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Local community practices to improve healthy aging in the North

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The governments of Finland, Denmark, Norway and Russia have developed national programs to address population ageing. There are also successful practices in healthy ageing at the local level in different countries, but they remain unknown among the global professional community and governmental authorities.

Healthy ageing has become an important policy issue at all levels of the society. The key international document is the World Health Organization's (WHO) plan for a Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020–2030 which is the second action plan of the WHO 's Global strategy on ageing and health. The Plan consists of 10 years of concerted, catalytic, sustained collaboration to improve the lives of older people, their families, and their communities. Older people themselves are in the core of this plan, and it brings together variety of actors, including governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector. The Plan also notes that healthy ageing is not only a healthcare issue but also needs to engage many other sectors.

The aim of research was to search and introduce local community practices according the priority areas of WHO Decade of Healthy Aging action plan for gerontological policy in arctic countries.

Examples of good practices for the Priority 1 of the Plan: Change how we think, feel and act towards age and ageing

Fostering of Healthy Ageing requires fundamental shifts from existing stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination towards older people. Older people should not be seen only as an economic burden for the welfare society, but as contributors to the state and communities, and as resourceful carriers of traditional values and wisdom. Governments eliminate age discrimination by variety of actions, such as legislative changes, and policies and programs which engage older people in decision-making.

Initiatives for Priority 2 of the Plan: Ensure that communities foster the abilities of older people

The environments which are built on decisions made not only by policy makers but involve citizens of all ages are better places to grow, play, live, work and retire. Even those people who have lost their capacity, shall be able to continue to enjoy everyday activities, to continue to develop personally and professionally, to participate and contribute to their communities while retaining their autonomy, dignity, health, and well-being.

Practices for Priority 3 of the Plan: Deliver person-centered, integrated care and primary health services to older people

Good-quality essential health services include prevention of diseases; promotion of healthy lifestyle; curative, rehabilitative, palliative and end-of-life care; safe, effective, good-quality essential medicines and vaccines; dental care; assistive technologies, while ensuring that the use of services does not cause the user financial hardship.

Local northern practices are mirrored against the recently released WHO Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020-2030 Action Plan with paying attention to indigenous elders. Based on these practices the national, regional, and municipal level authorities of the Nordic countries and Russia were suggested to consider the policy recommendations based of the research.