

Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

# SUCCESSFUL AGING OF SOCIETIES

Essays and policy recommendations on the challenges and opportunities of an aging society



 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY |  MAILMAN SCHOOL of PUBLIC HEALTH +  MacArthur Foundation

## Research from the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on an Aging Society

### Successful Aging of Societies

John W. Rowe

In his overview, Dr. Rowe provides a preview of the essays contained in this specially-themed issue of *Daedalus*. He introduces the considerations and strategies that are relevant to a comprehensive understanding of the institutional and policy changes required for the United States to emerge from the demographic transformation with a resilient, productive, equitable cohesive, secure, and sustainable society. He urges policymakers to consider both the benefits and risks to an aging society. He suggests the development of a unifying strategy that optimizes the balance between the two while emphasizing that older individuals have tremendous capability to productively participate in the workforce or through volunteerism.

### The Demographic Transformation of America

S. Jay Olshansky

Dr. Olshansky examines the future composition and function of the United States population. He explains how, within the next 30 years, the population will experience a permanent change in its age structure. He addresses why life expectancy in the United States is likely to diverge from that experienced by the rest of the developed world; describes recent trends in healthy-life expectancy; and examines how the age structure of the U.S. by mid-century will be different from that found today.

### Hispanic Older Adult Health & Longevity in the United States: Current Patterns & Concerns for the Future

Robert A. Hummer & Mark D. Hayward

The Hispanic population aged 65 and over—the most socioeconomically disadvantaged subset of America’s elderly—is projected to quintuple between 2012 and 2050. Essay authors provide an overview of current longevity and health patterns for this older Hispanic population. Specifically, they focus on four key issues impacting Hispanics—undocumented immigrant status, health insurance coverage, trends in important health behaviors, and continued socioeconomic status disadvantages. They conclude their discussion by urging forward-thinking policies aimed at enhancing the health and longevity profile for this aging population.

### The Future of Intergenerational Relations in Aging Societies

Frank F. Furstenberg, Caroline Sten Hartnett, Martin Kohli & Julie M. Zissimopoulos

As the pressure mounts to reduce the public costs of supporting rapidly aging societies, responsibility for supporting elderly people will increasingly fall on their family members. Essay authors explore the family’s capacity to respond to these growing challenges. In particular, they examine how family change and growing inequality pose special problems in developed nations, especially the United States. They conclude by considering some possible dilemmas that policymakers may face in their efforts to support families.

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### Labor-Force Participation, Policies & Practices in an Aging America: Adaptation Essential for a Healthy & Resilient Population

Lisa F. Berkman, Axel Boersch-Supan & Mauricio Avendano

Population aging in the United States poses challenges to societal institutions while simultaneously creating opportunities to build a more resilient, successful, and cohesive society. In their essay, authors argue that expectations about old age have not sufficiently adapted to the reality of aging today and that institutions need more adaptation in order to successfully face the consequences of demographic change. They describe some of the underemphasized benefits that working and remaining active may have for health and well-being in older populations and suggest that it is not demographic transitions that will shape our future, but instead how our institutions and policies respond and adapt to them.

### Productivity & Engagement in an Aging America: The Role of Volunteerism

Dawn C. Carr, Linda P. Fried & John W. Rowe

Volunteering in late life is associated with health benefits such as reduced risk of hypertension, improved self-related health and well-being, delayed physical disability, enhanced cognition, and lower mortality. In their essay, authors examine volunteerism, those who are volunteering and how they and the institutions and people they serve are affected. They propose that the impact of volunteering in an aging population be recognized and invested in, and that effective programs harness social capital of older adults to address critical societal needs and also improve the well-being of older adults. They further suggest that elder volunteerism presents a significant opportunity for health promotion and deserves consideration as a national public health priority.

### Resetting Social Security

S. Jay Olshansky, Dana P. Goldman & John W. Rowe

In this essay, authors examine the case for and implications of resetting the eligibility age for early and full Social Security retirement benefits. They present evidence demonstrating that the rate of improvement in life extension at older ages accelerated after 1983 by exploring four central questions:

- How well did the two-year increase in eligibility age for full retirement benefits from the 1983 amendments correspond to the proportional rise in life expectancy at age 65 from 1935 to 1983?;
- From a demographic perspective, does the rise in life expectancy at older ages observed since 1983 warrant a further adjustment to the age of eligibility for early and full Social Security benefits?;
- How would subgroups of the population with different survival prospects be differentially influenced by further increases in the age of early and full retirement ages?; and
- What would the early and full retirement ages be today if they had been indexed directly to rising life expectancy since the program's inception?

### Global Population Aging: Facts, Challenges, Solutions & Perspectives

David E. Bloom, David Canning & Alyssa Lubet

The rapid aging of populations around the world presents an unprecedented set of challenges: shifting disease burden, increased expenditure on health and long-term care, labor force shortages, dissaving, and potential problems with old-age income security. While longer healthy life spans are an enormous gain for human welfare, essay authors suggest that current institutional and social arrangements are unsuited for aging populations and shifting demographics; and propose that the best solution is to change our institutions and social arrangements.

### Individual & Social Strategies to Mitigate the Risks & Expand Opportunities of an Aging America

Julie M. Zissimopoulos, Dana P. Goldman, S. Jay Olshansky, John Rother & John W. Rowe

While increasing life expectancy offers the potential benefit of additional years of productivity and engagement for individuals and society, it also carries substantial risks. Authors of this essay detail the risks associated with aging at the individual level including longevity, frailty, and financial insecurity and at the societal level including lack of cohesion, inequity, and lack of productivity. They present policy recommendations to mitigate these risks.