

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: MARCH 3, 2018

UPDATE ON WHO'S HEALTHY AGEING FRAMEWORK

MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA, USA, March 3, 2018. In May 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted a 5-year global action framework to address ageing and health. Achieving the goal of reducing care dependency in older age will require the coordinated efforts not only of geriatricians and other specialists but of primary care providers as well, according to Dr. Islene Araujo de Carvalho, Senior Policy and Strategy Adviser in WHO's Department of Ageing and Life Course.

"To decrease care dependency in older age, it will be necessary to realign all health care systems and services towards the objective of preventing decline in intrinsic capacity," said Dr. Araujo de Carvalho. "Currently we don't have that. What we have is geriatricians and specialized clinics looking at people when it's too late. We need to have a community-based approach in which general practitioners will be able to assess people in family health-care settings for declines in physical and mental capacity."

Dr. Araujo de Carvalho delivered her comments today at the 2018 International Conference on Frailty and Sarcopenia Research (ICFSR2018) in Miami Beach, Florida, USA. Her goal was to convince specialists at the meeting to use their deep knowledge of these disabling conditions to help build public health approaches that can be implemented globally, including in underdeveloped countries.

Intrinsic capacity is defined as the combination of an individual's physical and mental capacities, which interact with environmental factors to determine that person's functional ability. Declines in intrinsic capacity may begin in mid-life, long before disorders such as frailty or sarcopenia (age-related muscle loss) set in, so it is important to begin intervening early in life.

Frailty is a syndrome of progressive age-related decline in physiological systems, which results in a loss of intrinsic capacity reserves and increased vulnerability to stress. "All the knowledge we have on geriatrics is based on frailty research. Frailty helps us understand the biology of aging," said Dr. Araujo de Carvalho. "Intrinsic capacity uses many indicators of frailty but adds other indicators since priorities differ across countries." For example, in Europe dementia is the primary condition that leads to care dependency, while in Africa, hearing loss and blindness are major causes of disability, she said.

WHO has put together a working group to develop tools to assess intrinsic capacity in clinical settings. The measures will include those used to assess frailty, such as mobility and muscle strength, but will also add measures of hearing and vision, as well as other conditions that cause disability. "It will need to be universal and comprehensive to address different problems in different countries," said Dr. Araujo de Carvalho. The working group will conduct a systematic review to develop a group of measures, with a goal of achieving consensus in one year, she said.