

# Universal Health Coverage must be fit for an ageing world

Universal health coverage (UHC) means everyone, everywhere can access the health services they need, when and where they need them, without suffering financial hardship.

UHC cannot be achieved without meeting the needs and upholding the rights of increasing numbers of older people globally.

Progress towards UHC presents an opportunity to reorientate systems and UHC to be fit for an ageing world. This will ensure we meet the needs of older people and reap the benefits of healthy ageing for individuals, systems and societies.

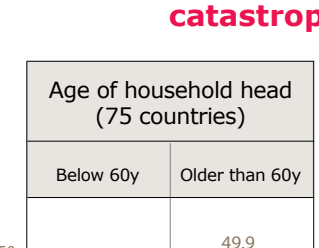


## Older people are among those with the greatest need for health and care services...

### People aged 60 years and older face the greatest burden of disease.

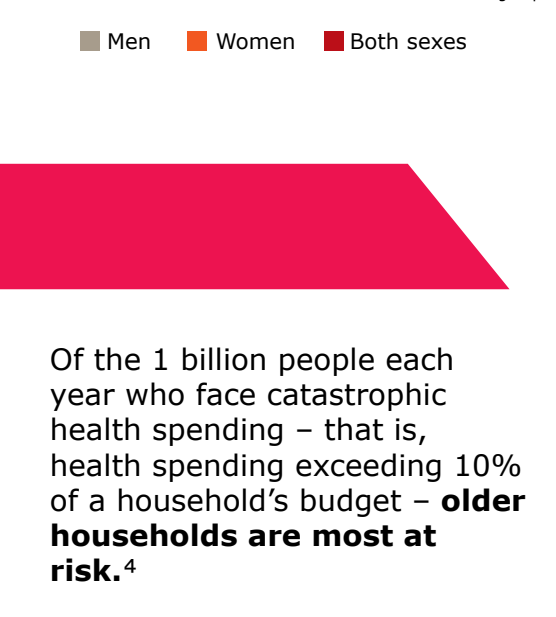


Over three quarters of all deaths from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are among people aged 55 and over.<sup>1</sup>



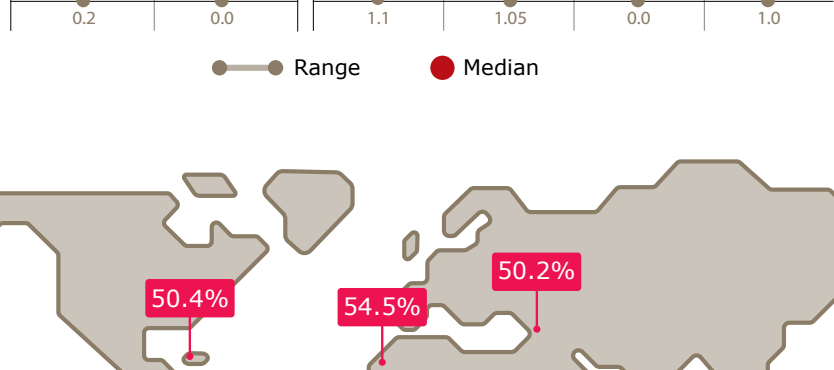
Just over half of older people in the community live with two or more health conditions, or 'multimorbidity', with rates higher in women compared to men.<sup>2</sup>

### Rates of disability also increase with age.<sup>3</sup>

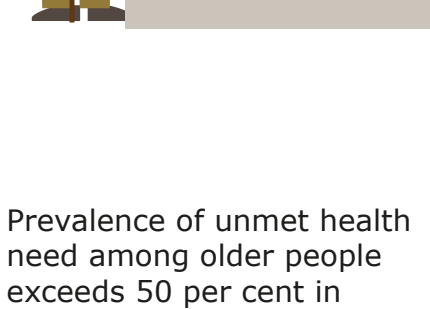


## ...but furthest behind in accessing them

### Percentage of population experiencing catastrophic health expenditure



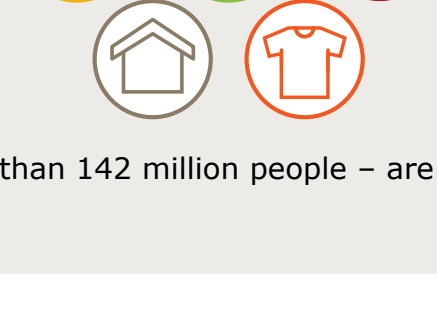
Of the 1 billion people each year who face catastrophic health spending – that is, health spending exceeding 10% of a household's budget – **older households are most at risk.**<sup>4</sup>



