



WEEK  
**EUROPEAN  
ACTIVE**  
HEALTHY AGEING



# **EWAHA 2021**

**Executive Summary**

[www.ageing-well-week.eu](http://www.ageing-well-week.eu)

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Dear Colleagues and Friends of AAL,

I am very pleased to present to you the executive summary of the second edition of the European Week of Active and Healthy Ageing (EWAHA 2021) that took place online from October 18 to 21, 2021. This publication aims to present key insights gathered during the week and the growing importance of this networking platform for connecting, learning and collaboration to address the challenges and seize the opportunities of an ageing population.

Due to the COVID pandemic restrictions, as in 2020, we kept the event fully online, which allowed attendees from across Europe and beyond to network and gain new perspectives on active and healthy ageing safely and securely.

This 2021 event supported the 'Decade of Healthy Ageing' proclaimed by the World Health Organization, and for this reason we joined forces with our partner 'More years Better Lives' and one of our AAL members, the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region in Italy.

EWAHA 2021 provided a networking and exchange platform at European level to foster innovation and inter-disciplinary cooperation for active and healthy ageing. We welcomed renowned and thought-provoking panelists from the political, academic and business worlds to explore emerging developments and how our AAL community can work towards achieving the goals of active and healthy ageing for all. The panelists included:

► The Vice President of the European Commission, Mrs. Dubravka Šuica, who presented key findings of the Green Paper on Ageing with first actions, such as the new European care strategy.

► The former Prime Minister of Finland, Mr. Esko Aho, who engaged in debate with Prof. Eve Middleton-Kelly of Cambridge University, a specialist in complex systems, on the need for a European Silver Deal and perspectives on an ageing society that must reinvent itself.

► The Director for Digital Society, Trust & Cybersecurity at European Commission DG CONNECT, Mrs. Lorena Boix Alonso who highlighted key aspects of the Digital Europe Programme.

EWAHA 2021 was organized around four themes and inspired a record number of applications (67) from all over Europe to convene workshops and side events demonstrating the growing interest from research, business, local authorities and the not-for-profit sector in exploring and co-creating 'an enabling environment for ageing well in Europe.'

I thank all participants for their active participation in networking and sharing their ideas. EWAHA 2021 offered the possibility to listen and exchange during the workshops and panels, provided a matchmaking platform for peer-to-peer interaction as well as an exciting virtual exhibition area that presented the achievements of over 40 AAL-funded projects and businesses working in the 'ageing well' market.

I hope that EWAHA 2021 has inspired attendees to strengthen European collaboration and I look forward to seeing you, hopefully in person, at our forthcoming events in 2022 in The Netherlands and Poland.



**Peter Saraga**  
President, AAL Association

# EWAHA 2021 AT GLANCE



## Why did people connect with our platform?



# DRIVING A PLATFORM FOR INNOVATION AND CHANGE IN AN AGEING SOCIETY

How to drive innovation and change in an ageing society was the focus for the first day of EWAHA 2021 with additional sessions and workshops pursuing this theme throughout the week. This is the 'big picture' question for our society: how do we envision a Europe with many more older people? Questions of how we (re)structure society and our collective ability to change were at the forefront of a lively debate.

Fostering Healthy Ageing requires the promotion of innovation, voluntary knowledge exchange and technology transfer. Healthy Ageing also relies on access to resources (people, institutions and financing) to address the major challenges society faces today. Development of the needed innovations requires significant strengthening of capacity at system, institutional and individual levels. And this will also need much greater collaboration across organizations, disciplines and nations.

Demographic change will not only change our healthcare services, it will fundamentally impact everyone from the day they are born. How we grasp this change and how society finds a way that allows for change to happen across different levels and fields was the subject of the plenary session on Monday: 'The Healthy Ageing Decade in Europe – Towards a Silver Deal?'

Older adults require access to adequate, non-discriminatory services, such as health and care, without causing financial hardship. Based on the results of the Commission's recent consultation on 'The impact of ageing in Europe', plenary contributors discussed the emerging vision for an inclusive and modern Europe and the framework and actions that need to be put in place.

