

Report on WHO meeting ‘Learning from COVID-19 to strengthen care for older people’

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As of 23th February 2021, globally, there are more than one hundred ten million confirmed cases and 2.4 million deaths due to COVID-19. Confirmed cases were more in 15 to 64 years age group. However, majority of COVID-19 deaths occurred in older people aged 65 years and older based on the case report forms with recorded age and sex.

The Ageing and Health unit in World Health Organization convened the meeting “Learning from COVID-19 to strengthen care for older people” in October 2020 to share experiences and lessons from the current COVID-19 pandemic on care for older people and identify the gaps in health and long-term care services and systems to better care for them.

The data has shown that COVID-19 has had an outsized impact on older people and long-term care facilities have been epicentres of COVID-19 outbreaks in many countries. The underlying conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity and social factors such as access to health care, are modulating the outcomes of morbidity and mortality among older people. The pandemic has also disrupted essential health services for older people with pre-existing chronic conditions, which continues to impact the current and future health of older people.

The gaps identified in the meeting include: Comprehensive assessment of diverse needs of older people; Research on risk factors for severe COVID-19 including declines in physical and mental capacities; Systematic investment on long-term care services in the community; Utilization of digital technology for older people and health care workers; Concrete support and training for caregivers; Disaggregated data on infection, mortality, and morbidity including mental health by income and ethnicity to identify vulnerable populations and understand the long-term consequences; Palliative care; Mental health assessments and care for those who have experienced loss, bereavement and social isolation; Palliative care; Best practices and challenges to be shared on mitigation strategies for essential health services including vaccination.

Many participants noted this pandemic provided an opportunity to re-envision the long-term care model, to re-orient it towards being person-centred with a focus on healthy ageing; further, it represents a unique opportunity to advocate that policy-makers invest in such a long-term care model – one that views older people as vital to healthy communities, rather than simply a cost society must bear.

Key WHO documents on COVID-19 and older people are found below:

[Preventing and managing COVID-19 across long-term care services](#)

[EPI-WIN update 36: Long-term effects of COVID-19](#)

[The impact of COVID-19 on mental, neurological and substance use services](#)

[The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on noncommunicable disease resources and services](#)

[COVID-19 clinical management](#)

[Guidance on developing a national deployment and vaccination plan for COVID-19 vaccines](#)

[COVID-19 vaccines technical documents](#)