

Health indicators for older persons: A document review

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: Comparable health indicators shared by international organisations are important for monitoring and benchmarking the quality and effectiveness of a country's policies and service delivery. However, the measuring tools could be adopted and adapted to meet the local objectives. This study explores the health indicators for older persons used in the Ministry of Health Malaysia (MOH) and in two international organisations.

Methods: A grey literature document search was performed on the i) WHO Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing data portal, ii) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) website, iii) The Malaysian Health Services Action Plan for Older Persons 2008, iv) Strategic Plan of the Malaysian Social Welfare Department 2021-2015, and v) Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development 2013-2017 for older persons. We included and compared health areas monitored across these organisations until November 2021. One reviewer conducted the search and extraction, which was then validated by a second reviewer. Disagreements were addressed through consensus. No quality assessment was conducted on the information/documents retrieved.

Results and Discussion: We captured three health areas (environmental factors, personal factors, as well as participation and activities), consisting of 34 domains, however, there were 5 domains monitored across organisations, namely, i) hospital care, ii) general practitioners with qualifications for geriatrics, iii) community care, iv) social support, v) training. Although there are similar domains monitored across organisations, the monitoring tools vary depending on the organisations' focuses/objectives, and information availability. Within the hospital care domain, Malaysia monitored the number of hospitals with geriatric services while international organisations emphasised on the ratio of older persons to bed number and hospital employment. In community care, international organisations measured the resources available for long-term care services to individuals outside their homes, whereas MOH measured the number of home visits to patients/institutions. For social support, MOH measured the number of senior citizen clubs established while OECD and WHO monitored the number of older persons living alone by gender. In terms of geriatrics qualification, Malaysia monitored the number of geriatricians trained whereas OECD countries monitored the percentage of general practitioners with geriatric qualifications over total physicians by age group and gender. The impact of indicators selected by different organisations in fostering continuous improvement should be further explored, as the right metrics are needed to achieve desired outcomes.

KEYWORDS: health indicators, older persons