policy."

Setting out their concerns Prof Lloyd-Sherlock and co-authors Prof Shah Ebrahim and Prof Martin McKee, from the LSHTM, add: "Over the past decade, WHO has begun to address this key global challenge, yet the proposed WHO 13th General Programme of Work makes no reference to older people or to conditions associated with later life.

"This is entirely unacceptable. If the proposed Programme is approved, it will considerably diminish WHO's global authority and will brand it as a champion of age discrimination.

"We therefore urge that WHO rectify this striking oversight and that the proposed Programme include substantial plans relating to the [health of older people](#) and challenges of population ageing."

Last November the draft 13th General Programme of Work was considered by WHO's Executive Board. This month the Executive Board is due to further consider and submit the Programme to the World Health Assembly, which takes place in May.

More information: 'The World Health Organization washes its hands of older people', Peter Lloyd-Sherlock, Shah Ebrahim and Martin McKee, is published in the January 6 print issue of *The Lancet*.

Provided by University of East Anglia

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