

Meeting:

Seventy-third World Health Assembly

Agenda Item:

- Written statements exceptionally considered under provisional agenda item 3 Address by WHO Director-General devoted to the COVID-19 pandemic response in advance of the opening of the Health Assembly

Statement:

HelpAge International thanks the secretariat for its leadership on COVID-19. Data on the pandemic shows where the greatest impact is being felt. Older people and those with comorbidities are most at risk of serious illness and death from the virus. 95% of deaths in Europe have been in people over 60. In China people aged over 80 had a 15% case fatality rate. Older people also face threats to their livelihoods, increased risks of violence, abuse and neglect and challenges to their mental health and wellbeing.

HelpAge welcomes the inclusion of older people, and commitments to age responsive measures, in the EU resolution. HelpAge urges WHO and Member States to take specific action on COVID-19 including:

- Ensuring continued functioning of health systems to deliver COVID-19 and other vital services, protecting older people's right to health.
- Ensuring protection for frontline workers, within the formal health system and those providing care, particularly for older people.
- Strengthening long-term care and support systems, including care provided at home and in communities and in residential care homes, hard hit by COVID-19.
- Providing information to older people in appropriate languages and formats, taking into consideration sight and hearing impairments.
- Including older people and those with underlying conditions in clinical trials and prioritising those facing the poorest health outcomes in the roll-out of successful vaccines or treatments.
- Ensuring the provision of palliative care in COVID-19 responses, including training health workers, making medicines accessible and supporting people to care for each other.
- Committing to data disaggregation, including data on cases and deaths disaggregated by age, sex, disability and underlying condition.

COVID-19 is exposing deep rooted ageism and structural barriers to the inclusion of older people in health and other sectors. These challenges must be addressed, in our immediate responses and as we build back better after the pandemic.