
Instead of 'life span,' think 'health span'

By Editorial Staff Thu, Oct 31, 2019

A conference will be held to kick off the National Academy of Medicine's 'Healthy Longevity Global Grand Challenge' at AARP headquarters in Washington, D.C. on November 6-8, 2019.

With population-aging a major issue in the 21st century, the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) has launched a multi-year, international effort to improve the health, productivity, and quality of life for older people, with awards totaling \$30 million over the next five years as incentives for the development of new ideas.

The initiative, called the [Healthy Longevity Global Grand Challenge](#), aims to confront population aging on two fronts:

- Near-term policy change informed by existing evidence
- Catalysis of novel research and innovation

A [workshop](#) will be held to kick off the Challenge at AARP headquarters in Washington, D.C. on November 6-8, 2019.

The NAM envisions a study led by international experts that will “recommend actions for societies to take in the next 10 years and a global innovation competition to stimulate breakthrough ideas, research, and technologies that could extend health and well-being into later life,” according to the NAM release this week.

“Aging will be a defining challenge of our time,” the release said. “The rapidity of population aging will change the ways in which families, communities, societies, industries, and economies function. Multidisciplinary, innovative solutions are urgently needed to support and engage our older populations and maximize their years of good health.”

Benefiting from population aging “will require policies, socioeconomic infrastructure, and innovations that enhance the health of older populations while creating sustainable, health-promoting systems that support longer lives,” the release said. “[All sectors will need to] collaborate to promote the lifestyles, behaviors, services, supports, and infrastructure that are critical to fostering effective, affordable, and equitable outcomes.”

The NAM is tasking an independent, multidisciplinary, international commission made up of thought leaders from science, medicine, health care, public health, engineering, technology, economics, and policy to identify priorities and directions for improving health, productivity,

and quality of life during extended longevity.

The commission will assess the “risks, challenges, and opportunities” presented by global aging and recommend priorities and actions for optimizing the health, function, and well-being of all people into later life.

An International Oversight Board will determine the study scope, oversee the process, and provide strategic guidance and dissemination opportunities. The road map is expected to be available in the fall of 2020. It will have three branches: sciences and technology; health care systems and public health; and social, behavioral, and environmental enablers. The commission will consider policy and practice, health equity and disparities, technology solutions, sustainable financing, and monitoring metrics.

The NAM is sponsoring a Healthy Longevity Global Competition to incentivize new contributions in this field from individuals and teams from the biologic, medical, engineering, behavioral, and social sciences. Inspired by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s Grand Challenges Explorations awards, the Longitude Prize, and the X-PRIZE Foundation, the NAM has developed a model built on Catalyst Awards; bold ideas and successful pilots and prototypes will be followed by successively larger inducement prizes.

The competition will unfold in three phases between 2020 and 2025, mobilizing more than \$30 million to foster innovations in healthy longevity. In the first phase, approximately 450 Catalyst Awards, worth \$50,000 each, will be issued as seed funding to advance ideas originating from any field or combination of fields.

This October, the NAM and collaborating entities worldwide launched Catalyst Award competitions in more than 40 countries and territories.

In the second phase, Accelerator Awards will provide further funding to projects that have achieved proof of concept and may have promise for commercialization. The competition will culminate with one or more Grand Prizes, awarded for breakthrough achievements with potential for global impact.

Winning ideas may be basic science insights and other approaches to modifying the aging process, preventive treatments for age-related diseases, facilitative technologies, social and economic policy, or other advances that demonstrate promise for extending the human health span.

Sponsors of the Challenge include:

AARP

California Health Care Foundation

Nathaniel (Ned) David

Gary and Mary West Foundation

Harvey V. Fineberg Impact Fund

John A. Hartford Foundation

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