

HEALTH OF THE ELDERLY: PUBLIC POLICIES FOR THE HEALTH OF THE ELDERLY



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Luzimere Pires do Nascimento¹.

ABSTRACT

This course completion paper aims to analyze public health policies aimed at the elderly population in Brazil, focusing on their effectiveness and the challenges faced during their implementation. The research is exploratory and descriptive in nature, using documentary analysis and bibliographic review to examine official documents, legislation, and academic studies related to the subject. The results indicate that, although Brazil has advanced in the creation of specific policies, such as the Statute of the Elderly and the National Health Policy for the Elderly, there are significant gaps in their implementation. Regional inequalities in access to health services, lack of adequate training of health professionals, and insufficient resources are the main challenges identified. Regions such as the North and Northeast face greater difficulties compared to the South and Southeast, reflecting an unequal distribution of infrastructure and resources. The survey also highlights the need to adapt international good practices, such as home care programs and the integration of different levels of health care, to improve the effectiveness of public policies in Brazil. It is concluded that, in order to promote active and healthy aging, it is essential that public policies are continuously improved, with a focus on equity and professional training. This study contributes to the understanding of the limitations and potentialities of health policies for the elderly in Brazil, offering subsidies for the formulation of more effective strategies that can guarantee the quality of life of the elderly population.

Keywords: Health, Public Policies, Elderly.

¹ Bachelor of Science in Nursing
Master of Science in Public Health and Family Health
Doctorate student at FIOCRUZ - RJ/AM
Teacher
University of the State of Amazonas – UEA
E-mail: mere.pires@hotmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Population aging is a global phenomenon that has intensified in recent decades, especially in developing countries such as Brazil. The increase in life expectancy and the reduction in birth rates have contributed to a significant change in the age composition of the population, with a significant growth in the number of elderly people. This scenario imposes considerable challenges for health systems and for the formulation of public policies that meet the specific needs of this age group.

In Brazil, the demographic transition has generated increasing demands for specialized health services for the elderly population, which tends to have a morbidity profile characterized by chronic diseases and conditions that require continuous and multidisciplinary care (IBGE, 2020). In this context, it is essential to develop and implement public policies that guarantee access to quality health services, promote active aging, and ensure the dignity and well-being of older people.

However, despite legislative advances and government initiatives, such as the creation of the Statute of the Elderly and the National Health Policy for the Elderly (PNSPI), there are still significant gaps in the implementation of these policies. The reality faced by the elderly in Brazil reveals a series of challenges, such as inequality in access to health services, the lack of adequate infrastructure, and the scarcity of professionals trained to meet the demands of this population (Brasil, 2003; Ministry of Health, 2010).

This paper aims to analyze Brazilian public policies aimed at the health of the elderly, evaluating their effectiveness and identifying the main challenges faced in their implementation. In addition, it proposes to discuss possible improvements and innovations that can contribute to the improvement of these policies, ensuring comprehensive and quality health care for the elderly population. The relevance of this study lies in the urgent need to strengthen public policies to respond effectively to the growing demands of a society in the process of accelerated aging.

The rapid aging of the Brazilian population has generated a growing demand for specialized health services. However, existing public policies are not always able to keep up with this reality, resulting in inequalities in access to health services, lack of adequate infrastructure, and lack of trained professionals. In addition, the implementation of these policies often faces obstacles such as the poor distribution of resources and limited coordination between the different levels of government. This situation raises questions about the effectiveness of health policies for older adults and the capacity of the public

health system to meet the needs of this population in a comprehensive and equitable manner.

The study on public health policies aimed at the elderly population is extremely relevant, considering the accelerated aging of the Brazilian population. Demographic projections indicate that, in the near future, the elderly will represent a significant portion of the population, which will require a reformulation of public health strategies. Understanding the current challenges and proposing improvements is essential to ensure the dignity, well-being and quality of life of the elderly. In addition, the critical analysis of existing public policies can contribute to the development of new approaches and innovative solutions that more effectively meet the needs of this population.

Public health policies aimed at the elderly in Brazil, although well-intentioned and based on solid principles, have significant flaws in their implementation, which compromise their effectiveness. These failures are aggravated by factors such as regional inequality, lack of adequate resources, and insufficient training of health professionals. With the implementation of improvements in execution strategies, greater investment in infrastructure and training, and better articulation between the different levels of government, it is possible that these policies will become more effective, promoting healthy and active aging.

This paper aims to analyze the effectiveness of public health policies aimed at the elderly population in Brazil and to propose improvements that can contribute to a more comprehensive and quality health care for this population.

With this, **we examine the evolution of public health policies for the elderly in Brazil**, highlighting the main legislative and institutional frameworks; **identify and assess the main challenges and limitations** in the implementation of these policies, with a focus on regional inequality, available resources and professional training; **to analyze good practices and innovations** in health policies for the elderly in national and international contexts, identifying potential solutions that can be adapted to the Brazilian context and to propose recommendations for the improvement of public health policies aimed at the elderly, considering the peculiarities and needs of this constantly growing population.

