

Healthcare for the Elderly in Algeria: Current Reality and Prospective Challenges

Fatma Yahiaoui

Researcher in Demographic Sociology, University of Tipaza, Algeria

Email: yahiaoui.fatma@univ-tipaza.dz

Abstract

This study investigates healthcare for the elderly in Algeria as a paramount social and health issue that has gained substantial prominence due to the continuous demographic growth of older persons and their expanding physiological, psychological, and social needs. The primary objective of this research is to identify the current reality of healthcare services provided to senior citizens in Algeria, highlight the most pressing challenges confronting this domain, and propose practical mechanisms capable of enhancing health coverage and holistic care for this demographic cohort. The study explores the conceptual framework of geriatric healthcare and the biopsychosocial features of aging, followed by an analytical examination of the demographic and epidemiological indicators of older adults in Algeria. Furthermore, the inquiry examines medical, institutional, and social welfare services, alongside the regulatory and institutional role assumed by the Algerian state. The findings reveal that while Algeria has deployed commendable initiatives, such as therapeutic coverage, social security reimbursements, and specialized senior care facilities, the sector faces substantial obstacles. Foremost among these are the widespread prevalence of chronic non communicable diseases, deficits in specialized geriatric infrastructure, institutional pressure on public hospitals, and psychological vulnerabilities. Consequently, the study recommends upgrading geriatric infrastructure, developing home health and psychological support services, and institutionalizing health education programs to secure a dignified life for senior citizens.

Keywords: *Elderly healthcare, geriatric services, demographic transition, chronic diseases, social protection, Algeria.*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, global societies have witnessed rapid demographic transitions characterized primarily by the unprecedented expansion of elderly populations and rising life expectancy at birth. This transition is a direct outcome of major advancements in medical science, improved epidemiological control, and widespread enhancements in social and living standards. Consequently, these structural changes have brought numerous geriatric issues to the forefront of social and healthcare policy, most notably medical, psychological, and social care. Old age represents one of the most critical and delicate stages in human life due to accompanying functional and somatic declines that restrict daily autonomous activity, as emphasized by Boutarfa, 2018, page 45.

Healthcare for the elderly is systematically defined as the integrated matrix of medical, preventive, therapeutic, psychological, and social services provided to older persons to preserve physical and cognitive vitality and optimize quality of life. This comprehensive concept transcends curative interventions to encompass early disease prevention,

¹ Received: 12/04/2026 ; Accepted : 16/07/2026 ; Published : 02/10/2026

continuous clinical monitoring, mental health support, and the provision of supportive physical environments that enable elderly individuals to live with dignity and independence, as noted by Ben Aissa, 2019, page 67.

Societal concern for senior citizens has evolved into a primary indicator reflecting human rights protection and social progress. International epidemiological and demographic data demonstrate that the proportion of elderly individuals is increasing steadily across all continents, placing considerable pressure on social security systems, specialized pharmaceutical supply, and long term healthcare infrastructure. In Algeria, profound demographic transitions have emerged during the last few decades. The expansion of the elderly demographic cohort is propelled by improved public health services, reduced general mortality rates, and life expectancy exceeding 77 years, as documented by Zerrouki, 2020, page 112. The proportion of individuals aged 60 years and above has risen noticeably, transforming geriatric healthcare into a pressing strategic concern for public authorities and social welfare bodies.

The Algerian state has instituted multiple programs aimed at protecting senior citizens, supporting public healthcare structures, expanding social security coverage, establishing specialized senior residential centers, and funding treatments for widespread chronic illnesses, including diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, arterial hypertension, and joint degenerations, as highlighted by Sharef, 2023, page 44. Nevertheless, despite significant public investments, elderly healthcare confronts serious structural obstacles. These challenges include shortages in specialized geriatric clinics, severe overcrowding in university hospital centers, underdeveloped home healthcare and psychological support systems, and the erosion of traditional extended family solidarity under the weight of modern economic and social pressures, as detailed by Bouhafs, 2023, page 38.

1.1 Research Problem and Inquiries

The central problem of this study is formulated through the following comprehensive inquiry: What is the current reality of healthcare provided to the elderly in Algeria, and what are the prominent challenges facing this vital sector?

To examine this central question, the following sub inquiries are addressed:

- First: What is the conceptual definition and theoretical framework of healthcare for the elderly?
- Second: What is the current status of healthcare services provided to senior citizens across Algerian institutions?
- Third: What are the fundamental medical, social, and structural challenges confronting senior healthcare?
- Fourth: What practical mechanisms can be implemented to upgrade geriatric healthcare in Algeria?

