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### **As a Clinical Geropsychologist contributing to the World Health Organization**

For 25 years, I dedicated my work on improving the mental health and well-being of older people through research, teaching and clinical practice. I increasingly became aware of the important role of policy to achieve this goal. Thus, when I had the opportunity to join the World Health Organization (WHO) as a diplomat for 4 years, seconded by the Ministry of Health in the Netherlands, I did not have to think twice. So, I moved from my Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century home to Geneva surrounded by mountains.

At WHO I had two main tasks. Firstly, I was responsible for the domain Long-Term Care (LTC) in general, or the care and support for older people in the broadest sense, from care at home to

care in nursing homes and everything in between. Secondly, I was in charge of the development of a web-based intervention for caregivers of people with dementia. In the fields of ageing and dementia there have been important developments. I joined at the right time. The momentum was there.

Before I provide more detail on the work that was done, first a few words on WHO as an organization. WHO is the part of the United Nations family focused on health, to build a better, healthier future for people all over the world. WHO is the secretariat of 194 Member States, across six regions, and with more than 150 offices worldwide. WHO's agenda is set at the yearly World Health Assembly (WHA) with over 3,500 representatives of Member States and a wide range of organizations.

WHO's Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health calls for global action to support *Healthy Ageing* through a range of strategic directions.<sup>1</sup> One of these strategic directions is the establishment of sustainable and equitable long-term care (LTC) systems. In the Global strategy and action plan, WHO states that every country should have a LTC-system, and in May 2016 this was approved by the WHO's 194 Member States.

The foundation of the Global strategy and action plan is the innovative *Healthy Ageing* model.<sup>2,3</sup> The model is not focused at disease, but at mental and physical capacities and functional ability of (older) people. During the life course people may experience a loss in their capacities and at certain point this may result in a significant loss in their functional ability. They then need care and support of other people to continue to do the things they value in life. This care and support of others is what WHO calls long-term care (LTC). So, LTC is not defined as a collection of services, but as the care and support to continue to do the things people value in life. The *Healthy Ageing* model means a paradigm shift, from a service-oriented to a person-centered approach.

In 2017, the Global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017-2025 was adopted at the WHA. This plan is also highly ambitious with seven action areas, one focused on the support for caregivers of people with dementia.<sup>4</sup> To scale up the worldwide support for caregivers, WHO developed a generic web-based training and support program called iSupport. I was in charge of this development, with the help of an international development team, including several geropsychologists. Several countries are now translating and adapting iSupport, including Australia, and (plan to) study its usefulness and effectiveness. The program consists of 23 lessons around 5 themes: what is dementia, being a caregiver, caring for yourself, an enjoyable day, and managing behavioral changes.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, I am back in the Netherlands with a much broader view on the care for older people in the world. I am very grateful for the chance that was given to me.

### **To Learn More:**

For an update on the work of WHO in the field of Ageing, check the website on a regular basis: <https://www.who.int/ageing/en/>

There you can also find several infographics and gifs that might be helpful for presentations.

For an update on the work of WHO in the field of Dementia:  
[https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/neurology/dementia/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/neurology/dementia/en/).

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### **Further reading**

<sup>1</sup>WHO (2015). World report on Ageing and Health. WHO: Geneva. Free downloadable:  
<https://www.who.int/ageing/events/world-report-2015-launch/en/>

<sup>2</sup>WHO (2016). Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health. WHO: Geneva. Free downloadable: <https://www.who.int/ageing/global-strategy/en/>

<sup>3</sup>Beard, J. R., Officer, A., de Carvalho, I. A., Sadana, R., Pot, A. M., Michel, J. P., . . . Chatterji, S. (2016). The World report on ageing and health: a policy framework for healthy ageing. *Lancet*, 387(10033), 2145-2154. doi: 10.1016/s0140-6736(15)00516-4

<sup>4</sup>WHO (2017). Global action plan on the public health response to dementia 2017-2025. Geneva: WHO. Free downloadable:  
[https://www.who.int/mental\\_health/neurology/dementia/action\\_plan\\_2017\\_2025/en/](https://www.who.int/mental_health/neurology/dementia/action_plan_2017_2025/en/)

<sup>5</sup>For more information on WHO's iSupport: [www.iSupportForDementia.org](http://www.iSupportForDementia.org).