

Submission to the National Hartford Center of Gerontological Nursing Excellence Newsletter

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June 16, 2019

We've all heard the statistic that the number of older adults is increasing. Often we also hear how this will strain our society, our economy and our health care resources. The popular narrative casts older generations as a burden to the younger ones and contributes to some of the negative opinions and stigma around aging. When people pose that aging itself as a problem, we need to push back.

The problem is not that we, as a global population, are aging. Aging is natural. We don't suddenly become unable to contribute to society in meaningful ways simply by collecting more years. However, our needs do change as we age.

The problem is that we are not prepared to support the changing needs of our own population. Our health care system is not well-equipped to handle the chronic conditions that are more common in later life. Medicare doesn't always cover needed services for older such as prescription glasses or dental work. We don't have enough health care workers specializing in geriatrics. Many of our public spaces and services, such as parks and transportation, aren't accessible. Caregivers have little support.

We need to make accommodations for aging instead of blaming it on aging. The solution to dementia, for instance, is not only finding medical treatment but also making sure our communities are friendly places for people with dementia and their caregivers.

We need to think critically about how we approach aging in our research, practice and everyday life. The answer is not only funding projects that support older adults, although that is an essential part of it. It's also remembering that as we age, will still have a right to participate in our society. It's always thinking about how we can make spaces, events, and services more accessible.

Our aging population is not something to fear. It's a reminder that our society is not only made up of the young and we should make sure our infrastructures support that.