1.2 Significance of the Study

The scholarly and practical value of this research lies in examining the healthcare reality of an increasingly expanding demographic cohort with multifaceted medical, emotional, and social requirements. Upgrading geriatric services represents a critical pillar of sustainable human development, social stability, and public welfare policy in Algeria, as noted by Merabet, 2021, page 91.

1.3 Research Objectives

- Clarifying the conceptual foundations and operational dimensions of elderly healthcare.
- Analyzing empirical health and demographic indicators regarding older persons in Algeria.
- Evaluating the structural role assumed by public health and social protection institutions.
- Formulating actionable policy recommendations to optimize geriatric and home care services.

2. Conceptual Framework of Geriatric Healthcare

2.1 Concept and Core Dimensions of Elderly Healthcare

Elderly healthcare denotes the integrated medical, curative, preventive, and psychosocial interventions dedicated to senior citizens to sustain functional capacity and mitigate chronic degenerative ailments. It encompasses early diagnosis, continuous clinical follow up, and rehabilitative therapies that assist aging individuals in adapting to physiological decline, as outlined by Gara, 2017, page 89. Furthermore, it requires coordinated intersectoral collaboration between hospitals, specialized primary health centers, social security funds, and municipal social assistance services, as affirmed by Khelloufi, 2023, page 51.

2.2 Biological and Psychosocial Characteristics of Aging

The aging phase is characterized by gradual physiological regression, diminishing sensory and motor acuity, decreased immunological competence, and progressive functional impairment. These biological transformations amplify susceptibility to multiple concurrent chronic conditions. Concurrently, seniors experience emotional adjustments triggered by occupational retirement, reduced personal income, loss of social networks, or feelings of loneliness, as emphasized by Zaghdoud, 2023, page 73. Consequently, holistic geriatric care mandates combining somatic medical therapies with affective psychological and social support.

2.3 Core Objectives of Elderly Healthcare

Geriatric healthcare operates according to several strategic objectives, as outlined by Laour, 2021, page 54:

- Preserving general physical and cognitive wellness while decelerating age related functional decay.
- Preventing chronic pathologies and detecting complications at early clinical stages.
- Promoting personal autonomy and enabling older persons to perform activities of daily living independently.
- Providing robust psychological and social guidance to prevent social isolation and feelings of neglect.
- Alleviating inpatient pressure on tertiary hospital facilities by reinforcing home healthcare and community nursing.

3. Ethical and Spiritual Foundations of Elderly Care

In Algerian society, deep cultural values and Islamic moral principles establish profound ethical imperatives regarding the veneration, compassion, and comprehensive care owed to parents and older citizens. The Quran instructs believers to provide tender support to elderly parents:

كَرِيماً قَوْلًا لَهُمَا وَقُلْ تَنْهَرُهُمَا وَلَا أَفَّ لَهُمَا تَقُلْ فَلَا كِلَاهُمَا أَوْ أَحَدُهُمَا الْكَبِيرَ عِنْدَكَ يَبْلُغَنَّ إِمَّا إِحْسَانًا وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِيَّاهُ إِلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا رَبَّكَ وَقَضَىٰ

23 الآية الإسراء، سورة

Translation: *And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them so much as uff, and do not repel them, but speak to them a noble word, Surah الإسراء, Verse 23*

This foundational divine command establishes that treating elderly parents with boundless mercy, dignity, and active care is inseparable from righteous monotheistic worship. Similarly, the prophetic tradition explicitly elevates honoring senior members of society into an essential test of genuine community cohesion, stating that whoever does not show mercy to our young and honor our elders is not among our exemplary community.

4. Demographic and Epidemiological Status of the Elderly in Algeria

4.1 Demographic Growth of Senior Citizens

Algeria has witnessed profound demographic shifts across recent decades. Mortality reductions, universal immunization programs, and improved maternal and infant health have raised overall life expectancy beyond 77 years, as confirmed by Zerrouki, 2020, page 112. The population aged 60 and above currently exceeds 7 percent of the national total, with demographic projections indicating that older persons will surpass 12 percent by 2030 and exceed 20 percent by 2050, as documented by national demographic projections and Ben Aissa, 2019, page 67. This upward trajectory places escalating demands on specialized healthcare, long term home assistance, and pharmaceutical supply chains.

