



AT-A-GLANCE INSIGHTS

PUBLIC POLICY & AGING REPORT SYNOPSIS

Each quarter, the Gerontological Society of America's (GSA) *Public Policy & Aging Report* examines key policy issues affecting older adults. We create a synopsis of the issue and provide key themes and answer possible policy actions that keep you informed on the evolving landscape of aging policy and discover ways to make an impact. This edition explores research on aging among Latino and Mexican older adults in the U.S. and Mexico, highlighting findings from major studies and their policy implications.

AGING AND HEALTH POLICY IN THE AMERICAS: U.S. Latino and Mexican Older Adults

Social Health and Dementia Risk in Mexican Older Adults

Aguilar et al. (2024) urge policymakers to adopt a Social in All Policies approach to increase awareness of the negative health implications of inadequate socialization for people of all ages, but particularly for older Latinos. Social engagement offers a protective factor for dementia risk in older adults.

Policy Actions

- ✓ Encourage use of the social engagement assessment included in the Annual Wellness Visit. This assessment is often not used given the time involved in discussion and addressing social issues in a healthcare encounter.
- ✓ Congress can expand subsidies under the Federal Communications Commission's Affordable Connectivity Program to focus on people of all ages.
- ✓ Incentivize partnerships with local and state age-friendly initiatives that offer visibility and more community and population-centered approaches to social and civic engagement.

Social Security and Other Public Benefits

Black and Hispanic workers have the lowest rates of coverage in private employer-based pension plans (Angel et al., 2024), increasing their reliance on Social Security benefits as a sole source of income in retirement. The experiment with defined contribution plans (i.e., individuals contribute to their own retirement benefit) in lower income countries has been challenged by an inability of workers to contribute enough and disincentives for employers to pay more in wages to support retirement savings, leaving workers exposed to financial insecurity in later life.

Policy Actions

- ✓ The current system is inequitable and disadvantages low-skilled workers. Policymakers can offer matching contribution programs, which would incentivize employers to employ low-skilled workers.
- ✓ Automatic enrollment in retirement plans increases participation and contributions and should be considered as a policy lever.
- ✓ Given that immigrants offer significant economic, social, and tax benefits to the United States, research confirming that they do not pose an undue burden on public benefits may provide some political leverage to inform and shift public mood and federal immigration policy.

Long-Term Care in Mexico

Lopez-Ortega (2024) suggest a path forward for improving access and quality in Mexico's long-term care sector.

- ✓ A lack of regulatory and data collection infrastructure for long-term care in Mexico has resulted in a gap in knowledge of the demographics, care standards, and health conditions of older people residing in Mexico's care homes (Lopez-Ortega, 2024). In 2015 a registry was created, yet many care settings are unregistered.

Ethnic, Racial, and Age-Related Health Disparities

Martinez (2024) urgently reminds us that our societal systems, structures, and institutions were constructed in a culture of widespread racial, ethnic, and age bias and discrimination, resulting in unjust health and social disparities. Political and public will are required to address these inequities and embed updated equitable norms of education, access, and outcomes. Torres-Gil (2024) stresses the need to better define disability and reasonable accommodations now that increasing numbers of people identify as having a disability. We can leverage the advocacy power of the intersection between ageism and ableism and find common policy ground.

Policy Actions

- ✓ Focus on implementing strategies such as those outlined in the National Institute on Aging: Strategic Directions for Research, 2020–2025, which include identifying the environmental and other contextual factors that lead to health disparities.
- ✓ Support and incentivize awareness education on the institutions and structures that precipitate health disparities so that emerging scholars and professionals fully understand population health needs from a prevention and treatment perspective.
- ✓ Support a lifespan approach to aging and disability that does more to ensure services as needs and preferences arise and evolve over time.

Caregiving Needs of Dually-Eligible Older Latinos

Antequera, et al. (2024) highlight the caregiving responsibilities and burdens on older, low-income Latin Americans and their family caregivers. We need to reimagine publicly funded caregiving supports for dually eligible older Latinos, a rapidly growing demographic with unique needs.

Policy Actions

- ✓ Community-based organizations offer opportunities for monitoring needs and designing and delivering individual and population-specific services.
- ✓ Look to state approaches for addressing various needs: e.g., use of PACE programs, adult day services in Texas, and offering Medicare Advantage plans to dually eligible older adults in California.

Wrap-Up Message: Reason for Optimism

Older Latin Americans are living longer and need equitable access to health, social services, and caregiving supports. The inequities precipitated by long-standing ethnic, racial, and age structural biases can be remedied with education, reframing, and innovative population-based approaches. Policy updates are needed to better accommodate changing demographics.