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**Ageing Today: Living Positively as a Community**

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**Overview of Aged Today**

Today we are faced with an aging population – age 65 & older – that is growing rapidly. In the U.S., there are currently about 43 Million in this age group, or 13% of the total population. With the baby boomers, born between 1946 & 1964, this older age group is projected to be around 72 Million by 2030, or 20% of the population. This is twice as large as their counterparts in year 2000, less than 20 years ago.

There is also a larger than ever number of people age 85 or over, about 5.5 Million. These individuals have been referred to as the “oldest-old” and they may number as many as 19 Million by the year 2050. This number has the potential to be higher, as it is thought that their death rate may decline more rapidly than expected.

Appropriate and increased services are needed for the aged population in our society. We need to plan for this, as individuals and as a community, and find ways to focus on quality of life and values, not just on cost and crisis. We need to find joy and appreciation in our longevity, not just fear and concern. We need to positively face the challenges of the aged by supporting each other within our communities.

**Challenges Facing the Aged Today**

- Availability of appropriate services
- Shortage of personal financial resources
- More long-term care needed for longer time
- High cost of residential & long-term care
- Shortage of hands-on professional caregivers
- Mobile society means family may not be local
- More lifestyle changes & residential living transitions
- Living with chronic conditions – Over 50% have 2-4 & almost 20% have 5 or more
- Reduced social contact; isolation, lack of intimacy & conversation, physical touch, etc.
- Status & role changes more significant
- Senior Stigma: Stereotype of seniors and people not seen as individuals; tend to be identified by disabilities, not abilities, and sometimes makes seniors feel invisible or a burden to others
- Losses; home, belongings, independence, privacy, etc.
- Grief; loss of friends, may outlive peers, family, and possibly own children

**Potential Unmet Needs of Ages & Opportunities to Help**

- Transportation
- Food & nutrition
- Assistive devices; i.e. hearing, mobility
- Home adaptations
- Medication assistance
- Home & personal care services
- Social stimulation
- Spiritual fellowship or guidance
- Physical touch
- Sexual intimacy
- Emotional needs
- Support groups
- End-of-life planning
- Technology assistance



## **Aging Today: Living Positively as a Community**

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### **Suggestions for Interacting Positively with the Aged**

- Make the effort to interact & engage
- Always speak in a respectful, adult manner
- Remember, all people are *individuals*; get to know their interests & history
- Consider the person's perspective; think about what decade they lived as a child & young adult
- Don't assume cognitive issues because of physical disabilities
- Try to maintain relationships if they become less involved
- Look for different needs as health or physical status changes
- Find new activities to do together, if they can no longer do old ones
- Accept the person as they are now – We all change through life
- Focus on *abilities*, not *disabilities*
- Be willing to let them talk about anything; i.e. death, faith, losses, etc.
- “Focus on the feelings, not the facts.” - Alzheimer's Association

### **Ways to be Supportive of Caregivers & Family**

- Stay in touch & let them know you care – Ask how *they* are doing
- Be sensitive to *who* the family may be
- Inquire *when* it is best to visit – Respect schedule for meals, activities, etc.
- Offer to find information & resources
- Tell family about your visits with their loved one, especially in residential care
- Offer help where you can – Be honest & upfront about your limitations
- Be ready to act if someone accepts your offer or asks for help
- Provide information about services; i.e. homecare, support groups, hospice, etc.
- Don't forget the children! Be conscious of their need to understand & express emotions
- Listen and be a friend – Be careful about giving advice

### **Encouraging a Caring, Loving Community for Everyone**

- Engage with elders; talk, show interest & involve in activities
- Be aware of individual struggles – Share appropriately, without gossip
- Consider personal visits to homebound people
- Include people in your prayers & ask them to pray for you
- Encourage interaction between generations
- Seek education about senior topics for better understanding
- Know resources for elders & caregivers in the area
- Provide training for community professionals
- Evaluate organizational policies to ensure suitability for all ages
- Consider changes to physical space to ease use and mobility
- Read about legislation on senior issues and get involved

**Community can make a positive impact in someone's life.**

***You can make a difference!***