

TERMINOLOGY

The terminology used to describe older persons varies considerably. It includes:

“Older persons”, “the aged”, “the elderly”, “the third age”, “the ageing”, and, to denote persons over 80 years, “the fourth age”.

The United Nations opted for the term **Older Persons** when referring to people aged 60 years and older.

The National Council on Ageing has made the decision to also use the term ‘older persons’ when referring to this age group of people in Belize:

In Spanish ‘*personas mayores*’ is used to distinguish older persons in society. As is ‘*mutu weiyaya*’ in the Garifuna language and ‘*noch vini*’ and ‘*noch upe*’ in the Maya dialect for older man and older woman respectively

National Council on Ageing

Unit 17, Garden City Plaza
P.O. Box 372
Belmopan City
Belize, Central America

Phone: + 501-822-1546
Fax / Message: + 501-822-3978
E-mail: ncabze@yahoo.com
Website: www.ncabz.org



INFORMATION SHEET THE SITUATION OF OLDER PERSONS IN BELIZE

FACTS: POPULATION AGEING *

The population in Belize is rapidly ageing and the proportion of older persons is set to double in the next 20 years.

- 1: In 2010 it was estimated that older persons, 60 years and above, made up 7% of the population of Belize. This number is increasing by well over 1000 each year.
- 2: Within the Caribbean region, Belize will see one of the highest increases in the population of older persons.
- 3: Life Expectancy has increased over the past 10 years and is currently 73 years for men and 77 years for women.

Poor Older Persons face growing problems in meeting their basic needs for food, healthcare and housing. However, as the number of older persons rise in the country, it becomes necessary for greater consideration to be given to the provision of services and the protection of rights of all older persons.

* Data Information obtained from the 2010 Belize Census and the United Nations World Population Ageing Report 1950—2050.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS CHART OF INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ENDORSED POLICIES AND PRINCIPLES

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS:

- 1948 United Nations adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- 1982 1st World Assembly on Ageing in Vienna, Austria.
- 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing: 62 recommendations
- 1991: United National Principles for Older Persons
- 1992: United National General Assembly adopt 8 Global Targets on Ageing for the year 2001
- 1992: Vienna + 10: United Nations Assembly Proclamation on Ageing
- 1994: Caribbean Health Promotion Charter
- 1998: Caribbean Charter on Health & Ageing
- 1999: International Year of Older Persons
- 1999: Belize initiated the process to develop the National Policy for Older Persons**
- 2002: 2nd United National World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, Spain.
- 2002 International Plan of Action on Ageing: 19 articles and 132 recommendations
- 2002: World NGO Forum on Ageing, Madrid Final Declaration & Recommendation for the ‘Development and Rights of Older Persons’
- 2003: **Belize National Policy for Older Persons adopted by Cabinet focused on 9 Principles.**

SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS IN BELIZE

Although most nations of the world agreed to adopt the Universal Declaration of Human Rights following the 2nd World War, there was no concern or interest for issues of ageing until 1982. It became apparent, not only to developed countries, but also to the developing nations, that older persons were living longer and therefore they were to become a concern of society as a group necessitating inclusion in policies and services.

The National Policy for Older Persons was adopted by Cabinet in June 2002 as Belize recognized that population ageing was a concern.

The National Council on Ageing was formed in February 2003

The National Plan of Action for Older Persons 2003-2008 was produced by the NCA and focused on 11 specific issues of Older Persons that needed attention.

The NCA Strategic Plan 2003-2008. Identified 9 priority action areas that supported the National Plan of Action.

Draft Older Persons Act 2007: Still awaiting a attention

The Situational Analysis of Older Persons 2010: A research document undertaken to determine the issues and concerns of older persons.

The Feasibility of a Universal Pension in Belize 2011: Produced by HelpAge International in collaboration with the NCA to draw attention to the need for greater social protection in Belize.

