

Preface to the First Edition

Primary healthcare professionals play an important role in offering first-contact, community-based care for the general population in a comprehensive, holistic manner. Their healthcare services cover preventive, diagnostic, and curative care at different stages of people's life. This life course approach could enhance people's well-being at all ages by addressing their specific needs. As highlighted by the World Health Organization, this approach may ensure people's access to healthcare services and safeguard their human right to health throughout their life journey.¹ This also synergises with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), namely "ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages".²

It is increasingly recognized that a life course approach could optimize health trajectories by bridging healthy development in early life stages with better health in middle and older ages.³ An accumulating body of evidence has demonstrated that adopting a life course approach could effectively reduce the risk and burden of common non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, and diabetes. A systematic review from the WHO showed that people's propensity to develop NCDs and obesity could be affected during fetal development and infancy.⁴ For instance, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life is associated with higher intelligence in childhood, lower likelihood of being overweight or obese, and a reduced risk of incident diabetes.⁵ Another example is screening for high blood pressure in adults aged 18 years or older, which could substantially reduce the incidence of cardiovascular events.⁶ Similarly encouraging evidence on the benefits of early preventive care has been found for other conditions, such as health assessment for metabolic diseases, adoption of healthy lifestyle habits, cancer screening, and immunisation.

¹ World Health Organization. Life Course. Available at: <https://www.who.int/our-work/life-course>. Accessed on August 21, 2023.

² United Nations. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>. Accessed on August 21, 2023.

³ World Health Organization. Creating healthy life trajectories: universal health coverage and a life course approach. <https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/universal-health-coverage/who-uhl-technical-brief-template---uhl-life-course.pdf>. Accessed on August 21, 2023.

⁴ World Health Organization. Good maternal nutrition the best start in life. 2016. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/publications/2016/good-maternal-nutrition.-the-best-start-in-life-2016>. Accessed on August 21, 2023.

⁵ World Health Organization. Breastfeeding. Available at: https://www.who.int/health-topics/breastfeeding#tab=tab_1. Accessed on August 21, 2023.

⁶ U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. Screening for High Blood Pressure in Adults: Recommendation Statement. *Am Fam Physician*. 2016;93(4):300-302

The Expert Panel on Reference Frameworks has produced this Reference Framework for Life Course Preventive Care. It introduces life course approach as a holistic public health strategy to enhance primary care; provides preventive interventions and implementation details across people's lifespan; and highlighted some of the government subsidised services and programmes. It promotes the formulation of healthcare plans for the general public at different stages of life, including that for children, men, and women. The recommendations in the reference framework represent effective, practical, and user-friendly clinical practice guides for use in various primary care settings. Apart from offering a common reference to guide and coordinate life course healthcare to people from different healthcare settings in Hong Kong, this Framework also represents an important blueprint to empowering Family Doctors to translate recommendations to clinical practice. In order to implement evidence-based healthcare, the Expert Panel is reviewing and updating this Framework on a regular basis based on continuous scientific evaluation of high quality research.

Family doctors are in the most privileged position to enhance preventive and curative care, both in the community and clinic settings. It is hoped that this important document will meet with support from Family Doctors and other healthcare stakeholders so as to achieve optimal patient care and improvements in population health.



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