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HOW CAN WE LIVE LONGER IN BETTER HEALTH?

Today the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee has published a report into healthy ageing, following an in-depth inquiry. It finds that:

- New Science has potential to improve healthy ageing benefiting the individual, the NHS and society
- UK is global leader in drug development and new technologies with promising advances
- However, Government is missing its key healthy ageing targets and must act now
- Inequalities in healthy life expectancy are stark; COVID-19 has highlighted concerns
- Evidence that the rate of multi-morbidity is increasing; designated clinicians required

New Science can delay the onset of age-related diseases; promising advances in drug development and new technologies

The report finds that the “understanding of the biology of ageing is advancing rapidly”, with new medications and drug repurposing bringing the potential to delay the onset of age-related diseases.

The Committee recommends that the Government ensure the UK remains a global leader in drug research and development and that UK Research and Innovation commit to funding further research into the biological processes underlying ageing. Research to identify accurate biomarkers of ageing in humans should also be prioritised.

AI, emerging robotics and data driven technologies have the potential to significantly support healthier and independent living in old age. The report recommends that the Government make strategic investments in research in these areas to develop national expertise.

Government must act now

The report finds that the Government’s “Ageing Society Grand Challenge” target of ensuring people have five extra healthy years of life by 2035 will not be met. The Committee recommends that the Government produce a roadmap on how to achieve the target and report annually to Parliament on progress.

Stark inequalities in healthy life expectancy

Inequality is a major cause of ill health, resulting in a growing period of poor health towards the end of life. The report finds shocking differences in healthy life expectancy amongst ethnic groups and in the most deprived groups, who spend almost 20 years longer in poor health than the least deprived. For women, the Committee finds that “healthy life expectancy at birth has decreased in the past decade”, whilst for men improvements in healthy ageing have slowed. The Committee asks Government to set out a clear plan for reducing health inequalities over the next Parliament.



Furthermore, the report finds that healthy living messages are not having sufficient impact and urges more targeted public health advice, including making interventions early and throughout life.

COVID-19 has highlighted concerns

The report finds that COVID-19 has tragically further highlighted health inequalities, showing how poor health makes people more vulnerable to further health risks. Even before COVID-19 the “fragmentation of care contributes in many cases to even poorer health in older age”.

Multi-morbidity is increasing; more oversight required with designated clinicians

The report finds that the rate of multi-morbidity is increasing and that the current health system was not designed to treat people with multiple conditions. Care pathways are not well coordinated or integrated for older people, particularly those with multi-morbidity.

The report recommends assigning each older person a designated clinician who will have oversight of the patient’s care as a whole and who can coordinate across multi-disciplinary teams. The report also recommends that the MHRA ensure older people are more frequently included in clinical trials and show greater willingness to approve trials which target multiple conditions.

Commenting on the report, Lord Patel, Science and Technology Committee Chair said:

“The Committee found that the Government needs to urgently address the key issues of reducing health inequalities, implementing health system reforms and promoting lifestyle changes.

“The Government must therefore act now to increase support for the exciting new scientific research that targets the underlying processes of ageing. Treatments are being developed that could improve health without the need to treat multiple separate illnesses. Furthermore, technologies can be better utilised to help people live independently for longer.”

Notes to editors:

1. For an embargoed copy of the report, please email lordspressoffice@parliament.uk
2. The report will be available on the Committee Website from Friday 15 January, here: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5801/ldselect/ldsctech/183/183.pdf>
3. The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee is chaired by Lord Patel. For more information or to arrange interviews with the Chair or other Committee members, please contact Henry Cowling, Media and Communications Officer, on 02072192692 or email lordspressoffice@parliament.uk