The NCA Strategic Plan 2015- 2019: Developed to address issues resulting from the Situational Analysis

The Major Concerns of Older Persons in Belize

OLDER PERSONS AND FINANCIAL SECURITY

The cost of living in Belize is high and many Older Persons need to work well into their 70's and 80's in order to survive because the majority do not receive a pension.

The Belize Social Security Board was established in 1981 at a time when many older persons had already reached retirement age and therefore did not qualify since they had not made any or insufficient contributions.

BENEFITS: In 2003 the Government of Belize introduced the Non-Contributory Pension (NCP) through the BSSB for Women aged 65 years and in 2007 for Men aged 67 years. Unfortunately the criteria for acceptance under this scheme has become so stringent that only the poorest older persons are accepted and the majority continue to be reliant on family, friends, neighbours, the church and welfare organizations to provide them with their basic needs.

In 2011 the Social Assistance programme was discontinued in favour of the BOOST Programme. This conditional cash transfer initiative, primarily for families with school age children, is available to older persons who prove a special need. There is definitely a need to introduce a National Pension Scheme to protect all older persons in Belize from old age poverty. (Feasibility Study 2011).

OLDER PERSONS AND HEALTHCARE

The most common non-communicable illnesses associated with ageing are diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), arthritis and vision problems. Many older persons suffer from more than one condition. Alzheimer's disease and dementia have also been found to be increasing in Belize.

Although older persons use the services of their local health providers, many still prefer bush medicine as a means of treating certain illnesses. Chronic conditions often require expensive medication, which is either not affordable on an older person's budget, or not available from the public health service.

The Ministry of Health introduced the pilot National Health Insurance Programme (NHI) to southside Belize City in 2001. This was subsequently rolled out in 2003; the Southern Districts of Toledo and Stann Creek in 2006 and Corozal in 2014. However, initially it was discovered that older persons were not using the facility due to the fees that were charged so in 2005 the MOH discontinued the co-payment system for older persons and this has certainly increased access to the primary healthcare services available under the NHI programme. Unfortunately this scheme is not yet available countrywide.

The Mercy Care Centre in Belize City was approved as a NHI primary health service provider specifically for older persons in 2010. All persons 59 years and older can take advantage of all the facilities at the Clinic.

OLDER PERSONS THE FAMILY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT

Once Older Persons reach the age when it is assumed that they should 'take it easy', they are effectively forgotten by society. They are excluded from decision making largely due to the feeling that they are no longer able to contribute to society. However, retirement from work does not mean retirement from life.

The NCA Situational Analysis 2010 found that older persons are often neglected, and suffered from depression and loneliness. This would indicate that, not only is there a need for families to be more sensitive and understanding of the concerns of their older family members, but also for more facilities to be made available to older persons in order for them to socialize and engage in stimulating activities to alleviate loneliness.

Older People generally would wish to remain independent for as long as possible and therefore should be assisted by the appropriate support services. However when it is no longer possible and it becomes dangerous for older persons to remain at home through physical or mental impairment then care facilities should be made available.

There are currently 3 residential homes operating in Belize which offer care to less than 100 older persons. The waiting lists for places are long and therefore alternative support care facilities, such as Day Care Centres, should be developed countrywide, which would provide much needed support to older persons and to family members.

OLDER PERSONS LIVING IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Older persons are perceived as being one of the most vulnerable sectors of the Belizean society.

It has been mentioned that most older persons in Belize do not receive a pension and therefore are not able to afford the expenses of maintaining good health. It has been stated that they are often forgotten by their families and live on their own without support. There is also insufficient care facilities available to offer the most infirm older persons shelter.

It has become increasingly important that a change in attitude needs to take place whereby older persons are given the respect they deserve to live safely and with dignity in the community.

Due to their often fragile appearance, older persons become targets for unscrupulous persons seeking to take advantage by depriving them of their valuables, property and often their lives.

Currently there is no legislation that specifically protects older persons in Belize and so it is important that the community at large accept greater responsibility for the well-being of older people so that they can feel safe and free from harm.