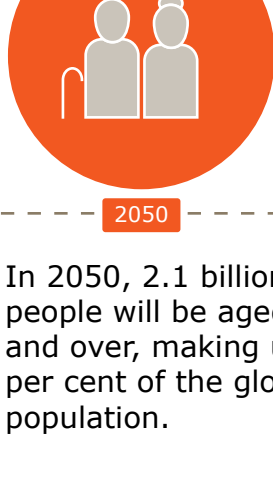
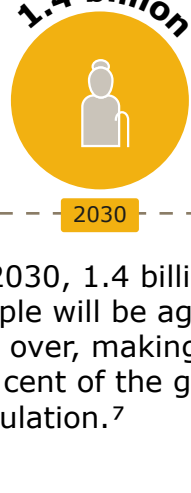
Prevalence of unmet health need among older people exceeds 50 per cent in several countries – including Georgia, Haiti, Morocco, Rwanda and Zimbabwe.<sup>5</sup>

### 142 million people

At least 14 per cent of older people globally – more than 142 million people – are unable to meet their basic needs.<sup>6</sup>

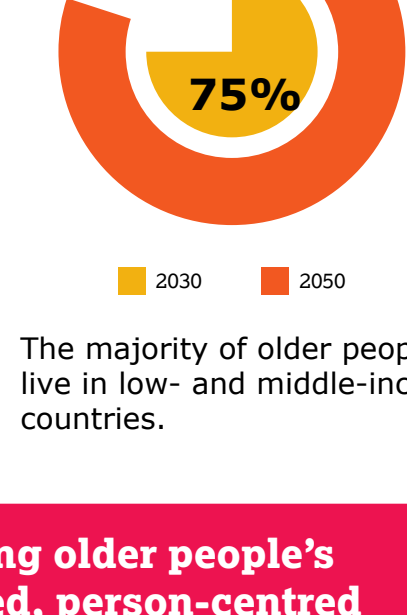


## Globally, both the number and proportion of older people are increasing



In 2030, 1.4 billion people will be aged 60 and over, making up 17 per cent of the global population.<sup>7</sup>

In 2050, 2.1 billion people will be aged 60 and over, making up 22 per cent of the global population.



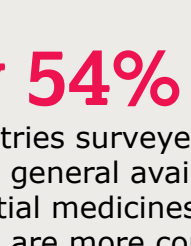
The majority of older people live in low- and middle-income countries.

## But health systems are unprepared for meeting older people's more complex needs and delivering integrated, person-centred and community-based services that promote healthy ageing for all

Responses to the Decade of Healthy Ageing progress survey from 134 countries in 2023 reveals only:<sup>8</sup>



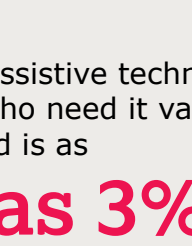
report adequate resources for delivering person-centred and integrated care for older people.



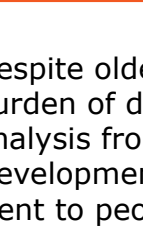
report adequate resources available for action on long-term care and support.



report cross-sectional, nationally representative data on older people and their health and care needs.

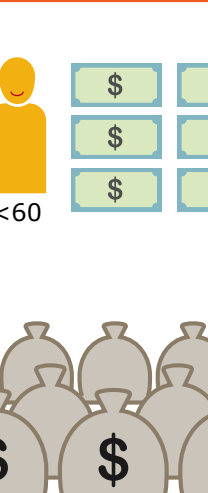


of low-income countries report capacity-building plans to strengthen the geriatric and gerontology workforce.



### Only 54%

of 194 countries surveyed by WHO report general availability of 11 essential medicines for NCDs which are more common in later life.<sup>9</sup>



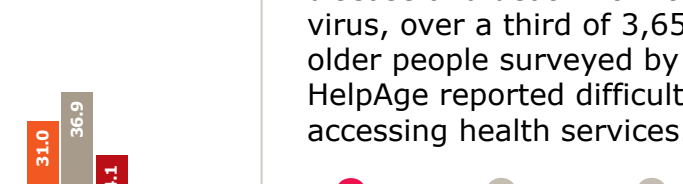
Access to assistive technology for those who need it varies globally and is as

