

An aging population poses a challenge for Cuba



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By María Josefina Arce

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In spite of being a developing country and being blocked for six decades, the largest of the Antilles has implemented policies that have led to an increase in life expectancy and a decrease in mortality.

This phenomenon, also associated with a low fertility rate and migration, focused the attention of the National Assembly of People's Power in its recently concluded tenth Ordinary Session of its Ninth Legislature, due to the challenges it represents for society in terms of the labor market, demand for services such as health and long-term care.

In his speech, Prime Minister Manuel Marrero pointed out that in view of this panorama, the country has outlined strategies to stimulate fertility, in order to get as close as possible to population replacement in a medium-term perspective.

The Government Commission for the Attention to Demographic Dynamics has been restructured and its work is supported by the Center for Population and Development Studies, the National Office of Statistics and Information and the Center for Demographic Studies of the University of Havana.

But in addition, although care for the elderly has always been a priority of the Cuban government, this sensitive issue that concerns the whole society requires a new look, as it seeks to ensure an active, participatory and healthy aging.

Hence, between November 2017 and January 2018, the Second National Survey on Population Aging was conducted, covering the 15 Cuban provinces and the special municipality Isla de la Juventud.

Various aspects were measured in this survey such as the health status of citizens over 50 years of age, income and those who require help or support for their daily activities.

In order to continue providing special attention to this sector, Marrero said, work is being done on the introduction of technologies and the development of new nationally-produced medicines for the elderly.

The reality is that, in view of the country's indicators, the Cuban state is willing to protect these people. In fact, the new Family Code, approved by Parliament and endorsed by the citizens last September, consolidates the observance of the rights of the elderly.

A universal and free health care system and a social security system that leaves no one unprotected are favorable elements for Cuba to face the challenge of population aging, but it needs the whole society to join in, even more, to offer a better and concerted response to this problem.

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