

# The Physiological Society urges government step change to meet its own Ageing Society target

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The UK government is at risk of missing its target to increase healthy life expectancy by five years by 2035, according to a new report, "Growing Older, Better," published by The Physiological Society on Tuesday 15 October.

Healthy life expectancy, which is the number of years lived in [good health](#), has not increased as quickly as life expectancy in recent decades, which means people are living more years in [poor health](#). The UK Government's Industrial Strategy contains a target of "ensur[ing] that people can enjoy at least five extra healthy, independent years of life by 2035, while narrowing the gap between the experience of the richest and poorest".

This new report, which is the result of a project involving an expert panel of researchers, funders and public health policy makers, outlines concerns that the Government is too focused on responding reactively to ageing, rather than being proactive in challenging the ageing process itself.

The step change required to meet the government's target will require putting physiological research at the heart of the response. Physiological research into the processes underpinning ageing and age-related conditions as diverse as dementia and arthritis is key to providing answers to many of the questions that will need solving.

The report produced a number of key findings related to public health, including:

- There is a gap between physiological insight and policy decision making.
- Significant sections of the population do not engage with healthy ageing campaigns or recognise the impact of positive lifestyle changes to the quality of later life.

- Those that are socioeconomically disadvantaged are less likely to be engaged in activities and lifestyles that promote healthy ageing.

The report includes a number of recommendations to keep people living healthier, for longer, including:

- A greater focus across national and local government on preventative care to reduce the likelihood of health problems occurring.
- Improved public health guidance by providing personalised, tailored advice based on physiological evidence.
- Joined up healthcare to deliver an integrated approach to the care of older people before, during and after periods of poor health.

For example, only 10% of those aged over 65 in the UK meet the Chief Medical Officer's recommendations for physical activity of 150 minutes of aerobic exercise per week. This impacts not only muscle strength but has a significant impact on an older person's immune system. Research from physiologists at the University of Birmingham and UCL demonstrated that study participants who maintain high levels of physical activity throughout middle and older age had higher levels of immune hormones important for maintaining immunity. This immunity is important for vaccine efficacy, warding off infections and viruses and lowering cancer risk.

Speaking at the report's launch, Stephen Metcalfe, MP for South Basildon and East Thurrock and Chair of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee noted:

"Having met a number of physiologists, including some of those who gave their time to support this report, I can attest that physiology is core to understanding the changes in how our bodies work as we age, which

will be crucial in solving some of the major challenges of our generation. Understanding the causes of age-related diseases and frailty can result in lifestyle and medical interventions to allow people to keep contributing longer into their lifespan. This will have benefits for the individual by increasing their quality of life in older age as well as easing the burden on [health](#) and care systems."

Professor Paul Greenhaff, University of Nottingham and Chair of the Growing Older, Better Expert Group, added:

"Ensuring that we understand the current landscape and have a clear picture about what needs to change to ensure physiology is at the heart of meeting the challenges of an ageing society is a crucial first step."

Provided by The Physiological Society

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