



The need to increase support for healthy ageing and longevity research in the EU by establishing a Coordination and Support Programme on Healthy Ageing and Longevity[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Europe faces rapidly accelerating population ageing, driving multimorbidity and unsustainable healthcare costs. This paper calls for the establishment of an EU Coordination and Support Programme on Healthy Ageing and Longevity to integrate research, innovation, regulation, and capacity-building across Member States.

1. Background

Europe is undergoing a rapid and massive population ageing and the derivative increase in major ageing-related non-communicable diseases and their economic and humanitarian burden. By 2050, approximately 30% of Europe's population is projected to be aged 65 years and older, with the old-age dependency ratio expected to approach a significant 56.7%, placing substantial pressure on health and social protection systems (Eurostat, 2023; European Commission, 2020). Non-communicable ageing-related diseases account for approximately 90% of all deaths in Europe, and ageing-related conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and neurodegenerative disorders are the primary drivers of healthcare expenditure, with overall health spending accounting for approximately 8–10% of GDP across EU Member States (World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe, 2021; Eurostat, 2023; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/European Commission, 2024). At the same time, this demographic transition presents a strategic opportunity for advancing research, innovation and education in healthy ageing and longevity which can reduce the disease burden, extend healthy life expectancy, and strengthen the sustainability of European health and social systems (World Health Organization (WHO), 2021).

While the EU invests substantially in disease-specific research, there is currently **no dedicated coordination and support framework** that systematically targets the **biological, social and systemic drivers of ageing** across diseases, sectors and Member States (European Commission, 2025, 2021). There is an urgent need for a **European Coordination and Support Programme for Healthy Ageing and Longevity: A Strategic Priority for Health, Innovation and Sustainability**. These

interventions are designed to mitigate degenerative ageing processes, thus preventing and eliminating the main underlying contributors for major chronic ageing-related diseases and improving the healthy and productive longevity for the older population.

European research cooperation on ageing can play a leading role in addressing this challenge, in Europe and across the globe. Stronger European cooperation in ageing research can extend healthy life expectancy across the EU. This can generate major humanitarian, health and economic benefits (World Health Organization (WHO), 2021; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)/European Commission, 2024). Longer periods of health, activity, and productivity in older adults can improve their quality of life and reduce pressure on healthcare and social welfare systems (European Commission, 2020). At the same time, it could stimulate substantial economic growth in Europe, by stimulating the development of biomedical and healthy longevity industries and related sectors, strengthening Europe's innovation and competitiveness (European Commission, 2025; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2025). Moreover, the savings in the healthcare and welfare systems can free resources for wider scientific, technological, and social development. Therefore, the promotion of healthy longevity should be seen as a high strategic priority within the EU (World Health Organization (WHO), 2021; European Commission, 2020).

Enhanced coordination and support for research on healthy ageing and longevity can enhance European capacity building initiatives by developing supportive infrastructure for research and development (Council of the European Union, 2025; World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe, 2022). An essential concomitant of this capacity building will be educating highly skilled scientific, medical

and technological work force capable of addressing the ageing challenge, training leaders across diverse branches of biomedical research on ageing and ageing-related disease, thus ensuring the future of European achievement and innovation (Maeda and Socha-Dietrich, 2021).

Achieving this will require coordinated action, including the formation of strategic consortia, targeted funding streams, harmonised standards, robust data sharing and interoperability, equitable access mechanisms, comprehensive training, and other forms of coordination and support (Council of the European Union, 2025; Svingel et al., 2025; European Commission, 2022, 2021).

Despite substantial EU investment in health research through programmes such as Horizon Europe, there is currently no dedicated co-ordination and support programme explicitly focused on targeting the biological processes of ageing to prevent multimorbidity and extend healthy longevity (European Commission, 2025, 2021). While the EU funds substantial research on individual non-communicable diseases through programmes such as Horizon Europe, these initiatives largely remain disease-specific and siloed (European Parliament, 2026; European Commission, 2021). Current funding structures tend to prioritize oncology, cardiovascular, or neurodegenerative research separately, rather than systematically addressing the shared biological mechanisms of ageing that drive multimorbidity (European Commission, 2021; Kennedy et al., 2014; López-Otín et al., 2023; Jin et al., 2015). As a result, research efforts remain fragmented, limiting opportunities for integrative, mechanism-based prevention strategies (European Commission, 2020). Such a research coordination and support programme needs to be established to address the urgent challenge of the European population ageing. This initiative would enable cross-disciplinary collaboration between biogerontology, clinical medicine, digital health, public health, and regulatory science, ensuring alignment between basic research, translational development, and health system implementation. The main distinguishing feature of such a programme, compared to existing programmes on disease research, would be a strong focus on principles of geroscience, namely, targeting degenerative ageing processes as underlying causes of multiple ageing-related diseases (multimorbidity), rather than particular age-related diseases and symptoms (Kennedy et al., 2014).

