

# *Cuba Expanding Geriatric Services*

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Havana, May 24 (RHC) -- Cuba, the country with the largest elderly population in Latin America, is implementing various plans to create the conditions needed to achieve an active, productive and satisfying longevity, according to Miguel Valdés Mier, head of the National Group of Geriatrics and Gerontology.

Mier emphasized that the state, and all of Cuban society, in particular the public health system, must actively address this issue.

According to the specialist, ongoing efforts include the restoration and remodeling of community centers, elder care homes, psychiatric hospitals and similar institutions that impact directly the standards of living of people from this age group.

In addition, Mier stated that the human resources framework is being restructured, specifically designed around elder care and the expansion of geriatric services across different levels of primary care.

Dr. José Ramón Rodríguez, head of external services of the national reference Center for Research on Longevity, Aging and Health (CITED), stated that Cuba is training more than 200 geriatricians to expand and improve such services, which are being made available throughout the country.

Cuba has more than 2 million senior citizens, of which 1,500 are over 100 years old. This represents a growing concern for the health system as well as to other sectors, the expert said. In 20 years, 30% of the population will be over 60 years of age and soon the number of pensioners will surpass that of those entering the workforce, Rodríguez added.

Among other research projects, CITED is also investigating morbidity, and the issue of falls - one of the biggest problems for elderly people - and other injuries, as well as collaborating with the Cuban pharmaceutical industry, on the development of treatments for anemia and other ailments typical of this group.

Cuba has a life expectancy similar to that of developed countries, which is both a great achievement and challenge for our health system, considering that, when Cubans reach 60 years of age they have a life expectancy of an additional 20 years, and another seven or more once they reach 80, Rodríguez emphasized.

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