Environments are the settings in which people live their lives and refer to more than just the natural environment (e.g. air, climate, soil, water, etc.). Environments include a range of factors including broader policies, health and social care services but also buildings, transportation, housing, information, streets and parks, as well as people and their prevailing attitudes and values.

The comprehensive framework for Healthy Ageing identifies a common goal for all these sectors – to optimise functional ability that reaches everyone. The forthcoming World Report on Aging and Health explores how this might be achieved in five strongly interconnected domains of functional ability that are essential for older people to do the things that they value – the abilities to:

- meet their basic needs;
- learn, grow and make decisions;
- be mobile;
- build and maintain relationships; and
- contribute

Together these abilities enable an older person to age safely in a place that is right for them, to continue to develop personally and to contribute to their communities while retaining autonomy and health.

The actions necessary to foster these abilities take many forms but operate in two fundamental ways. The first is to build and maintain intrinsic capacity, either through reducing risks (such as high levels of air pollution), encouraging healthy behaviours (such as physical activity) or removing barriers to them (for example high crime or dangerous traffic), or by providing services that foster capacity (such as health care). The second is to enable greater functional ability. In other words, by extending what a person can do beyond their given level of capacity (for example through appropriate assistive technologies, accessible public transport or safer neighbourhoods). While population level interventions may improve environments for many older people in both these ways, many will not be able to benefit fully without individually tailored supports.

Since so many sectors and players can contribute to Healthy Ageing, a coordinated approach to policy and practice that puts the needs and aspirations of older people at its centre will be crucial. Three proposed approaches cut across almost all sectors as priorities for implementation. These are (see box for details):

1. Combat ageism
2. Enable autonomy
3. Support Healthy Ageing in all policies and at all levels of government.
Box: Strategic Objective 4 proposed actions

Age based stereotypes influence behaviours, policy development and even research. Addressing these by combating ageism must lie at the core of any public health response to population ageing. While this will be challenging, experience of dealing with other widespread forms of discrimination such as sexism and racism shows that attitudes and norms can be changed.

Tackling ageism will require building, and embedding in the thinking of all generations, a new understanding of ageing. This cannot be based on outdated conceptualizations of older people as a burden, nor unrealistic assumptions that older people today have somehow avoided the health challenges of their parents and grandparents. Rather, it demands an acceptance of the wide diversity in the experience of older age, acknowledgement of the inequities that often underlie it, and an openness to ask how things might be done better. Key actions include:

- undertaking communication campaigns to increase knowledge about and understanding of ageing among the media, general public, policy-makers, employers and service providers;
- legislating against age-based discrimination and mechanisms for enforcement;
- ensuring that a balanced view of ageing is presented in the media, for example by minimizing sensationalist reporting of crimes against older people.

The second crosscutting priority is to enable autonomy. Autonomy is heavily dependent on an older person’s basic needs being met and in turn has a powerful influence on older people’s dignity, integrity, freedom and independence, and has been repeatedly identified as a core component of their general well-being.

Older people have a right to make choices and take control over a range of issues including where they live, the relationships they have, what they wear, how they spend their time, and whether they embark on a treatment or not. The possibility of choice and control is shaped by many factors including the intrinsic capacity of the older person; the environments they inhabit; the personal and financial resources they can draw on; and the opportunities available to them.

One key action in enabling autonomy will be to maximize intrinsic capacity and this is largely covered in the strategies related to health systems. But autonomy can also be enhanced regardless of an older person’s level of capacity. These key actions provide options for how this can be achieved:

- legislating to protect the rights of older people (for example, by protecting them from elder abuse), supporting older people in becoming aware of and enjoying their rights, and creating mechanisms that can be used to address breaches of their rights, including in emergency situations;
- providing services that facilitate functioning, such as assistive technologies, community-based or home-based services.
- providing mechanisms for advanced care planning and supported decision-making that enable older people to retain the maximum level of control over their lives despite significant loss of capacity.
- creating accessible opportunities for lifelong learning and growth
In a rapidly increasing number of countries, more than one in five of the population are aged over 60 years. There will be few policies or services that do not affect them in some way. **Embedding Healthy Ageing in all policies and at all levels of government** will therefore be crucial. National, regional, state, or municipal ageing strategies and action plans can help to guide this, and ensure a coordinated response that spans multiple sectors and levels of government. Institutionalizing the goal of enhancing functional ability is a starting point for collaboration across sectors. Each will need to establish clear commitment to goals, lines of responsibility, have an adequate budget and specify mechanisms for coordination, monitoring, evaluation and reporting across sectors. Collecting and using age-disaggregated information on older people’s abilities will also be important. This can facilitate reviews of the effectiveness of, and gaps in, existing policies, systems, and services. The involvement of older people’s representatives/organizations can ensure their relevance to local populations.

There are, however, many other areas for action, which include:

- establishing policies and programmes that expand housing options for older adults and assist with home modifications that enable older people to age in a place that is right for them;
- introducing measures to ensure that older people are protected from poverty, for example through social protection schemes;
- providing opportunities for social participation and for having meaningful social roles, specifically by targeting the processes that serve to marginalize and isolate older people;
- removing barriers, setting accessibility standards and ensuring compliance in buildings, in transport, and in ICT and other technologies;
- considering town-planning and land-use decisions and their impact on older people’s safety and mobility;
- promoting collaboration, age-diversity and inclusion in working environments.