Such a coordination and support programme is essential for investigating, developing, implementing and eventually evaluating the effectiveness of medical interventions for the promotion of healthy ageing and longevity. It can serve as a necessary first step for building a sustained and institutionalized framework for healthy ageing research in the EU (Beard et al., 2016). By mobilising key stakeholders, including decision makers, academia, healthcare, industry, and the general public, it can accelerate progress in research, development and education for the prevention of ageing-related diseases and extension of healthy lifespan (Stambler, 2026; Schumacher et al., 2025; Bhattacharjee et al., 2024). This program has the potential to bring together leading experts and institutions on healthy ageing and longevity from Europe and partnering countries. Collectively, these efforts can establish a cohesive European framework that drives global progress in healthy ageing and longevity.

2. Objectives

Specific areas of consideration of the proposed coordination and support programme for healthy ageing and longevity may include (but not limited to) the following critical subjects:

1. Research & Innovation on Healthy Longevity

- Advancing interdisciplinary research targeting the **biological mechanisms of ageing** as shared drivers of multimorbidity, in line with geroscience principles, adopting a life-course approach and integrating healthy lifestyle promotion and biomedical innovation for prevention and early intervention.

- Supporting the development, validation and translation of **preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic interventions** aimed at extending healthspan and functional capacity.
- Strengthening Horizon Europe and related EU investments in **integrated longevity research**, spanning biomedical, digital, clinical and public health domains.
- Facilitating coordination between basic research, translational development and real-world implementation in healthcare systems.
- Exploring, advancing and providing diagnostics and therapies that show promise to improve the underlying ageing processes, extend healthy lifespan and improve functional capacity.

2. Data, Standards, Regulation & Health Technology Assessment

- Promoting data sharing, interoperability and responsible data governance for ageing and longevity research, while ensuring ethical use, privacy and security.
- Developing common evaluation criteria, biomarkers and outcome measures for healthy ageing interventions.
- Integrating longevity-related interventions into existing European Health Technology Assessment frameworks, ensuring robust evidence standards, transparency and equity.
- Supporting regulatory and policy dialogue on risk–benefit assessment and appropriate approval pathways for longevity medicine.

3. Ecosystem Development & Market Uptake

- Strengthening the **European healthy longevity ecosystem** by connecting academia, healthcare providers, industry, policymakers and investors.
- Supporting innovation pathways, including **incubators, accelerators and public-private partnerships**, to translate research into scalable solutions.
- Embedding healthy longevity innovation within **European age-friendly cities and regions**, leveraging living labs and real-world testing environments.
- Enhancing Europe's competitiveness and leadership in healthy longevity-related industries.

4. Societal, Economic & Policy Impact

- Assessing and promoting the **social, economic and labour-market implications** of extended healthy longevity.
- Supporting evidence-based policy development for **sustainable health, social and long-term care systems** in ageing societies.
- Addressing equity, access and inclusion, with attention to demographic diversity and the rights of older persons.
- Facilitating strategic dialogue between researchers, policymakers and civil society to ensure alignment with European values and priorities.

5. Education, Skills & Public Engagement

- Building **human capacity** by supporting interdisciplinary education and training in ageing, longevity medicine, digital health and policy.
- Developing leadership and expertise across biomedical, technological and societal dimensions of healthy ageing.
- Increasing **public and professional awareness** of ageing processes, prevention strategies and healthy longevity opportunities.
- Promoting informed public dialogue to counter misinformation and foster societal trust in longevity research and innovation.

Specific aims of the coordination and support programme for healthy ageing and longevity:

1. Establishing and managing joint calls for research proposals on ageing and healthy longevity between institutional researchers in the EU and partner countries.
2. Holding top-level international conferences on ageing and healthy longevity research, development and education, and accompanying meetings, workshops and exchanges.
3. Creating a distributed knowledge network dedicated to connecting key stakeholders, data sharing, data analysis, creating and promoting educational programmes and policy recommendations, for the advancement of healthy longevity research, development and education in the EU and partner countries.
4. Stimulating the establishment of research, development and commercialization facilities on healthy longevity in the EU and partner countries, such as biotechnological incubators or accelerators, to leverage unique cooperative medical and technological capabilities and investments in the EU to advance the healthy longevity industry ecosystem in the EU and partner countries.
5. Establishing and validating new types of working and learning in ageing digitalised societies, transforming health, social and long-term care systems, strengthening the rights of the older persons and reducing inequalities.
6. Strengthening equitable international research partnerships in longevity science to ensure datasets are diverse, representative, and methodologically robust, reflecting Europe's increasing demographic diversity and thereby enhancing the global validity, fairness, and translational impact of longevity innovations.

Collectively, advancing these objectives will advance the healthy ageing and longevity field, nationally and internationally, for the benefit of the older persons and the entire population in the EU and globally.

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