Challenges in the provision of community aged care in China

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Presentation overview

- Population ageing in China
- Traditional forms of care and support for older people: An historical view
- Current challenges to the provision of care for older people
- Community care approaches to promote ageing in place and healthy ageing
Population Ageing: China

• In 2010 the total population of China was 1.34 billion: 8% were aged 65 years and over.
• By 2050 25% of the population will be aged 65 years and over.
• 60% of the total population resides in rural areas.
Population ageing: China and Australia
Urban and gender differences

• Rural areas are ageing faster than urban areas due to the internal migration of younger people to large cities.
• Proportionally there are more women than men aged 80 years and over.
Traditional forms of care support in China

• Family based care (family obligations).
• Assistance from neighbors (neighbor obligations).
• Assistance from “rich” people (moral obligations).
Family based care: Family obligations

- The family is at the centre of all aspects of rural life and hence the care and financial support of older people resides within the family:
  - The traditional Chinese economy is based on rural family based enterprises.
  - Philosophers such as Confucius and Mencius advocated good treatment of elders and filial piety.
  - Traditional beliefs: Having children is important for ‘a happy old age’; ‘Sons will care for you in old age.’
A four generation family in Guilin, China
Assistance from neighbors: Neighbor obligations

- Neighbors will assist if the family is facing difficulties.
- This is an extension of a sharing culture in rural settings: Farmers share water resources and tools of production.
- Neighbors are seen as part of the extended family.
- Traditional beliefs: ‘Love other’s elders as your own.’
Assistance from “rich” people: Moral obligations

• Sort term assistance in times of great need or on special occasions (e.g. Chinese New Year.
• Local landlords and Party members (‘the rich’”) generally had a good relationship with the farmers.
• Rich people have a ‘moral obligation’ to assist people and treat them ‘like their children.’
• Helping those in need can improve your image; not doing so will mean that you “lose face.”
Social transitions and changes to family based care

• Formally instituted in the 1980s the one child policy has put a strain on family based care.
• In the early 1980s farmers were permitted to leave their villages to find outside work.
• Young people and older people stayed in the villages.
Our children's life is not easy...
Social transitions and changes to family based care

• During the 1980s, the concept of family narrowed to a nuclear family with dependents often living away from the family bread winner.

• Family-based care is still very common today but is under threat from the one child policy, urbanization and internal migration.
Self care and caring for others

• Older Chinese people now recognise that they cannot rely totally on their families for care and support.

• **Self care and the care of one’s spouse** is accepted as a consequence of the current economic climate.

• Older people may also be providing care to their grand children.
Others can’t take care of me. I wish for my children to come very much, but my children don’t have time. My son is very tired from work. And, he also has no strength to take care of me. I have to take care of myself. But I need to help with the grand children, get up at 5 o’clock to take them to school. We not only have to help ourselves’ but also to help our grandson, granddaughter …. 

(Beijing man aged 82 years)
“Formal” aged care

- Formal aged care in China has become more common as older people accept that they need to find and pay for care resources outside the family.
- In Australia formal aged care includes community care (services to the home) and residential aged care (nursing homes). These are heavily subsidised through the taxation system.
- While community care approaches maybe preferred by older people they are virtually non-existent in China.
- The alternative to family and self care in China is self funded aged care accommodation/homes.
Case Study: Aged Care Homes in Beijing

• In 2010 there were 366 aged care facilities in Beijing and around one third were run by the private sector.

• Of the 55,809 beds available, 24,525 were provided by the private sector.

• The provision of aged care homes is seen as a growing market for investment aimed at the richer middle class.

http://www.cncaprc.gov.cn/zhengce/4114.jhtml
Workforce implications

• Most staff providing services to older people are not qualified as health or aged care professionals.

• To ensure quality of service delivery, a major training effort is required.

• However qualified staff will push up the costs potentially reducing access for all but the emerging middle class.
Do older Chinese people want to live in aged care homes?

- The views of older people regarding living in aged care homes has changed over the last 10 years.
- A recent survey by the China Research Centre on Ageing showed that the percentage of older people who were willing to move to an aged care facility dropped from 18.6% in 2000 to 11.3% in 2010.
The alternative: Community care in China?

- In Australia “ageing in place” is a key policy approach.
- The central idea is that older people should be supported to age in their own homes and communities.
- To achieve ageing in place community care packages (food, housework, nursing services etc.) are provided to older people.
Community Care in China?

• While the push in China is to build aged care homes to accommodate its burgeoning older population, like other older citizens, the older person in China has a preference to age in place in their own home and community.

• There will be a growing market for services in the home but government policy needs to promote this approach.
Challenges for aged care in China

- The sheer numbers of older people.
- A growing gap between rich and poor, and little government financial support for older people: User pays approach.
- Little commitment to ageing in place.
- Gap in workforce skills in the care of older people.
- Rural/Urban differences in demography and in the capacity to provide support.