4.2 Sociodemographic Features

Demographically, a substantial proportion of senior citizens reside in major urban hubs due to greater proximity to tertiary healthcare infrastructure, though rural provinces face pronounced disparities in medical availability. Socially, the vast majority of older Algerians continue to live within family households. However, rapid socioeconomic modernizations, increased female workforce participation, and urban housing constraints have placed noticeable strain on traditional extended family care structures, as detailed by Bouhafs, 2023, page 38. Moreover, significant educational disparities persist among older cohorts, particularly elderly women in rural localities, affecting functional health literacy and digital health access, as observed by Ben Salem, 2021, page 102.

4.3 Epidemiological Indicators and Chronic Diseases

Epidemiological data in Algeria demonstrate an elevated burden of chronic non communicable diseases among older adults, predominated by Type 2 diabetes mellitus, arterial hypertension, ischemic heart diseases, chronic respiratory ailments, and osteoarticular disorders, as documented by Djabbari, 2020, page 87. These concurrent degenerative conditions necessitate continuous medical supervision and prolonged polypharmacy. Additionally, geriatric neuropsychiatric disorders, including clinical depression, anxiety, dementia, and Alzheimer disease, are experiencing rising diagnostic rates, requiring specialized geriatric psychiatric services, as underscored by Yahi, 2020, page 58.

5. Current Reality of Healthcare and Social Protection for Seniors in Algeria

5.1 Clinical Services in Hospital and Primary Institutions

Public hospitals, specialized hospital establishments, and polyclinics form the core operational spine delivering therapeutic care to elderly Algerians. Senior citizens represent a disproportionately large share of outpatients and inpatient admissions across medical specialties, frequently utilizing cardiac, endocrinological, orthopedic, and nephrological departments, as reported by Hamlaoui, 2022, page 66. While basic medical consultations and emergency interventions remain universally accessible across all provinces, specialized geriatric hospital units remain concentrated primarily within northern university medical centers.

5.2 Social Security and the Chifa Card System

The national social insurance framework, operated through the National Retirement Fund and the National Social Insurance Fund for Salaried Workers, provides essential health protection for retirees. Through the Chifa electronic card system, elderly beneficiaries obtain prescription medications, laboratory analyses, and chronic disease therapies under full third party payment coverage, as detailed by Sharef, 2023, page 44. This protective social insurance shield shields millions of senior citizens from catastrophic medical expenses. Nonetheless, non contributory seniors and individuals who worked within informal sectors often encounter administrative hurdles in securing full health coverage.

5.3 Institutional Elderly Care Centers

Specialized residential homes for the elderly, administered by the Ministry of National Solidarity, Family, and the Status of Women, provide shelter, somatic care, psychological monitoring, and nutritional sustenance for vulnerable seniors lacking viable family care, as documented by Merabet, 2021, page 91. While these institutions provide vital safety nets for abandoned or destitute older adults, social norms in Algerian society strongly favor family based domestic care, maintaining low institutionalization rates across the country.

5.4 Public Health and Social Solidarity Policies

The Ministry of Health, in coordination with the Ministry of National Solidarity, formulates targeted geriatric guidelines focused on screening for cardiovascular risks and diabetes complications. Furthermore, ministerial initiatives increasingly encourage public awareness regarding healthy aging, physical mobility, and nutritional balance, as outlined by Khelloufi, 2023, page 51.

6. Structural Challenges Confronting Elderly Healthcare in Algeria

6.1 Medical and Psychological Challenges

The acute rise in multimorbidity among elderly Algerians creates therapeutic complexity. Older patients frequently suffer from three or more chronic conditions simultaneously, generating elevated risks of drug drug interactions and polypharmacy complications, as observed by Djabbari, 2020, page 87. Moreover, severe deficits in specialized clinical psychologists and geriatric social workers leave psychological distress and cognitive disorders untreated, as noted by Yahi, 2020, page 58.

6.2 Socioeconomic Vulnerabilities

Economic constraints represent a major barrier for retirees with modest pension allocations, particularly given supplementary expenditures for specialized nutritional regimens, paramedical assistive devices, spectacles, hearing aids, and mobility equipment, as analyzed by Zaghdoud, 2023, page 73. Furthermore, working family caregivers face severe

role overload, struggling to reconcile demanding employment responsibilities with around the clock home healthcare for bedridden elderly family members.

6.3 Shortages in Specialized Geriatric Infrastructure

Algeria faces a pronounced national shortage of certified geriatric physicians, specialized geriatric nursing professionals, and subacute rehabilitation units, as underscored by Bouhafs, 2023, page 38. Tertiary public hospitals shoulder an unsustainable burden, as elderly patients occupy acute hospital beds due to the scarcity of intermediate step down facilities or formalized mobile home nursing teams in rural and semi urban districts.