### low as 3%

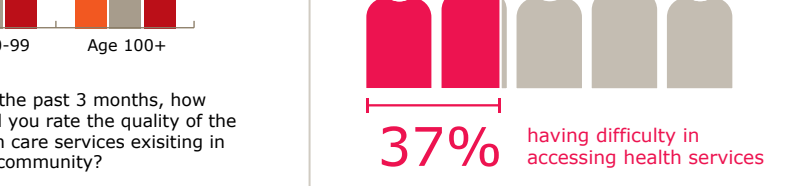
in some countries.<sup>10</sup>

## Global health funding is also not keeping pace with population ageing and changing patterns of disease and disability

Despite older people facing the highest burden of disease of any age group, analysis from 2017 found 90 per cent of Development Assistance for Health (DAH) went to people younger than 60.<sup>11</sup>

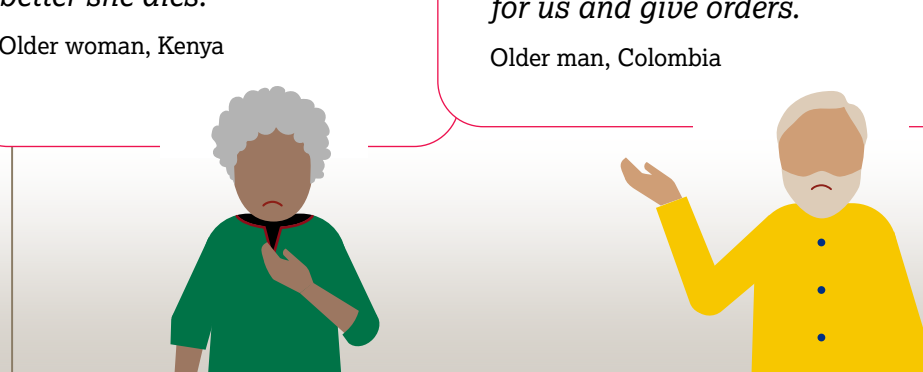


NCDs are responsible for 74 per cent of all deaths and 80 per cent of all years lived with a disability globally, yet received just 1.6 per cent of DAH in 2021.<sup>12,13</sup>

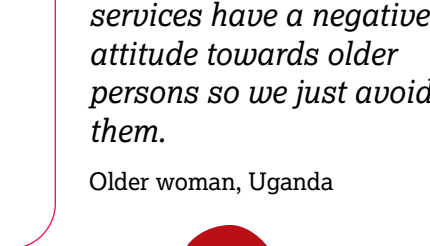


## The result leaves older people facing multiple barriers to enjoying their right to health

Across 3000 older people surveyed by HelpAge across nine low- and middle-income countries, older people rated the access, affordability and quality of services at 50 out of 100.<sup>14</sup>



During COVID-19, despite older people being the age group most at risk of severe disease and death from the virus, over a third of 3,658 older people surveyed by HelpAge reported difficulty in accessing health services.

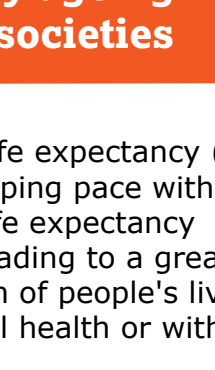
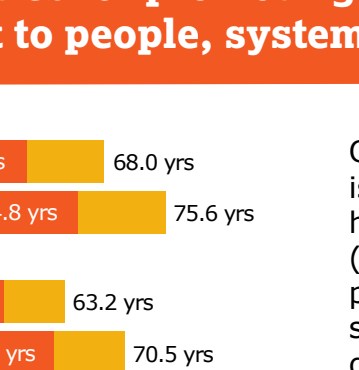


### Older people report ageism and age discrimination in accessing services

*When you go to the hospital, they say, 'This one is too old, we are wasting medicine, it's better she dies.'*  
Older woman, Kenya

*The employees of the health system or public servants are imposing; they do not have the attitude to listening to us to know what we want or need. They simply decide for us and give orders.*  
Older man, Colombia

*People who provide these services have a negative attitude towards older persons so we just avoid them.*  
Older woman, Uganda

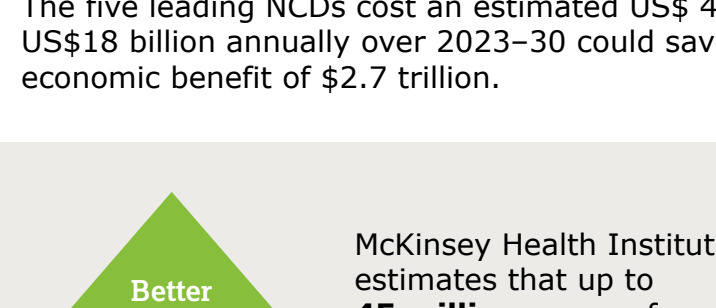


## Meanwhile, critical opportunities for promoting healthy ageing are being missed, at huge cost to people, systems and societies