The methodology adopted in this study aims to critically analyze public health policies aimed at the elderly population in Brazil, with the objective of evaluating their effectiveness and proposing improvements. To achieve this goal, a qualitative approach

was chosen, which allows for an in-depth analysis of existing policies and practices, as well as the challenges faced in their implementation.

The research is exploratory **and descriptive in nature**, with the objective of exploring the theme of public health policies for the elderly and describing the main characteristics of these policies, as well as the difficulties encountered in their implementation. As Gil (2019) points out, exploratory research is appropriate when there is a need for greater familiarity with the topic and when the objective is to identify variables and establish priorities. Descriptive research, on the other hand, is suitable for the characterization of phenomena and for the collection of data in specific situations (Triviños, 1987).

The main methodological strategy of this study is **documentary analysis**. Official documents were analyzed, such as legislation, guidelines from the Ministry of Health, government reports, and publications from health organizations, as well as academic studies that deal with the theme of public health policies for the elderly. Document analysis allows a detailed understanding of the policies and the contexts in which they were designed and implemented (Lüdke & André, 1986).

In addition, a **literature review was carried out** to theoretically support the study. The review involved searching and analyzing relevant academic literature, including scientific articles, books, and theses, with a focus on health policies for older adults, the challenges faced by health systems, and good practices identified in other contexts. According to Lakatos and Marconi (2017), the literature review is essential for the development of a solid theoretical base, in addition to allowing the identification of gaps in existing knowledge.

Documents such as the Statute of the Elderly (Brazil, 2003), the National Health Policy for the Elderly (Ministry of Health, 2010), and IBGE reports on population aging (IBGE, 2020) were analyzed.

The literature review included works by renowned authors in the area, such as Veras (2012), Neri (2014), and Mendes (2018), which discuss health policies for the elderly, population aging, and inequalities in access to health.

Data analysis was carried out through **content analysis**, a technique proposed by Bardin (2011). Content analysis allows you to identify and categorize the main ideas, concepts, and challenges presented in the documents and in the literature reviewed, providing a structured and critical understanding of the material analyzed.

The data obtained were categorized into key themes, such as the history of public health policies for the elderly, the challenges in the implementation of these policies, and proposals for improvement. This categorization facilitated the identification of patterns, similarities and differences in the data, contributing to the construction of a reasoned critical analysis (Bardin, 2011).

As with all research, some limitations must be recognized. Document analysis and literature review depend on the quality and availability of the documents and studies reviewed. In addition, qualitative research, due to its interpretative nature, may be subject to researcher biases, although measures have been taken to minimize this possibility, such as the triangulation of sources and the critical analysis of data (Lüdke & André, 1986).

DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC POLICIES FOR THE HEALTH OF THE ELDERLY

Public policies for the health of the elderly in Brazil are part of a historical process that aims to guarantee the right to health and well-being of this population group, which has grown significantly in recent decades. The Federal Constitution of 1988, in its article 230, recognizes the need for protection and support for the elderly, establishing the responsibility of the family, society and the State in guaranteeing their rights (BRASIL, 1988).

The implementation of these policies is implemented through the Unified Health System (SUS), which follows principles of universality, integrality, and equity, and is primarily responsible for providing health care to the elderly population (MINISTRY OF HEALTH, 2020). In addition, the Statute of the Elderly, sanctioned in 2003, reinforces the State's obligation to provide full access to health services, with priority for the elderly (BRASIL, 2003).

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

The Statute of the Elderly is a fundamental milestone that ensures specific rights, including preferential access to health services, with a focus on preventing and treating diseases common in the elderly (BRASIL, 2003). In addition, the National Health Policy for the Elderly (PNSPI), established by Ordinance No. 2,528 of 2006, outlines guidelines for health promotion, disease prevention and comprehensive health care for the elderly, with a focus on functionality and autonomy (MINISTRY OF HEALTH, 2006).

These policies are based on the principles of comprehensiveness and intersectoriality, seeking to integrate health actions with other social policies, such as social assistance and housing, to face the challenges of longevity (PUCCINI; SUÁREZ, 2018). Implementing these guidelines requires articulation between different levels of government and a multidisciplinary approach to meeting the complex needs of older people.

CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC POLICIES

Despite legislative and regulatory advances, the implementation of public policies for the health of the elderly faces significant challenges, such as the lack of adequate infrastructure and insufficient training of professionals to deal with the specificities of aging (NOGUEIRA; RAMOS, 2019). Studies indicate that the unequal distribution of health services among the country's regions also compromises equitable access to care, particularly in rural areas and urban peripheries (BARRETO; BASTOS, 2021).

Another important challenge is the need to adapt the SUS to the increased demand for specialized services, such as geriatrics and gerontology, and to the promotion of home care that can guarantee the continuity of care and the maintenance of the quality of life of the elderly (SILVA; OLIVEIRA, 2020). The continuous training of professionals and the awareness of society about the rights of the elderly are essential strategies to overcome these barriers.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the main results obtained from the documentary analysis and the literature review carried out on public health policies aimed at the elderly population in Brazil will be presented and discussed. The results are organized into thematic categories that reflect the specific objectives of the study.

