

MEDIA RELEASE

24 April 2012

LONGITUDINAL HEALTH STUDIES MORE IMPORTANT AS POPULATION AGES

The importance of longitudinal studies in determining future health outcomes was the theme of a CEPAR sponsored healthy ageing seminar led by internationally renowned expert on healthy life expectancy, [Professor Carol Jagger](#).

Professor Jagger, from Newcastle University in the United Kingdom and Partner Investigator with CEPAR, was the keynote speaker at the 'Ageing Well: Evidence for a Healthy Future' seminar attended by 130 academics, gerontologists, policy officials and medical professionals.

The seminar was jointly hosted by the Australian Association of Gerontology (NSW), CEPAR, Hunter Medical Research Institute Public Health Program, the University of Sydney and the Sax Institute.

With an ageing population, longitudinal health studies are an increasingly important way to try to better predict future health trends, such as the incidence of chronic diseases, obesity and depression. Research from a range of important longitudinal studies was discussed at the seminar.

Professor Jagger presented newly released data on the [Healthy Life Years Indicator](#) (HLY), which measures the number of years people in the European Union are expected to live free from disability. It is an important long term study of the relative health of the population.

The research showed the average healthy life expectancy is almost the same for men and women across the Eurozone. The latest data found that men and women living in the European Union can expect to live disability free to the age of 62.

"The study shows the usual differences between men and women in that women live longer at all ages, but women have roughly the same number of healthy life years as men," Professor Jagger said.

According to Professor Jagger, these findings have implications for lifting the retirement age. "In Europe it doesn't look like some people over the age of 65 are healthy enough to remain in the workforce. If you look at healthy life years at age 50, that's actually less than 15 years - up to age 65 - in some countries. So that would mean a significant proportion of the population are already unhealthy or would not be healthy at 65."

As in Australia, the issue of population ageing is of growing concern in Europe. In 1950 the proportion of Europeans aged over 65 years was less than 10 per cent. That figure will reach 25 per cent by 2050 but climb to 35 per cent in some countries, including Italy and Spain.

The latest research from Australian longitudinal health studies was presented by CEPAR Chief Investigator, Professor **Hal Kendig**; CEPAR Associate Investigator, Professor **Julie Byles**; and Associate Professor Vasi Naganathan from Sydney University Medical School.

Professor Byles presented research on the **Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health**, which showed worrying levels of obesity among younger women. Professor Byles said the trend is extremely concerning and if the rates of obesity in these women continue as they age, obesity levels will be significantly higher than today.

Associate Professor Vasi Naganathan provided insights into the Concord Health and Ageing in Men (**CHAMP**) research project, a longitudinal study on the health of older men. He told the audience he is particularly concerned with the high level of antidepressants being prescribed to men over the age of 90.

One of the biggest challenges of an ageing population is increasing health costs. Longitudinal health studies provide valuable information on ageing and disease patterns, and are useful in helping to determine future health demands.

For more information contact Kate Miranda, 0478 474 074