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Local Community Practices Support Healthy Ageing in the North

The governments of Finland, Denmark, Norway and Russia have developed national programs to address population ageing. There are also successful practices in healthy ageing at the local level in different countries, but they remain unknown among the global professional community and governmental authorities.

This Policy Brief presents findings of the NORRUS-AGE project [1]. The research and networking project has collected a series of local-level healthy ageing practices. These practices are mirrored against the recently released WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020-2030 Action Plan with paying attention to indigenous elders.

Based on these practices, we suggest the national, regional, and municipal level authorities of the Nordic countries and Russia to consider the following recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1:** Involve older people in policy co-design and integrate their wisdom, culture and experience in public health promotion and community life. This is empowering for the older people, eventually leading to their re-engagement in everyday life activities, and is also useful resource for social and physical innovation.
- **Recommendation 2:** Support the indigenous people's (the Sami, for example) access to social and health services in their native language and take their indigenous culture and traditions into account in the service process.
- **Recommendation 3:** Design not "age-friendly" but citizen-friendly initiatives and communities. Here, intergenerational dialogue is important and "healthy ageing" is not an issue only for the later part of the life course.
- **Recommendation 4:** Develop local training programs and material for staff working in the care for older people. These programs need to consider the educational level of healthcare workers in the particular regions and be both culturally and structurally sensitive.

Addressing the Priorities of the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing in the North

Healthy ageing has become an important policy issue at all levels of the society. The key international document is the World Health Organization's (WHO) plan for a Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020–2030 [2] which is the second action plan of the WHO 's Global strategy on ageing and health. The Plan consists of 10 years of concerted, catalytic, sustained collaboration to improve the lives of older people, their families, and their communities. Older people themselves are in the core of this plan, and it brings together variety of actors, including governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector. The Plan also notes that healthy ageing is not only a healthcare issue but needs to engage many other sectors.

The WHO Plan has four priorities, three of which are particularly relevant and currently addressed in various regional actions in the North (Picture 1).



Picture 1: Strongly interconnected areas of action of the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020-2030 with the NORRUS-AGE project and other Northern actions

Healthy ageing is addressed in several regional initiatives in the North as well. The networking and research project NORRUS-AGE (2020-2022) is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM) and run by a multidisciplinary consortium from the Nordic countries and Russia [1]. The project collects best local-level policies and practices on healthy ageing, paying attention to the situation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and to priorities of the WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020-30 action plan. The NORRUS-AGE project supports other regional activities on healthy ageing, including the Northern Dimension Institute Think Tank Action, UArctic Thematic Network "Health and well-being in the Arctic", and the NCM funded project on Aging, gender, and ethnicity (AGE-Arctic).

Examples of good practices for the Priority 1: Change how we think, feel and act towards age and ageing

Fostering of Healthy Ageing requires fundamental shifts from existing stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination towards older people. Older people should not be seen only as an economic burden for the welfare society, but as contributors to the state and communities, and as resourceful carriers of traditional values and wisdom. Governments eliminate age discrimination by variety of actions, such as legislative changes, and policies and programs which engage older people in decision-making.

Foster Family for lonely older person (Arkhangelsk, Russia)



This is a social service practice in remote areas based on the regional Law. It means that a person, who is not a relative, lives with an old person and provides care. Those involved in the foster family work are most often younger lonely pensioners in rural areas. The practice creates work places for foster family carers in remote areas and encourages people to stay in remote areas of the Arctic region. The program is the social policy response for family-type social support on local level and supported by the local authorities [3].

Citizen involvement in policy and project work in Qeqqata Kommunia (Greenland)



This is an example of practical work on municipal policy creation. Older people have not necessarily felt that their interests are represented by the elected members of a local Elder's Council. Therefore, the municipality has worked more directly with older people since 2018. Now, the municipality is involving citizens of all ages in new ways in different projects, including the planning of a new municipal strategy for 'The good life'. The initiative is co-hosted by the Ageing in the Arctic project (AgeArc) [4].

Initiatives for Priority 2: Ensure that communities foster the abilities of older people

The environments which are built on decisions made not only by policy makers but involve citizens of all ages are better places to grow, play, live, work and retire. Even those people who have lost their capacity, shall be able to continue to enjoy everyday activities, to continue to develop personally and professionally, to participate and contribute to their communities while retaining their autonomy, dignity, health, and well-being.



Birgen ruovttus – Pärjään kotona, practice by NGO SámiSoster (Lapland, Finland) The practice is to organize multicultural and social interaction group activities and events for the elderly in a few meeting places, which are promoted, known and easy for everyone to get to. The meeting places are open 5 days/week for older people to dine, socialize, and take action in Sámi and Finnish. Events are organized without involvement of third parties or in cooperation with various stakeholders.



The Charlottenlund park (Tromsø, Norway)

This is a group of local seniors, who exercise in the park on a regular basis guided by a physio therapist employed by the Tromsø municipality Healthy Life Center. This is an opportunity to be physically active, to engage in social encounters with peers, to relax and meet across generations in the outdoor conditions.

Practices for Priority 3: Deliver person-centered, integrated care and primary health services to older people

Good-quality essential health services include prevention of diseases; promotion of healthy lifestyle; curative, rehabilitative, palliative and end-of-life care; safe, effective, good-quality essential medicines and vaccines; dental care; assistive technologies, while ensuring that the use of services does not cause the user financial hardship [4, p.12].



Mental health practice in remote areas in the arctic region of Russia (Arkhangelsk, Russia) This practice shifts the focus of prevention from psychiatrists to family medicine practitioners and social workers. It includes training of the latter groups to use special mental health screening tools. It also offers psychological training for relatives on the simplest methods of detecting mental disorders of older people and on the communication with patients with mental disorders [5].



Workplace development in elderly care in Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq (Greenland) This municipal policy and practice initiative of the Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq municipality started in 2019 with the aim of improving the care for older people as a work task. It focuses on management across institutions, collectively defines values in each institution, emphasizes individual development for each care worker, and educates all people who are recruited in older people care.

To sum up, there are several local initiatives in the Nordic-Russian North that contribute to the WHO Plan's priorities and goals, and they could be applied more widely in the ND area and beyond.

References

- [1] NORRUS-AGE project: <https://www oulu.fi/medicine/node/209541>
- [2] Decade of Healthy Ageing <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing>
- [3] Golubeva E. & Emelyanova A. 2019. The Foster Family as Means of Promoting Social Inclusion of Older People. In Päivi Naskali, Joan R. Harbison, Shahnaj Begum (Eds.) New Challenges to Ageing in the Rural North A Critical Interdisciplinary Perspective Springer. 10.1007/978-3-030-20603-1_6
- [4] AgeArc project: <https://arktiskaldring.ku.dk/>
- [5] Soloviev A., Novikova I., Mestechko V. 2015. Prevention of cognitive and emotional impairments (recommendations for older persons and their relatives). In Russian. <http://oa.lib.nsmu.ru/files/docs/201612051245.pdf>
- Images' sources: the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, from the project team members.

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