

***The Journal*, 2020 Edition**

By Peter Rundlet

We are only halfway in, but 2020 has turned out to be a year like no other. While we were performing our final reviews before going to press on the 13th edition of *The Journal*, the COVID-19 coronavirus hit and, like the rest of the world, we went home. We never stopped working, but we necessarily shifted our attention to the enormity of the pandemic, and we paused printing to better understand its impact and review our content against the pandemic's world-altering backdrop. This is one of those extraordinarily rare inflection points, a moment when the course of human history shifts so significantly that the epochal change is even recognized by the participants themselves.

Most readers of *The Journal* already know that, despite the crisis of the moment, there remains an inexorable shift toward an increasingly aging population, both in the United States and around the world. The megatrend of people living longer, healthier lives will endure – and will continue to impact our society and our individual lives even as we manage so many other challenges. And yet, as we were readying to publish a journal that reaches around the globe to illuminate solutions on aging issues, we were learning that older people are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19.

Moreover, in addition to the direct damage it has inflicted on individuals, families, and our economy, the coronavirus has shined a spotlight on the persistent, cumulative, and shameful health and wellbeing disparities among different groups. In the United States, African Americans

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and Latinos are dying at rates between two and 10 times higher than whites, depending on their age bracket.¹ Around the world, racial minorities, immigrants, refugees, and poor people tend to be at greater risk of serious consequences from COVID-19. And people living and working in long term care facilities are at much greater risk of dying from the coronavirus, regardless of where they reside.

More Relevant than Ever

In so many ways, however, COVID-19 didn't change the world so much as it held up a mirror, offering an unforgiving look at ourselves. The fundamental disparities have always been there. And our world was already aging rapidly.

But here is the good news: we have an opportunity to treat this crisis as a springboard for change. Unlike pandemics, resource scarcity, and climate change, the megatrend of healthy longevity is not a bad one. Though it poses challenges we need to plan for, it also presents a huge opportunity. By acting wisely, we can make changes in our society, in our workplaces, and in our communities that leverage this shift in a way that improves the lives of all.

In reexamining this issue of *The Journal* in the context of the pandemic, we were faced with a daunting question: What value could its carefully curated content offer at a time when seemingly all perennial assumptions had suddenly been knocked off the table? But when we looked at our content lineup in this brand-new context

— a lineup that for months we'd been extremely excited to put out into the world — it took only a brief pause to realize something: the solutions proposed in this edition to address the most pressing aging issues have become more relevant than ever.

This issue of *The Journal* features global thought leaders reporting on activity shaping a future that embraces the new realities of rapid population aging. In one article, Rosa Kornfeld-Matte, the first United Nations Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, and Khaled Hassine, a lawyer with the UN Human Rights Office, examine what the pandemic has revealed about the dignity and rights of older persons that were already all-too present in today's world.

As Jean Accius highlights in his Executive Editor column, by 2030 nearly 1.4 billion people will be age 65 and older globally, and he describes how this will drive four megatrends that transform society. As the United Nations turns 75 this year, it looks ahead with its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Here, a UN Under-Secretary-General discusses how addressing issues related to the global aging population lies at the heart of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals; they are inextricably intertwined, because the world is an aging world.

Manifest Opportunity

The unprecedented opportunity that the aging population presents is told visually through

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a compelling infographic on the “Longevity Economy.” That story is multifaceted and is told throughout these pages. On the business side, people from five different generations now stand shoulder to shoulder in the workplace, which means greater diversity and translates into a greater pool of ideas and stronger business engine. For the worker, life stages are no longer linear but dynamic and fluid. Education can and must continue throughout one’s career, and retirement doesn’t come at one fixed age. For a look into these issues, consider New York University professor Michael North’s article on the “GATE” workplace framework — Generation, Age, Tenure, Experience.

Heather McGowan, author of the book *Adaptation Advantage*, meanwhile, details “the Experience Advantage” of older workers in the context of a fourth industrial revolution that is already under way. And AARP’s Alison Bryant and Patty David explore the technology implications of an aging society. In “Solving for Inclusive Technology for Older Adults,” they examine both opportunities and barriers in the space.

In this year’s *Journal* you will also find some of the most preeminent thought leaders discussing health issues and solutions to address them. To start, it’s important to understand that not everyone around the world is benefiting

from greater longevity. As a group of renowned international experts reveal in “Longevity and Equity,” economic and social disparities, both from country to country and even within countries, create disparities in the opportunity to live longer, healthier lives.

Alzheimer’s and dementia are front of mind when it comes to the aging population, and one particular concern looms over the issue. Maria Shriver, accomplished journalist and founder of the nonprofit organization The Women’s Alzheimer’s Movement, teams with Sarah Lock, AARP’s Executive Director of the Global Council on Brain Health, to highlight how Alzheimer’s and dementia disproportionately affect women and needed solutions. And at the heart of all aging issues, of course, is the community. Danielle Arigoni tells the story of AARP’s Network of Age-friendly States and Communities, while Maine Governor Janet Mills writes about her unique vantage point as a Network member.

This issue includes an in-depth look at Singapore, which boasts the world’s longest life expectancy at nearly 85 years. A delegation of experts from AARP went on a learning tour of this “small nation with a big vision,” as Debra Whitman and Lina Walker call it in their review. They write about Singapore’s Action Plan for Successful Aging and describe how a country, with careful

planning and design can create meaningful improvements in the lives of older people.

And don't miss Singapore Health Minister Gan Kim Yong's excellent article in which he details Singapore's forward-thinking Action Plan for Successful Ageing. We have a lot to learn from Singapore's holistic approach.

The feature section explores some of the country's age-friendly initiatives, including a groundbreaking retirement community that serves as a model for future public housing. We also look at how Singapore has utilized green spaces to foster mental health and community; set up incubation programs to protect culinary traditions; and encouraged job creation and skills training for older workers. Through the stories of people our team met with on the ground, we are able to share a glimpse into what it is like to grow old in Singapore and how this tiny island nation has created a unique ecosystem for aging innovation.

Eye on the Future

Indeed, this issue of *The Journal* is rich with relevant content for the moment we are in. Nonetheless, those of us at AARP are determined to look in that mirror and work to create a world that, as AARP CEO Jo Ann Jenkins writes, empowers individuals "to live a life of dignity, good health, and purpose — regardless of age, race, or income."

As we go forward, AARP International is more committed than ever to elevating the voices and insights of thought leaders from around the world, with a particular eye toward amplifying those policies, laws, community practices, private sector approaches, and individual actions that are truly making a difference in the lives of

older people. We will also continue to highlight national and regional approaches, as we have done in this issue with Singapore. In the 2021 issue, we'll look to Latin America to share some of their exciting innovations. And we will, of course, continue to promote and highlight the insights of our thought leaders at home.

As for 2020, it has tested us; it has even shaken us. But it has also given us an opportunity to achieve genuine step-change, to pivot, and build back better. We are truly energized to embrace this challenge relentlessly. ●

¹ See Tiffany Ford, Sarah Reber & Richard V. Reeves, *Race Gaps in COVID-19 Deaths are Even Bigger Than They Appear* (Brookings, June 16, 2020), available at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/06/16/race-gaps-in-covid-19-deaths-are-even-bigger-than-they-appear>.



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