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A New Model for the Future of Aging

To realize the value of increasing longevity, we must change hearts, minds and attitudes.



Why a series of essays on the future of aging? Because the issues could not be more important, and attention is needed now. The global demographic shift, a product of increasing longevity and lower birthrates across much of the world, will, like climate change, affect humanity forever. At the Center for the Future of Aging, we're proud to be associated with a group of extraordinary advisors—thought leaders—who are working in their own domains and in their own ways toward a stronger society and a better future for people of all ages. Their essays identify challenges and opportunities that must be urgently considered. Will the

future of aging realize the breathtaking possibilities stemming from longer life, or heighten the risks and costs of an aging population?

In the United States, about 10,000 people turn 65 each day, and one in five Americans will be 65 or older by 2030. Globally, the number of people age 60 and over is projected to leap from about 900 million in 2015 to 2 billion by 2050, according to the World Health Organization. Between 2000 and 2050, the 80-and-older cohort will almost quadruple, and those 65 and over will outnumber children under the age of 14. It should be noted that many experts see

these demographic predictions as too modest. In the wake of the decoding of the human genome, even longer lives and larger aging populations may be just ahead.

Increasing longevity has contributed to unprecedented global economic growth and wonderful opportunities for personal fulfillment. This gift of more years, due to advances in science, sanitation and safety, may be the most momentous accomplishment in human history. But, as remarkable as this progress has been, there is more change to come.

The demographic aging shift will have massive impacts on

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government budgets, living standards, individual health and well-being and economic and social stability. While longer lives mean exciting possibilities for individuals, families and societies, increasing longevity will also bring great challenges—from financial insecurity and disease to intensifying strains on social and financial safety nets and health-care systems.

The issues are big, and the stakes are clear. But there's reason for optimism.

Today's older adults are generally healthier and more vibrant than those of generations past. They are changing retirement norms as they seek to learn, work and contribute. They are driving growth and opportunity in entrepreneurial ventures and bolstering economic vitality as creators and consumers. In workplaces and classrooms, their guidance and beneficial support enhance performance and intergenerational collaboration. In encore careers, volunteering and civic and social settings, their balance and problem-solving abilities contribute to society's well-being.

They are the beneficiaries of continuing advances in health and technology that will change the aging experience.

In times of economic stress and seemingly intractable social challenges, there is a need for fresh ideas and collaborative solutions. Older adults may provide just that. This largely untapped resource has much to offer—not just wisdom, but the practical experience and skills that can enrich families as well as work, educational and social settings.

But to realize the potential and value of the aging population, we must shift course and shape a future that's different from yesterday's model. We envision a future that advances public health, creates age-friendly homes and communities, enables and encourages lifelong learning, work, and entrepreneurship, and promotes purposeful engagement and volunteerism. It's a future that speeds the development of empowering technologies, social networks and accessible transit systems, and builds a vibrant longevity economy to increase access and opportunity for the current

generation of older adults as well as generations to come.

It's a future that enables and empowers a population seeking fulfillment, ready and willing to engage so long as engagement is possible. It's a future that elevates beneficial purpose as a new life course model, harnessing the talent of a vast cohort—and calling on them to remain actively and valuably involved by contributing to the lives of younger people as educators, mentors, advisors and coaches.

We must combat ageism, magnify opportunity, celebrate contribution and enhance dignity. We must change hearts, minds and attitudes about the possibilities of healthy, productive and purposeful aging. We must begin a different conversation about getting old.

We are at an inflection point, at the intersection of a fundamental demographic change and a search for a new model. If we join together and do what's needed, we'll enrich aging lives, strengthen families, businesses and communities and ensure a better future, not just for older adults, but for people of all ages in every corner of society.

We hope you enjoy these essays by our "Future of Aging" authors. We believe their ideas will expand perspectives and encourage involvement. Let us know your reactions, and, please, join the conversation.