
Cuba expanding geriatric services

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Mier emphasized that the state, and all of Cuban society, in particular the public health system, must actively tackle the problem. In order to do so, a strategic plan has been designed which includes restoration and remodeling of community centers, elder care homes, psychiatric hospitals and similar institutions, reflecting the Guidelines for Economic and Social Policy, approved in 2011, he commented.

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, which will help improve the situation, given that life expectancy in Cuba is 78 years.

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 improve delivery of these types of services which are being made available throughout the country. Rodríguez, also spoke of the plan to offer geriatric services in all Cuban hospitals. The program of regionalization and consolidation of health services, Family Medicine clinics, as well as polyclinics, offers coverage to this segment of the population.

Cuba has more than 2 million senior citizens, of which 1,500 are over 100 years old, as much a concern for the health system as other sectors, he added. In 20 years, 30% of the population will be over 60 years of age and soon the number of geriatrics will surpass that of those entering the workforce, stated Rodríguez.

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, working with a group of pharmacists to develop treatments for anemia and other medicines.

With more than 20% its population 60 years or older, Villa Clara is the province with the highest number of elderly in the country, followed by Havana with 19.9% and Sancti Spíritus with more than 19%.

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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.
