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# Prevention in an ageing world



Health and care  
Carers  
Community  
Connections  
Inequalities  
Retirement  
Prevention  
Social care



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## What is ILC-UK doing?

### Prevention in an ageing world

There is already a consensus that preventing disease and limiting long-term illness and disability are both good for our health and will play an important role in supporting the economic sustainability of health systems. But translating that consensus into sustained action can be challenging.

- ILC-UK has launched an international programme of work exploring "Prevention in an ageing world".

Through this programme ILC-UK will:

- Influence and shape the discourse around prevention to promote preventative measures across the life course.
- Examine the health and economic impact of a number of communicable and non-communicable diseases, in which there is potential for preventative interventions right across the life course.
- Focus on better off\* countries in order to understand the potential for action.
- Draw together examples of effective preventative interventions and activities among adults in mid and later life and evidence the value of a range of primary, secondary and tertiary preventative interventions.

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\*Better off\* refers to high and high-middle socio-demographic index (SDI) categories. SDI refers to a summary measure of socio-demographic development. It uses income per person, educational attainment and total fertility rate to develop an index that allows for effective comparison.

## We live in an ageing world

Across the globe, societies are getting older. People are living longer. And there is a growing shift towards encouraging longer working lives.

**Between 2019 and 2050 the proportion of those aged 50 and over will increase by 11% from 35% to 46% in better off countries.**

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As countries age, it will be important to support people to live healthier lives for longer. By doing so we can not only improve wellbeing and enable people to remain active, but can also reduce dependency, bringing down the burdens on health systems.

## In our ageing world not all are living well

Despite living longer, many people are not living well.

Communicable and non-communicable diseases are limiting people's health and wellbeing, with significant associated costs. And the growing threat of anti-microbial resistance raises the potential of more challenging times ahead.

We are examining the scale and impact of a selection of age-related communicable and non-communicable diseases\* where there is potential for preventive action throughout the life course.

Our initial findings suggest that among those aged 50 and over in better off countries:

**27.1 million years** were lived with disability in 2017 due to **largely preventable diseases**.



**At least 16% of the total number of years lived with disability** for all diseases in 2017 were attributable to **largely preventable communicable and non-communicable** diseases.



Our health in later life is dependent on a wide range of factors including the environments in which we live and our experiences in earlier life. However, health systems also have a key role to play in proactively supporting people to age well, through the provision of effective and well-targeted interventions right through the life course.

\*Cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, lung cancer, and HIV.

## Prevention and ageing

It is never too late to take preventative action and adults in mid and later life must be included in health promotion programmes. Indeed, effective preventative health care measures will be needed right through our life courses if we are to live well for longer.

Such interventions include:

- targeted screening programmes to identify a disease early or those at risk of developing a specific disease;
- preventative medications, such as those to prevent cardiovascular disease;
- supporting people to adopt healthier lifestyles – such as by stopping smoking, or increasing levels of physical activity;
- vaccinations against communicable diseases; and,
- supporting people to manage long-term conditions in ways that improve their wellbeing and help them to enjoy more active, longer lives.

Despite governments across the globe acknowledging the case for prevention, during economic downturns prevention has tended to be more vulnerable to funding cuts than other frontline health care services.

In the EU, **spending on prevention fell by 1.4% a year** between 2008 and 2012.



Annual per capita **growth rates (in real terms) for prevention spending across the OECD were negative** in 2009-2011 (-0.3%) and 2011-2013 (-1.2%).



While we know that prevention spending doesn't tell the whole story – preventative interventions don't have to come with large price tags to be effective – governments need to ensure that their stated commitments to promote health and wellbeing are backed with action.

The longer-term gains from prevention are often not seen for years, even decades, after investments are made. The true impact of our current failure to invest in prevention could well be decades of additional health and economic burdens in the years to come.

## Prevention and ageing: Non-communicable diseases

As we live longer, more of us will have our health and wellbeing affected by non-communicable diseases, the impact of which could be reduced through preventative interventions and activities.

The scale of the potential benefits from effective prevention should not be underestimated. For example, our early analysis suggests that among those aged 50 and over in better off countries:

Approximately **one-tenth of the total number of years lived with disability** in 2017 were **attributed to cardiovascular disease**.

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**86%** of the total number of years lived with disability attributed to **cardiovascular conditions** in 2017 were **among those aged 50 or over**.

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All too often countries fail to learn from one another's good practices and opportunities to prevent or reduce the impact of diseases at scale are lost.

## Prevention and ageing: Communicable diseases

While less often discussed than non-communicable diseases, the impact of communicable diseases is also significant.

Vaccines are one of the main ways of preventing communicable diseases. While they are already a key component of preventative interventions for children, in many countries vaccinations for older people do not receive the same prioritisation and resources.

Across the OECD, childhood vaccination rates are, on average, above 90% whereas **flu vaccination rates among people aged 65+ are, on average, just above 40%.**

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An estimated **44,000 people in Europe die annually from the flu** and **77% of these deaths occur in those aged 65+.**

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Vaccinations won't prevent all communicable diseases, but they have a vital role to play in reducing the scale and impact of communicable diseases.