In a video contribution European Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography Mrs. Dubravka Šuica referred to the public consultation and the broad debate on ageing, its impact on society and to President von der Leyen's European Care strategy. Looking at the long term, and the Silver Deal, she highlighted a range of social, economic and political actions and initiatives that will place European citizens at the heart of the EU's work in this area.

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*We need to stand for each other and appreciate that everyone in the society has their own important role regardless of age.*

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**Mrs Dubravka Šuica**

Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, European Commission



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*We are far from equilibrium in a society where more people live longer, and birth rate is declining.*

”

**Professor Eve Middleton-Kelly**  
Cambridge University



Lorena Boix Alonso, Director for Digital Society, Trust and Cybersecurity at the Commission's DG CONNECT noted that during the COVID pandemic technology had "kept us together." The Commission recognizes the enabling power of digital technology for an ageing society, but there is a clear need to address challenges on all levels and work together. The resulting outcomes should not only add more years to life, but also more life to those years.

"Ageing is not a Black Swan event!" stated former Finnish Prime Minister Esko Aho. Black Swan events are rare and unexpected with huge ramifications, but in hindsight appear obvious and inevitable. Ageing should not be a surprise to society! It has a huge impact, but its consequences are easily predictable. This means that policies can and should be planned and implemented. However, the changes required will be disruptive. Aho agreed that the Commission can make a difference by enabling digital technology deployment and supporting public platforms for innovation.

For Prof. Eve Middleton-Kelly from Cambridge University the issue of the ageing population must be seen in a bigger picture, including decreasing fertility rates in Europe. A complete change in our educational systems is required to enable citizens to easily change careers and re-train throughout their lives. Today's world is far more complex than the industrial age of the last century, where most of our current institutions were founded. Our society and lives are far from their former equilibrium: a new equilibrium must be sought. This will require space for creativity, for trial and error and taking risks, to create the enabling environment for a more balanced society.

In the final analysis the solutions must be all about people: with technology as an enabler.

Further sessions on this theme during the week ranged from how to build online Innovation Communities to the potential for innovation ecosystems to be harnessed for change. Other topics covered included how to develop local and regional AHA innovation ecosystems and the use of co-creation methods to address citizens' needs and design the services required to improve their lives.



# ADAPTING HEALTH AND CARE SYSTEMS TO THE CHANGING NEEDS OF AN AGEING POPULATION

EWAHA 2021 sessions on Tuesday kicked off a debate on adapting health and care systems which continued into the plenary on Wednesday morning. As people age, their health and care needs tend to become more complex to manage due to a greater risk of chronic disease. Transformation is needed to re-design health and care systems to ensure affordable access to integrated services. These services must be centred on the needs and rights of older people – and be available to all.

AAL has explored the concept of health and care ecosystems in its previous Forums and stakeholder workshops. Currently health and care work is largely disconnected and has proved ineffective in addressing the growing pressure and demand for services and support.

Wednesday's plenary session addressed the debate on health and care eco-systems as innovation drivers for system transformation. The AAL Programme has worked extensively on the role of these eco-systems to transform European welfare. With a new European Partnership on Health and Care Systems Transformation about to be established, this was an opportune moment to bring together eco-system experts to look at the priorities for a European action plan that could integrate active and healthy ageing into our health and care systems.

Drawing on regional and national experiences, examples showed collaboration between different organizations and systems in health and care can deliver greater overall system resilience and agility while focusing on citizen-centred services.

Pia Wiborg, Head of Health Innovation in Regional Development in Central Denmark stressed that co-creation needs to be done in a more systemic and inclusive way and this includes providing the right tools for collaboration to the various stakeholders.

The session highlighted the crucial need to change the way stakeholders interact with each other to provide a more effective and pragmatic way forward. The approach should offer autonomy and freedom of decision-making to the people working at the heart of the system, but also provide them with a structure that can assist them in this. Active knowledge sharing is a 'must have' to reinforce innovative eco-systems.

How can technology create time in this context? Toni Staykova, Vice President International Education and Innovations UKeMED, works on innovative ways to share knowledge and recognizes time as the biggest barrier to this. Capacity building and knowledge sharing is crucial in health and care, so we need to find the barriers obstructing success and develop an appropriate framework to make sharing happen. Her essential message is: we need to invest in people. People are the number one ingredient for a successful way of life and healthy ageing – and they need to be put center stage.