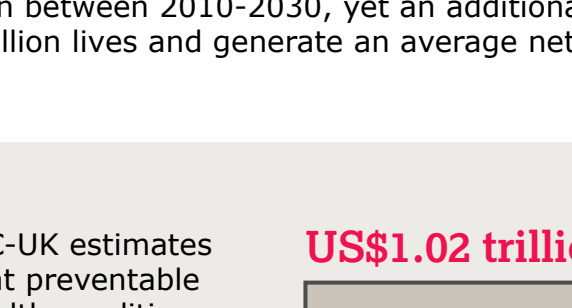


Overall, life expectancy (LE) is not keeping pace with healthy life expectancy (HALE) leading to a greater proportion of people's lives spent in ill health or with a disability.

### Estimated cost of NCDs between 2010-30



### Annual addition over 2023-30 and its impact

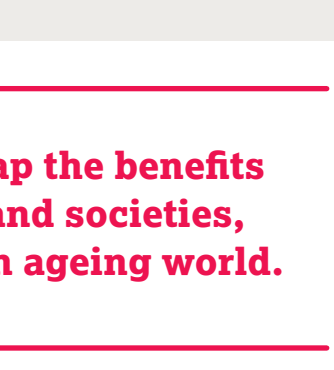


The five leading NCDs cost an estimated US\$ 47 trillion between 2010-2030, yet an additional US\$18 billion annually over 2023-30 could save 39 million lives and generate an average net economic benefit of \$2.7 trillion.



McKinsey Health Institute estimates that up to **45 million years** of better quality life with multiple related economic benefits could be gained by investing in healthy ageing.<sup>15</sup>

ILC-UK estimates that preventable health conditions cost G20 countries US\$1.02 trillion in yearly productivity loss among those aged 50-64 alone.<sup>16</sup>

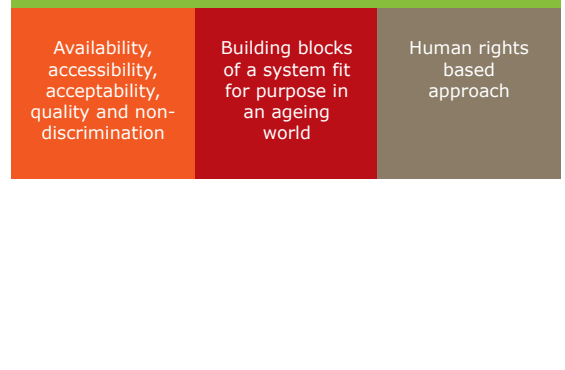
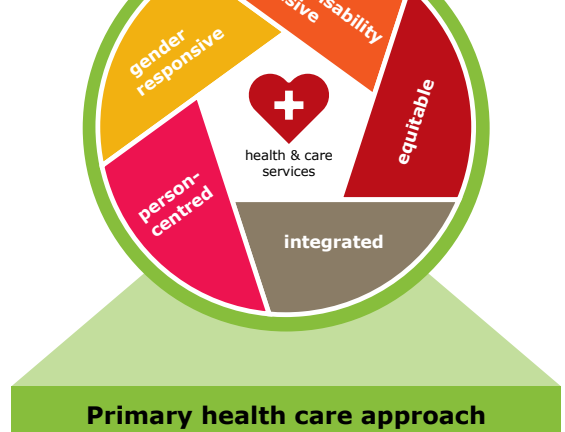


## To meet the needs of older people and to reap the benefits of healthy ageing for individuals, systems and societies, Universal Health Coverage must be fit for an ageing world.

Governments and health actors at all levels must champion inclusive and health and care systems that deliver equitable, integrated and person-centred services, founded upon strong primary health care approaches promoting healthy ageing for all.

This must include:

- Addressing the barriers older people face to enjoying their right to health
- Investing in the building blocks of a health system fit for purpose in an ageing world – including *Service delivery; Workforce; Medical products, vaccines and assistive technologies; Data and information systems; Financing; and Leadership and governance*
- Promoting a rights-based approach to UHC ensuring the voices of all groups, including older people, are heard.



**Find out more at HelpAge**  
**Achieving UHC fit for an ageing world** [Click](#)

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