

Services and Housing for the Elderly in Japan

Japan's population is aging at the rate the world has never experienced before.

As you may be familiar already with the terms, *aging society*, *aged society* and *super-aged society*, if the percentage of elderly persons in the total population exceeds 7%, a society is called an aging society. Japan became an aging society in 1970, followed by an aged society (14%) in 1994 and a super-aged society (21%) in 2007. In 2023, Japan's percentage of the elderly in the total population even went further and reached to 29.1% and I think it is not exaggerating to say that Japan is a super-super aged society.

The aging of the population is expected to advance further and by 2040 when the second baby boomers, who were born in between 1971 and 1974, become 65 years old and older, the aging rate is said to be over 35%.

Aging population is not unique to Japan but seen anywhere around the world.

When looking at the global aging rate, it was 9.4% in 2020, and it is expected to be 18.7% in 2060.

Japan has run ahead of other countries for about 60 years when it comes to the aging rate; however, South Korea will catch up with Japan in 2040 and Singapore, then followed by China and Thailand, will catch up in 2060.

According to the World Health Statistics 2023 released on May 19, 2023, the country with the highest average life expectancy is Japan with the age of 84.3. Switzerland comes in the second place with 83.4 and South Korea comes in the third place with 83.3. (Note that the result is different from the one released by UNFPA.)

When looking by gender, Switzerland ranks first at 81.8 years old, followed by Japan at 81.5 years old for males.

Japan ranks first at 86.9 years old followed by South Korea at 86.1 years old for female.

The average life expectancy exceeds 80 years old in 31 countries.

Aging has surely become the global issue.

While the longer average life expectancy is somewhat desirable, the lower birth rate is problematic. To be precise, the problem is the declining birthrate with the aging population.

Some fifty years ago, one elderly person was supported by nine working-age persons in Japan; however, in another 20 years or so, the day will come where one elderly person is supported by two or less working-age persons.

Problems such as the shortage of labor and the reduced tax revenue due to the shrinkage of the working population caused by the fewer children have arisen.

Transportation and nursing care industries will be hit the hardest by the decline of the

working population. Although the utilization of AI and robots is much anticipated, the nursing care industry where the number of users (the elderly) is increasing while it is hard to secure workers is the one of the industries easily affected by the changing demographics.

In Japan, there is a movement to consider revising the definition of *the elderly*.

In reference to the current definition and classification of the elderly, those who are 65 years old and older are defined as the elderly. However, when examining the long-time changes of the various data on the senility of the today's elderly, the result is that the mental and physical health among those who aged between 65 and 74 is well maintained, and the majority of them are still possible to actively engage in the social activities. There are also the number of growing negative opinions against the traditional definition that states people aged 65 and over are considered the elderly, according to many surveys. As such, redefying the elderly that the elderly should be those who are 75 years of age and older is being proposed. ("Redefining the elderly as aged 75 years and older: Proposal from the Joint Committee of Japan Gerontological Society and the Japan Geriatrics Society", March, 2017)

In fact, there is data that the elderly today are physically 10 to 15 years younger and mentally 5 to 8 years younger compared to that of 20 years ago.

That being said, the number of those who require nursing care is constantly increasing.

In addition, while the total population is shrinking, the number of people who aged 75 years and older is expected to increase until 2055.

I have just mentioned about the movement of redefying the elderly as 75 years of age and older instead of current 65 years, the actual number (percentage) of people who require nursing care for the old-old (75 years old and older) is 8 times as many compared to the young-old (between 65 years old and 74 years old).

Sure enough, the need for nursing care services will rise in the future.

The nursing care services available for the elderly in Japan are as follows.

Elderly Care Services

- Designated Facility Covered by Public Aid Providing Long-Term Care to the Elderly (Intensive Care Homes for the Elderly)
- Long-Term Care Health Facilities
- Home-Visit Long-Term Care
- Home-Visit Nursing
- Outpatient Day Long-Term Care
- Short-Term Admission for Daily Life Long-Term Care
- Daily Life Long-Term Care Admitted to a Specified Facility

- Rental Service of Equipment for Long-Term Care Covered by Public Aid
- Home Modification for In-Home Long-Term Care
- In-Home Long-Term Care Support
- Communal Daily Long-Term Care for a Dementia Patient
- Outpatient Long-Term Care for a Dementia Patient
- Multifunctional Long-Term Care in a Small Group Home
- Home Care - Regular and On-demand
- Community-Based Outpatient Long-Term Care Service
- Nursing and Small-scale Multifunctional Domiciliary Care
- Nursing Homes for the Elderly
- Low-Cost Homes for the Elderly (Type A)
- Low-Cost Homes for the Elderly (Type B)
- Low-Cost Homes for the Elderly (Care House)
- Low-Cost Homes for the Elderly (Urban-type)

Elderly care services include welfare equipment and housing renovation for those who are cared at home.

These services are provided in the form of the allowance for rental or purchase (not suitable for rent) costs for welfare equipment or the allowance for construction costs for such as installing handrails or improving accessibility (some requirements and restrictions apply).

Medical care, such as home-visit nursing, is also available.

The following is the list of facilities for the elderly.

In 1980, a half of households with people aged 65 and over were three-generation households, but today such households account less than 10%. Instead, households consisted of married couple account 32%, and single-person households, 28.8%. 60 % of households with people aged 65 and over are the elderly-only households.

Facilities for the elderly

[For the elderly who require nursing care or/and medical care]

- Facility Covered by Public Aid Providing Long-term Care to the Elderly (Intensive Care Homes for the Elderly)
- Long-Term Care Health Facilities
- Sanatorium Medical Facility for the Elderly Requiring Long-Term Care
- Integrated Facility for Medical and Long-term Care
- Special Facility Providing Daily Long-Term Care

- Community-Based Specified Facility Providing Daily Long-Term Care
- Community-Based Facility for Preventive Daily Long-Term Care of the Elderly Covered by Public Aid
- Private Assisted Living Facility
- Communal Daily Long-Term Care for a Dementia Patient (so-called Group Home)
- Serviced Residence for the Elderly

[For the elderly who have difficulties to live at home]

- Nursing Homes for the Elderly
- Low-Cost Homes for the Elderly
- Care Houses (Type A and B, Urban-type)
- Private Residential Homes
- Life Support Houses

In Japan, we have a special expression, *Tsui no sumika*, which refers to one's final abode. Will you be able to live the house you built when you were young, intending to live to the end of your life, even though you'd come to require nursing or medical care?

As there are issues of living alone and the elderly caring the elderly, I will discuss in details the housing for the elderly in my next report.

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