The COVID lockdown changed the way Healthy Valley Netherlands interacted with their stakeholders, stated International Ecosystem Director, Victor Haze. Online interaction has eased up a lot of exchanges, but

“ Knowledge sharing is power sharing. ”

**Klaus Niederländer**

Director of the Ambient Assisted Living (AAL) Association



also made some elements more difficult: often you really needed to have everyone in the same room. The pandemic has also highlighted the significant role of cross-border cooperation.

Workshops, discussions and presentations on this theme during the week covered topics including what can be done in terms of preventive initiatives to relieve the burden on social care systems and non-medical issues. The focus was on lessons learned from the COVID pandemic, the needs of an ageing population in emergencies, and the application of future technologies, such as social robots, to ensure a longer, active participation in social and working lives as we age.



# PROMOTING INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

The main focus for sessions on Wednesday was intergenerational solidarity following on from the plenary session on Tuesday hosted by JPI MYBL: 'The oldest old - a path between solidarity and healthy ageing.' Intergenerational Solidarity has sought increased recognition within European policy domains for several years with 2012 being named European Year of 'solidarity between generations'.

However, despite common usage, the term still does not have one commonly accepted definition. In the aftermath of the COVID pandemic, intergenerational solidarity should become a part of a broader discussion, including on pension schemes, social support, employment policies and much more. Similar questions of equality, equitable access and solidarity have been crucial in confronting and containing the pandemic. The question now is how can we promote intergenerational solidarity in Europe as a key element of the decade of active and healthy ageing?

Can we organize society in such a way that age does not define a person's opportunities? For example, older adults often experience discrimination in the labor market, and often access to opportunities are impacted by age and societal expectations. And at the same time, we need to learn how to increase independence for people who are the oldest old despite chronic health issues.

The plenary session presented the issues around this growing group of older persons (aged 80+) and investigated what is needed to assure their healthy ageing, how to maintain intergenerational solidarity, and what social consequences can be anticipated.

The plenary covered a wide range of aspects including fiscal, budgetary and human resource solidarity, and the role of formal and informal care. As people become older, they need more care and therefore, with an ageing population, public health expenditure will increase. Santiago Calvo Ramos, DG for Economic and Financial Affairs at the Commission's DG ECFIN argued that to ensure the maintenance of current standards of high-quality care, healthy ageing must be promoted to reduce health care needs and that policies must aim to improve the efficiency of health care systems.

Georg Ruppe, of the Austrian Interdisciplinary Platform on Ageing (ÖPIA), noted that research on the very oldest people (80+) is a relatively new topic and this cohort is not homogeneous or easy to categorize. Comprehensive research is required that combines health and care, socio-economic and life-course approaches to produce an inclusive, differentiated picture of this diverse group. If successful, the results can contribute to much improved intergenerational understanding and solidarity.

More flexible and non-institutionalized care such as assisted living is also needed. This will require new mechanisms to fund services to inspire civil society to care for the oldest old in their homes. This will need a cultural change in how we treat our oldest citizens. In principle, home care should be more efficient and

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*We have to look for a cultural change in how we treat the oldest old; how would you like to live and be cared for when you are in this age group yourself.*

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**Georg Ruppe**

Managing Director of the Austrian Interdisciplinary Platform on Ageing (ÖPIA)



cheaper for people with lower levels of need, while residential care should be more efficient for people with higher care requirements. Changing from institutionalized care homes to more assistive and flexible institutions should be the model for the future, argued Ruppe.

However, generating solidarity between generations in some communities will remain a challenge as younger people move away for economic reasons, exacerbating the overall ageing population trend. One answer to improve intergenerational solidarity could be to teach younger generations about the opportunities and challenges of ageing. Learning earlier to prepare for ageing can remove the anxiety often involved in growing old. Overall, every generation needs a better understanding of ageing and its consequences and challenges.

Activities in this theme during EWAHA2021 included sessions showing how exploiting digital storytelling can reveal shared values in AAL communities, strategies to ensure increased digital inclusion, and the role of the humanities and social sciences in active ageing.



