

The longevity revolution

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The UN has said that population aging is "transforming the world." Now that a large portion of the world population is joining the ranks of the "baby boomers," the phenomenon is permeating many areas of life, including the economic, medical, moral, political, and social. In the U.S., as of 2008 (the last time data was collected), the number of persons 65 or older came to 38.9 million. The Administration on Aging predicts that by 2030, there will be about 72.1 million older persons, more than twice their number in 2000.

Is this phenomenon negative or positive? In a new article in the journal *Political Insight* (launching April 2010), John Benyon, Director of Research at the Institute of Lifelong Learning at the University of Leicester, argues that it is an opportunity, "Lifelong learning can play a pivotal role in helping aging people and their loved ones to live independent and fulfilling lives. The mindset that getting older is the end of the enjoyment of life is now passé."

In the present day, future retirees need to plan for their retirement more carefully, and companies are becoming less apt to offer pension plans, and post-retirement planning resources. The ability to understand financial and legal matters, and make well-informed consumer choices, is absolutely vital. Additionally, older people are expected to contribute to the nation's economy up to and beyond the normal retirement age (usually 65).

These obstacles are real, and can be discouraging to older adults and their families. However, when older people reach out to develop new

skills and interests, and understand social, political and technological changes, Benyon asserts that they feel less overwhelmed and isolated, and may fare better in today's economy and society.

The study shows that many educational needs of older people are not being met, and that opportunities and participation have dropped off in recent years. Benyon points out, "Although much has been written on the growing older population, very little has been discussed in terms of public policy and politics. In our research, we identify the various issues that come with a larger population of older people, and suggest solutions to key policy questions in order to promote stronger, cohesive communities. Many [older people](#) continue to play a positive role in the community through dedicated volunteering. We hope that in the future they can take an even bigger role, and even be elected to local office more commonly."

More information: "The Longevity Revolution." John Benyon. *Political Insight* ; Published Online: March 15, 2010; [DOI:10.1111/j.2041-9066.2010.00010.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-9066.2010.00010.x)

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