

Opening Keynote:

Title: The Complex Nature of Mental Health Issues in Older Age

Alexander Kalache (Brazil)

My presentation will not deal with dementia, as my co-presenter will fully cover this subject of paramount importance when we talk about mental health in older age. However, there is far more in relation to mental health issues. The absolute and proportional number of individuals who will reach older in the next few decades is staggering, particularly in the Global South. How come someone could reach old age enjoying high levels of well-being and mental health if they have been faced with all sorts of risk factors alongside their life courses? Low educational levels, deprivation, lack of access to social and health services, ill-trained professionals, prejudice...The combination of all of them result in depression, loneliness, and use of drugs (including alcohol). There is also to consider the gender dimension, the plight of immigrants (some of whom are illegal and out of the radar), climatic changes leading to insecurity, and in some countries a staggering number of individuals who age deprived of liberty. Add to that, wars, and horrors; for each death, you will add traumatized family members and close friends suffering the silent pain that those losses represent. Violence is increasingly trivialized and a country does not have to be 'officially' in a war for such experiences to occur - they have their own internal 'wars' fueled by political greed, drug trafficking, and militias. For some it has never been so rosy to age, but for the majority of our populations (and not only in the global South) it is tough.

Title: Global Dementia Strategy: Current Stage and Challenges

Liliana Urbina (Argentina)

Dementia is a critical global health issue affecting more than 55 million people, and this number is projected to rise to nearly 80 million by the end of the decade. It is the seventh leading cause of death, disproportionately affecting women, with most cases occurring in low- and middle- income countries (LMICs). The economic burden of dementia is immense, with annual costs estimated at \$1.3 trillion in 2019, expected to more than double by 2030. Half of these costs are due to informal care, primarily provided by women, who face significant impacts on their physical and mental health.

Despite its severity, dementia receives insufficient attention. In May 2017, recognizing dementia as a public health priority, the World Health Assembly approved the Global Action Plan on the Public Health Response to Dementia 2017-2025, which serves as a comprehensive blueprint for policymakers, international, regional, and national partners, and the WHO. The plan addresses the issue through seven strategic areas: policy; awareness; risk reduction; diagnosis, treatment, care and support; strengthening health information systems, and research. However, significant gaps remain in diagnostics, national dementia plans, and research. To facilitate the monitoring of the global action plan, WHO has created the Global Dementia Observatory (GDO), a portal that collects national data on 35 key indicators across the seven strategic areas of the global action plan. Complementing the Observatory, WHO launched a Knowledge Exchange Platform, a repository of best practice examples aimed at fostering mutual learning and multidirectional exchange among regions, countries, and individuals, to facilitate global action. The GDO serves as a monitoring and accountability tool, guiding countries in policy implementation and progress tracking. To meet the 2025 targets, accelerated efforts are needed, emphasizing national responses, equitable access to services, and inclusion of people with dementia. Renewed political commitment and robust health information systems are essential to guide effective planning and action.