# MAKING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CASE FOR IMPACT INVESTMENT IN HEALTHY AGEING

The final day of EWAHA 2021 looked at the economic case for investing in Healthy Ageing. Better understanding of the socio-economic costs and opportunities of Healthy Ageing can be a starting point for sustainable, equitable and effective responses toward our ageing societies. Public investment should be accompanied by a parallel case for industrial innovation in health and care to capitalize on the increasingly important health and silver economy.

There are great technological advances that our societies can potentially use to mitigate some of the more concerning developments of an ageing society. Over the years, the AAL Programme has fostered many new services and products for the emerging silver market but there is much more to be done. And what is the right balance between public and private sectors? How can the public sector create the conditions for a win-win approach where the private sector delivers the innovation that the public sector is seeking? The plenary session presented some of the main applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in health and care with special attention given to the healthy ageing sub-domain. Practitioners from established health and care provider facilities considered the technologies that will be dominating this field over the next few years, looked into specific ethical aspects related to end users and sought to answer the question: 'Artificial Intelligence Dilemma: hype or necessity?'

The primary aim of AI applications in health is to analyze relationships between prevention or treatment techniques and patient outcomes. There are still many questions and concerns about exactly how AI can help in healthcare and how it can benefit citizens' lives. The plenary focused on three experiences from Belgium, Italy and The Netherlands.

Willem Dhoghe of Flanders Health Care was clear that AI and machine learning will become a part of our daily lives, especially in health and care. Alberto Sanna of Hospital San Raffaele in Milan agreed stating that AI will impact every dimension of our lives. Well-being and prevention are designed in socio-technological environments and AI will have a direct impact.

Data is the fuel for learning health systems according to Leone Flikweert, CEO of Health-R in The Netherlands. But a key element is trust. AI systems need an 'ethics by design' approach. This means that an environment must be created - a bubble of trust - that is transparent and inclusive. In turn, this will require a better dialogue with the general public on AI, what it is, and what it can do.

The cost of the required AI infrastructure, and who will pay for it, are also issues. Leone suggested that in building AI infrastructure, a crucial role is played by government, but different users should also pay for the data they receive and the systems that they use. In this way a clear framework can be established that describes who participates and how. In Europe, 5G is already establishing a gigantic digital infrastructure that should be a game-changer for effective AI distribution.

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*We need to create the environment to build awareness and trust about the use of Artificial Intelligence.*

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**Alberto Sanna**

Hospital San Raffaele, Milan, Italy



In the future, AI could be used to bring all of an individual's healthcare data together in one point. This would allow citizens to be more in control of their own health, not only addressing immediate health concerns but helping them to plan preventative measures, hopefully avoiding potential future health complications and easing ageing.

Three further sessions on the morning of the final day of EWAHA 2021 looked at further aspects of the socio-economic case: investment strategies for healthy ageing digital solutions, the potential for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to improve welfare, and value-based eHealth.



# OUR NEXT EVENTS

## Health Valley Event 2022

From March 15 to 17, 2022 the Health Valley Event (HVE) will be the place to be in The Netherlands for meeting everyone involved in innovation, science and business in Life Sciences and Health. The annual HVE events regularly attract more than 1,200 visitors.

In 2022 the HVE will take place in hybrid form: onsite / in person in Nijmegen, The Netherlands and also with an extensive online event programme!

In collaboration with the AAL Programme, HVE is your partner to Connect, Challenge and Grow your innovative technological solution!

Find out more here:  
[www.healthvalleyevent.com](http://www.healthvalleyevent.com)

## EWAHA 2022

And do not forget we are on the road to Gdansk in 2022. The next edition of the European Week of Active and Healthy Ageing will take place in Gdansk, Poland from October 18-20, 2022. See you there!

For more details, keep an eye on the EWAHA website:  
[www.ageing-well-week.eu](http://www.ageing-well-week.eu)



# HACKATHON

During the weekend before EWAHA 2021 (16 and 17 October) a Hackathon – the Trieste Citizen Accelerator – was organized in the capital city of the Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG) region in northeast Italy involving citizens, in particular younger and older generations, to tackle the specific challenge to ‘address the loneliness and isolation problems of society through Innovative and Tech solutions’.