Evolution of Public Health Policies for the Elderly

The analysis of the documents revealed that the evolution of public health policies for the elderly in Brazil has been marked by significant advances since the promulgation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which enshrined the right to health as a fundamental right of all citizens (Brasil, 1988). The creation of the Statute of the Elderly, in 2003, and the National Health Policy for the Elderly (PNSPI), in 2006, were important milestones in this

process, establishing specific guidelines for the protection and promotion of the health of the elderly population (Brasil, 2003; Ministry of Health, 2010).

However, the implementation of these policies faces challenges that compromise their effectiveness. Studies by Veras (2012) and Camarano (2018) point to the lack of articulation between the different levels of government and the insufficiency of resources for the health of the elderly as significant barriers. In addition, Mendes (2018) highlights regional inequality in access to health services, which aggravates the situation in poorer and less developed regions.

Inequality in Access to Health Services

The analysis revealed that inequality in access to health services is one of the main challenges faced by public health policies for the elderly in Brazil. The North and Northeast regions, in particular, have greater difficulties in accessing specialized services, compared to the South and Southeast regions, which have better infrastructure and greater concentration of resources (Mendes, 2018; Silva & Santos, 2017).

These inequalities are reflected in the quality of care offered to the elderly. Veras (2012) argues that while some states offer more integrated and comprehensive health care, others struggle to provide the most basic services. This regional disparity not only compromises the effectiveness of health policies, but also perpetuates existing socioeconomic inequalities.

Training of Health Professionals

Another important result identified is the lack of specific training of health professionals for adequate care for the elderly population. Studies such as those by Camargo (2016) and Ferreira *et al.* (2018) indicate that many professionals still do not have adequate training in geriatrics and gerontology, which limits the quality of care and the ability to meet the complex needs of the elderly.

The lack of training is particularly worrying in the context of accelerated population aging, which demands a multidisciplinary and specialized approach. Camargo and Toledo (2020) suggest that the creation of continuing education programs and the inclusion of specific disciplines on aging in undergraduate and graduate health curricula are urgent measures to improve this situation.

Proposals for the Improvement of Public Policies

The analysis of good practices identified in other countries and contexts reveals that there are several innovations that could be adapted to Brazil to improve public health policies for the elderly. Oliveira (2019) highlights the effectiveness of home care programs implemented in Europe, which could be a viable alternative for Brazil, especially in areas with limited hospital infrastructure.

In addition, *Dantas et al., (2020)* discuss the importance of integration between the different levels of health care, with the creation of care networks that ensure the continuity of care for the elderly. These practices, if adapted to the Brazilian context, could contribute significantly to improving the quality of life of the elderly and to the effectiveness of public policies.

Discussion

The results obtained confirm the hypothesis that, despite legislative advances, public health policies aimed at the elderly population in Brazil face significant failures in their implementation. Regional inequalities, lack of training of health professionals, and insufficient resources are critical barriers that need to be overcome if these policies are to meet their objectives.

The discussion of the results highlights the need for a more integrated and coordinated approach, involving all levels of government and sectors of society. The proposals for improvement suggest that the adaptation of good international practices, combined with the strengthening of existing initiatives, can be a promising path to overcome the challenges identified.

Finally, the results of this study corroborate the importance of robust and well-implemented public policies to ensure the health and well-being of the elderly population in Brazil. The promotion of active and healthy aging depends on an effective articulation between health policies, professional training and the guarantee of equitable access to health services.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present study aimed to analyze public health policies aimed at the elderly population in Brazil, evaluating their effectiveness and identifying the main challenges faced in their implementation. The research showed that, although the country has made

significant progress in the development of specific policies for this group, such as the Statute of the Elderly and the National Health Policy for the Elderly (PNSPI), there are still important gaps that compromise the full achievement of the objectives of these policies.

Among the main challenges identified, inequality in access to health services stands out, which manifests itself more markedly in less developed regions, such as the North and Northeast of the country. This regional disparity reflects the unequal distribution of resources and infrastructure, which limits the effectiveness of health policies and perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities.

Another critical point is the insufficient training of health professionals, who, in many cases, do not have adequate training to deal with the complexities of aging and the specific needs of the elderly population. The lack of a multidisciplinary and specialized approach compromises the quality of care and the effectiveness of the interventions proposed by public policies.

Despite these difficulties, the study also identified opportunities for the improvement of public health policies for the elderly in Brazil. The adaptation of international good practices, such as home care programs, and the strengthening of health care networks, with greater integration between the different levels of care, are promising ways to face the existing challenges.

In view of this, it is concluded that, in order to ensure healthy and active aging for the elderly population, it is essential that public policies are continuously improved and that their implementation is effectively monitored and evaluated. The promotion of equity in access to health services, investment in professional training, and the adaptation of successful innovations from other contexts are essential measures for Brazil to respond adequately to population aging.

This study contributed to the understanding of the limitations and potentialities of public health policies for the elderly in Brazil, offering subsidies for the formulation of more effective and equitable strategies. However, it is important to recognize that further studies are needed to deepen the analysis and monitor the evolution of policies and practices aimed at the health of the elderly population in the country.

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