## Why are we focusing on 'years lived with disability'?

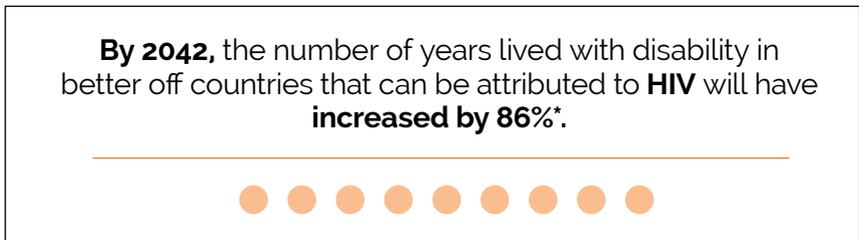
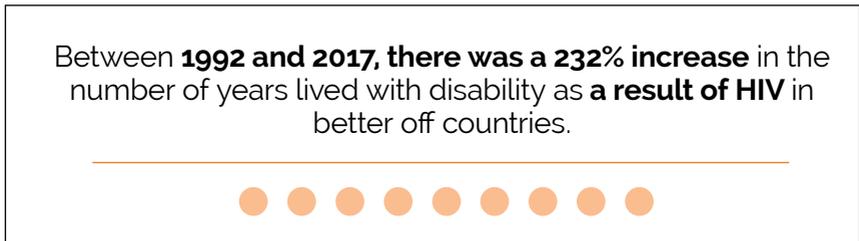
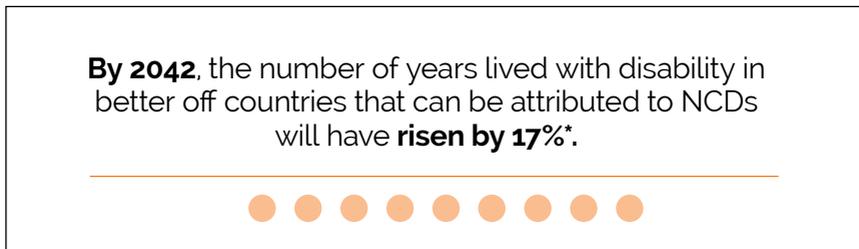
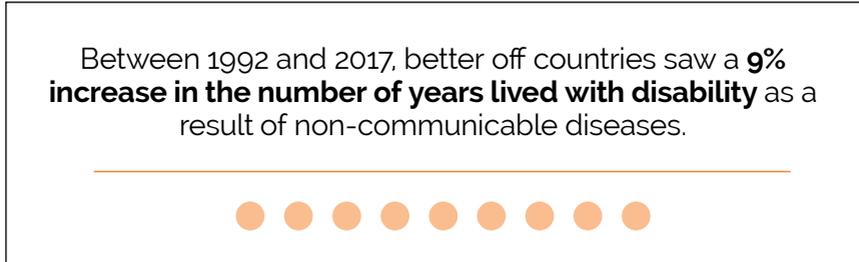
In an ageing world, where more and more people are living longer but less well, it is vital that we bring the focus of our efforts in prevention not just to how long people live, but how well.

Significant focus is often placed on the prevention of mortality. However, preventing morbidity is also important: we don't just want people to live longer, we want them to live well for longer.

Therefore, we have chosen in our analysis to focus on 'years lived with disability'. This measure identifies the number of years that people live in less than ideal health. In turn, this helps us put the spotlight on areas in which we can intervene to improve people's health.

## The burden of disease is growing

Among those aged 50 and over in better off countries, the number of years lived with disability per 100,000 population across a selection of age-related diseases is on the rise:



\*Percentage increases up to 2042 are calculated using 2018 as a base year.

## Health and productivity loss

Many different factors influence productivity, and health is one of these. There are strong correlations between rates of ill-health and reduced productivity.

These correlations exist for a range of reasons, and there is more to do to ensure that people with long term conditions are effectively supported in the workplace. However, there is also a need to find more effective ways to prevent ill-health in the first place.

Preventative interventions, particularly those delivered by health systems, therefore have the potential to have a positive impact on economic productivity.

Fresh data analysis by ILC will demonstrate the current economic productivity losses associated with a number of age-related diseases in better off countries.

As the number of years lived with disability grows over time, so will the costs associated with productivity losses unless prevention becomes central to health systems.

Productivity losses are not only borne by those with poor health and by employers: society as a whole confronts additional costs as a result of preventable ill health through both health care and welfare systems.

As our analysis will show, the productivity costs of failing to invest in prevention are significant. We believe there is a compelling case for health systems to invest in prevention, not only to improve the health and wellbeing of their ageing societies, but also to secure their own long-term sustainability.

## Prevention in an ageing world: Can you help?

During 2019/2020, ILC-UK will be working with people across the world, including experts, opinion formers and decision makers to shift the debate on prevention towards action, to share the emerging findings from our work and to develop recommendations.

We want to hear from you if you:

- Know of effective preventative interventions by health systems targeted at people aged 50 and over which need to be brought to the attention of policy makers.
- Would like to work with us to make the case for preventative interventions across the life course.
- Have carried out research in this area which you would like to share with us.
- Would like to be kept up to date with our work, including future events.

Share your examples and wider ideas on prevention in an ageing world with us by emailing at: **[prevention@ilcuk.org.uk](mailto:prevention@ilcuk.org.uk)**

And check our website to keep up to date:  
**[preventionageingworld.org](http://preventionageingworld.org)**







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