This AAL CITIZEN ACCELERATOR was co-organized by the Upper Adriatic Technology Park, the AAL Programme and the FVG region in the high-tech atmosphere of the Urban Centre in Trieste. The two-day event gathered a total of 80 people from a range of backgrounds, ages and places to discuss and create concrete measures for being ‘Active and Healthy over 65’.

Ten mixed, multidisciplinary and multilanguage teams were formed and worked overnight to devise real solutions to the challenge. A wide range of innovative solutions were presented to a panel of judges on the Sunday and the efforts of all the groups were acknowledged – there were no losers, all were winners!

The overall best solution was assessed to be from Group ‘REMMI’ who created prototype glasses for visually impaired people based on video-computing technology and connected with a camera activated by pre-set voice commands to recognize objects and faces. In addition, the device has the capability to ask simple questions to a user who is affected by dementia. The device is supported by a customizable dashboard.

The event and the winning teams were celebrated in the closing event of EWAHA 2021. Overall, the Hackathon was an outstanding success in terms of participation of students, mentors, health and assistance sector experts, and the creativity and innovative approach of the teams.

*An incredible experience, beautiful for the input we received, for what we learned, for the wonderful climate of collaboration in which we worked, for the excellent organization and for the care they had for us. We can't wait to repeat it.*

**Student participant**





# CLOSING REMARKS

## *The way forward*

This second edition of EWAHA has shown the resilience and flexibility of our international AAL community. As we grow out of the legacy of the AAL Forum, we are evolving and aim to involve more stakeholders. And from the increasing number of attendees at EWAHA 2021, we are pleased to see the community also appreciate this idea.

The discussions that took place at EWAHA 2021 were just the beginning and we look forward to continuing the exchanges at our forthcoming events.

Ageing affects everyone - and it starts at birth. We need to create a narrative that demystifies ageing and ensures wellbeing at all stages of life. At the same time, we must increase the participation of older adults – including the oldest old – to combat loneliness and provide purpose in life. Only by doing so can we create value-based societies where everyone has, potentially, their place.

To achieve this will require a much more systemic approach to innovation that allows us to deal with complex issues and incorporate learnings into adapted human behavior, in advancing science and in proliferating technology that works effectively for an ageing population.

Innovation will be valuable to foster human capital if we can harness and embrace it with a knowledge-led and critical approach. This is certainly required for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), where we will have to create an environment of trust and transparency between citizens, technology providers and public authorities.

European Commission President von der Leyen recently presented the EU strategy for care – an area where we feel we can offer our experience, network and innovative approach to help. Over the last 10 years the AAL Programme has focused on three main objectives to help address the challenges and seize the opportunities of an ageing population:

- ✓ Improving the wellbeing of older adults using adapted digital technology
- ✓ Stimulating the development of an age-tech sector in Europe
- ✓ Contributing towards more sustainable health and care systems

Our platform for exchange, learning and cross fertilization enables collaborative approaches between countries that can build a more value-based health and care approach that benefits citizens of all ages and background.

Our event in Gdansk in 2022 will be the final meeting organized by the AAL Programme as it nears the end of its funding period. We look forward to seeing you there after our long online break.

## About the AAL Programme

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The Active and Assisted Living (AAL) programme aims to create better quality of life for older people and to strengthen industrial opportunities in the field of healthy ageing technology and innovation. AAL does this by funding projects that work to create market-ready products and services for older people. Each project consists of SMEs, research bodies and end-user organizations.

Since 2008, AAL has funded over 240 projects addressing a range of issues, including management of chronic conditions, social inclusion, access to online services, mobility, management of daily activities, and support from informal carers.

The specific aims of the AAL Programme are to:

- Foster the emergence of innovative ICT-based products, services and systems for ageing well at home, in the community, and at work.
- Create a critical mass of research, development and innovation at EU level in technologies and services for ageing well, including the establishment of a favorable environment for participation of SMEs.
- Help create the market conditions for the industrial exploitation of healthy ageing products by providing a European framework that supports the development of standardized solutions and facilitates their adaptation to local, regional and national levels to account for varying social preferences and regulatory requirements.