Background

The World Economic Forum’s Global Future Council on Healthy Ageing and Longevity has kicked off a five-part dialogue series on regional outlooks on ageing. Five dialogues from July to September will bring together experts from government, academia, civil society, private sector and other key stakeholders to raise awareness and drive shared action on ageing in five regions: Latin America, the Caribbean, South-East Asia, Western Pacific, and the Middle East and North Africa.

It offers a platform for stakeholders to consider emerging imperatives and opportunities for action on healthy ageing and overall demographic change.

The Caribbean has one of the fastest-growing older populations in the developing world and it is expected to age more rapidly than populations of Europe and America. In 2000, 10% of the population in several Caribbean countries were aged 60 and over, which rose to 14% in 2015 and is projected to reach 25% by 2050. Since the adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) in 2002, Caribbean states have developed national policies on ageing and strengthened programmes and services for older people. However, significant gaps still exist between policy and practice.

Key Takeaways

Kim Simplis Barrow stressed the importance of accelerating collective efforts to ensure that Caribbean citizens not only live longer but also age with grace and dignity. The young people of today are tomorrow’s older adults, said Denise Eldemire-Shearer. Ageing is a biological process, and the life-course approach is critical as we are a product of our environment. Obesity and chronic diseases are developed much earlier in life and lay the foundations for how we age.

The life-course approach to healthy ageing and longevity was also echoed by Rosy Pereyra. We cannot age well if we don’t live well, she said. We age as we live – if you are poor, not well educated, have an unhealthy diet, and lack physical activity, this will have a negative impact on the ageing process.

Chronic non-communicable diseases are expensive, said Harold Robinson. This has a long-term impact on the healthcare system and the economy in sustaining the costs and services required for treatment. With demographic transition, health promotion and prevention are important as they are less costly. This also highlights the discourse on the care system, where women are overly represented as the primary caregivers and shoulder the burden of providing support to family members.

In responding to the needs of older adults, we need to be cognizant of the shift in physiology said Carl Anthony Bruce, one-size-fits-all mainstream medicine will not suffice. The special care we have for children should also apply to older adults as they age, he said. We need to understand their needs to provide value-based care. Age-related diseases require different treatment modalities from what is delivered in mainstream healthcare.

Regional Outlook on Ageing: the Caribbean

This demographic shift has significant societal, economic, and public health implications. The Regional Outlook on Ageing on the Caribbean dialogue was moderated by David Walcott, Founder and Managing Partner, Novamed, and member of the Global Future Council on Healthy Ageing and Longevity. Kim Simplis Barrow, First Lady of Belize (2008-2020) and Special Envoy for Women and Children of Belize, gave the keynote address. Panelists included:

- **Harold Robinson**, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- **Denise Eldemire-Shearer**, Professor of Public Health and Ageing, University of the West Indies

- **Rosy Pereyra**, President, International Longevity Centre, Dominican Republic
- **Carl Anthony Bruce**, Consultant Neurosurgeon, Medical Committee Chairman and the Medical Chief of Staff, University Hospital of the West Indies
- **Therese Turner-Jones**, General Manager, Country Department Caribbean Group, Inter-American Development Bank
As we consider policies and opportunities to better prepare and respond to the demographic shift, we must also include digital transformation in the discourse, said Therese Turner-Jones, adding that we have a unique opportunity to create tech-enabled solutions. In addition, we must also employ overall innovation for solutions to healthy ageing and longevity. The Inter-American Development Bank’s Innovation laboratory (IDB Lab) launched a Silver Economy Innovation for Inclusion challenge in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Silver innovation seeks to find and support innovative solutions that facilitate the rapidly growing ageing population to become an engine of social inclusion and economic recovery in the region. Initiatives like these are needed, said Walcott. We need a multistakeholder approach, not just the public and private sector, to create an ecosystem that facilities healthy ageing and longevity in the region.

- Despite the development gains in the Caribbean, older people still face numerous challenges. All the speakers pointed to lack of income security as a major issue. In many Caribbean countries, pensions are still available only to a tiny percentage of the population.

- Age-related diseases such as Alzheimer’s and related dementias make caring for older people complex and daunting to family members who are often the primary caregivers. This brings us to the gender dimension of ageing – not only do men and women age differently, most of the care work also needed in old age is undertaken by women. Older and young women shoulder the responsibility of caring for immediate and extended family members.

- As people in the Caribbean live longer, the pressure on women as caregivers will grow. This impacts the contribution of women to already declining economies in the region. We need to ensure we continue to include women in the economy; their skillset and human capital are invaluable to the economic development of the region.

- Draw attention to the long-term care needs of older people, what it entails and who will provide it, along with the need for societal reorientation and education of boys and young men as caregivers.

- Call for increased GDP allocation to health as well as investment. Investment in health promotion and disease prevention are two key areas of proactive intervention to minimize long-term healthcare expenditure of disease treatment, along with the need to address the availability of resources.

- Automation is unlikely to be prevalent in the care economy as it is difficult to replace caregiving roles. With a rapidly growing older population and declining economies in the region, the opportunity exists for employment to address the imminent need for care.

People do not age equally, and people age differently, therefore, it is imperative that we continue to improve the opportunities for older people to be engaged and active in their communities. The Caribbean is at the forefront of the ageing process. The region is resilient and there is an opportunity to demonstrate leadership in its response to the demographic transition.

Caribbean states are already making progress to improve the health of their citizens. Concerted regional efforts such as the Healthy Caribbean Coalition address non-communicable diseases and promote a healthy lifestyle. To be successful in responding to the needs and seizing the opportunities of healthy longer lives, both government and individuals have a responsibility to create solutions and promote the abilities of older people.

---

**Contact**

For more information on the Global Future Council on Healthy Ageing and Longevity, please visit the official [webpage](#) or contact:

Sofiat Akinola, Project Lead, Health and Healthcare; Global Future Council on Healthy Ageing and Longevity Manager, sofia akinola@weforum.org