7. Strategic Mechanisms for Upgrading Geriatric Healthcare

7.1 Expanding Geriatric Infrastructure and Medical Training

- Institutionalizing specialized geriatric medicine residencies and continuous professional education for physicians and paramedical personnel.
- Establishing specialized geriatric evaluation units within each public hospital establishment across all wilayas.
- Constructing regional subacute rehabilitation centers dedicated to post stroke and orthopedic recovery for seniors.

7.2 Developing Mobile Home Healthcare and Psychological Support

- Deploying multidisciplinary mobile health brigades, composed of general practitioners, nurses, and psychologists, to deliver domiciliary medical monitoring for homebound seniors.
- Providing structured psychosocial counseling centers to assist family caregivers and support elderly mental well being.
- Subsidizing paramedical equipment, adult hygiene products, and mobility aids directly through social security allowances.

7.3 Institutionalizing Preventive Programs and Digital Health Solutions

- Expanding periodic screening campaigns for hypertension, diabetes, osteoporosis, and cognitive impairment across local health clinics.
- Integrating digital telemedicine consultations and electronic health record monitoring to streamline clinical follow ups for rural elderly populations.
- Launching nationwide public education initiatives that reinforce familial care values, promote physical exercise, and support balanced nutrition in old age.

8. Conclusion

This investigation affirms that elderly healthcare has become one of the most pressing strategic and social priorities in contemporary Algeria, driven by rapid demographic aging, elevated life expectancy, and the growing epidemiological burden of chronic degenerative diseases. While the Algerian state provides substantial foundations through universal hospital care, social security medications, and dedicated senior care homes, significant structural deficits persist. Achieving a comprehensive, dignified healthcare model requires modernizing medical infrastructure, establishing geriatric medical specialties, institutionalizing mobile home care, and providing socioeconomic support to family caregivers. Ultimately, securing a dignified, stable, and healthy life for older adults represents a shared societal duty uniting the state, healthcare institutions, families, and civil society.

References

- Ben Aissa, A. Q., 2019. Sociology of Aging, 1st edition. Dar Al-Khaldouniyyah, Algiers, Algeria, page 67.
- Ben Salem, F., 2021. The reality of healthcare for the elderly in Algeria. Journal of Social Sciences, University of Algiers 2, Issue 15, pages 100 to 118.
- Bouhafs, N., 2023. The reality of healthcare for the elderly in Algeria. Master Thesis in Health Sociology, University of Mohamed Khider, Biskra, Algeria, page 38.
- Boutarfa, M., 2018. Social and Healthcare for the Elderly, 2nd edition. Dar Houma, Algiers, Algeria, page 45.

- Djabbari, Y., 2020. Health challenges of the elderly population in Algeria. *Al-Bahith Journal in Humanities and Social Sciences*, Kasdi Merbah University of Ouargla, Issue 8, pages 85 to 102.
- Gara, S., 2017. *Health Services and Social Welfare*, 3rd edition. Dar Al-Huda, Ain M'lila, Algeria, page 89.
- Hamlouli, S., 2022. Health and social services provided to the elderly. *Journal of Social Studies*, University of Setif 2, Issue 11, pages 65 to 82.
- Khelloufi, A. R., 2023. Health and social services for the elderly in Algeria. Master Thesis in Public Health, University of Algiers 2, Algiers, Algeria, page 51.
- Laour, M. A., 2021. *Aging Issues and Healthcare*, 1st edition. Dar Al-Maarefa, Algiers, Algeria, page 54.
- Merabet, K., 2021. Social protection policies for the elderly in Algeria. *Journal of Human Sciences*, University of Oran, Issue 19, pages 90 to 108.
- Sharef, F., 2023. The role of the state in elderly healthcare. Master Thesis in Health Administration, University of Oran 2, Oran, Algeria, page 44.
- Yahi, L., 2020. Psychological and healthcare for older adults. *Journal of Social Development*, University of Batna 1, Issue 13, pages 55 to 72.
- Zaghdoud, A., 2023. Social and psychological challenges of the elderly. Master Thesis in Social Psychology, University of Setif 2, Setif, Algeria, page 73.
- Zerrouki, F., 2020. *Public Health in Algeria*, 1st edition. Dar Al-Jami'ah Al-Jadidah, Algiers, Algeria, page 112.