



PHOTO: KENNETH BENGTSSON/AVTURLIBLD

Elderly care contributes to a normal and independent life.

ELDERLY CARE:

Ensuring quality of life

The elderly represent a growing share of the Swedish population. Many are in good health and lead active lives, and most live in their own homes. Sweden invests more of its gross domestic product in its elderly citizens than any other country in the world.

Health and social care for the elderly constitutes an important part of Swedish welfare policy. Of Sweden's 9.3 million inhabitants, 18 percent have passed the retirement age of 65 and are pensioners. This number is projected to rise to 23 percent by 2030, at which time about one out of five Swedes is expected to be of retirement age. One reason for this is that the number of Swedes born in the 1940s is unusually large.

Public or private

In 2008, life expectancy in Sweden was 78.6 years for men and 83.2 years for

women. Sweden has the largest proportion of people aged 80 or over among the EU member states, totaling 5.3 percent of the population. Since more and more citizens in this age group are in good health, their care requirements have declined since the 1980s. Most elderly care is funded by municipal taxes and government grants. In 2008, the total cost of elderly care in Sweden was SEK 91.8 billion. Only 4 percent of the financing came from patient charges. Health care costs to be paid by the elderly themselves are subsidized and based on certain rate schedules.

The bulk of all elderly care is provided by the municipalities. Some have contracted out their elderly care services. Everybody is allowed to choose whether they want their home help or special housing to be managed by public or private operators.

Independent lives

The aim of municipal care provision is to ensure that older people and those with disabilities are able to live normal, independent lives. This includes living in their own homes for as long as possible. ■

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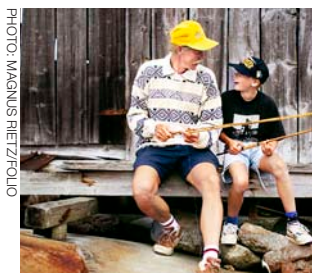


RIGHT TO LIVE TOGETHER

Since 2006, spouses, common-law spouses or registered partners are entitled to be given a place in the same special housing facility.

PRIVATELY OPERATED ELDERLY CARE

More and more municipalities are choosing to privatize parts of their elderly care, letting private care providers run their own operations. In 2007, private care provided services for 11 percent of all elderly with home help. However, the municipality always has overall responsibility, for instance, for funding and allocating home help or a place in a special housing facility.

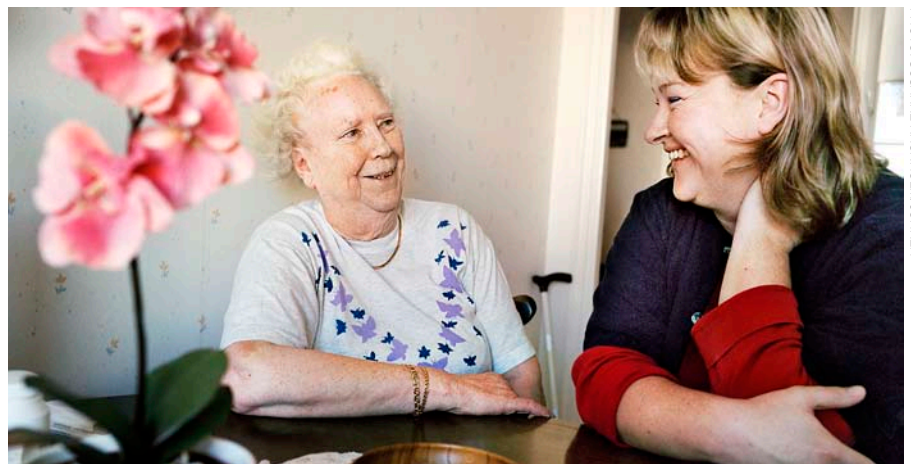


SELF-REPORTED HEALTH

Of Swedes who are 85 or older, 51 percent consider themselves to be in good health. That is the highest percentage in Europe, with Britain in second place (47 percent) and Iceland in third (46 percent).

FLEXIBLE RETIREMENT AGE

The retirement age, normally 65, has become more flexible. Nowadays, many people over 65 continue to work. The number of people who combine pensions and paid work is also on the increase.



Older people can obtain assistance around the clock.

Home help makes life easier

Older people who continue to live at home can obtain various kinds of support to make life easier. Almost all municipalities in Sweden offer ready-cooked meals that are delivered to the homes of the elderly and disabled.

Almost half of the country's municipalities also provide communal meals for the elderly at special day centers. A few organize small groups of the elderly into teams that cook their own meals.

Around the clock

When an older person is no longer able to cope with the demands of everyday life, he or she can apply for assistance from the municipal home-help services. The extent of such care is subject to assessment. Older people with disabilities can obtain assistance around the clock, which means that many are able to remain at home throughout their lives. The severely ill, too, can be provided with health and social care in their own homes.

Municipalities offer daytime activities for elderly and disabled people who need to be stimulated and rehabilitated. These activities primarily target older people with dementia or mental disabilities. Daytime activities help many continue to live in their regular homes.

Transportation services

The elderly and disabled also qualify for transportation services in taxis or specially adapted vehicles. This option is available to those who are unable to travel by regular public transport. In Stockholm alone, almost three million trips are made each year using these services. ■

The Swedish pension system

All Swedish citizens are entitled to a pension after they have stopped working. People can choose to start receiving their pension between the age of 61 and 67. The average retirement age today is 64.

The Swedish pension system consists of three parts – a national pension, an (employer-financed) occupational pension and private pension savings. People contribute to their national pension, which is income-based, for every year they work. There is also a small portion of the national pension called the guaranteed pension.

This is for people who have had very little income or no income at all in their life. The guaranteed pension provides them with a minimum amount each month.

Most people who have a permanent job also collect an occupational pension financed by their employer. The national pension and the occupational pension together account for between 60 and 80 percent of a retired person's income. Many choose to supplement their retirement benefits for added security through private pension savings. ■

PHOTO: SUSANNE KRONHOLM/JOHNER

PHOTO: MAGNUS HETZFOLO

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SOCIAL PEDAGOGICAL WORKERS BREAKING THE LONELINESS

The government invested roughly one billion kronor as of 2008 to raise quality and competence in elderly care. This was done by providing funding to the municipalities. One result is that many municipalities have now hired social pedagogical workers for the elderly.



PHOTO: NIKLAS BERNSTÖME

LOOKING AFTER THE INTERESTS OF RETIREES

There are also a number of different associations that organize retirees. The Swedish National Pensioners' Organization (PRO) is the largest. PRO's task is to look after the interests of retirees on various social issues. Other associations are the Swedish Pensioners' Association (SPF) and the Swedish Municipal Pensioners' Association (SKPF).



PHOTO: HANS BJÖRLING

RED CROSS HELPING THE ELDERLY

The Swedish Red Cross's most extensive operations involve visits to the elderly. Older people living at home or in different kinds of housing for the elderly can be visited by Red Cross volunteer members. The visit may include a chat, a walk or accompanying someone on a visit to the doctor or hospital.



PHOTO: EMMA JÖNSSON/FOUO

There is a broad variety of senior housing in Sweden.

How the elderly live

When planning housing and housing areas, Swedish municipalities are required to ensure that they are adapted to the needs of older people and people with disabilities.

A further goal is for commercial and public services to be easily accessible so that the elderly can continue to live at home and look after themselves. The accessibility requirement has been given greater prominence in legislation. For people with impaired mobility, the municipalities offer to adapt their homes to their needs. When older buildings are refurbished, some of the flats are adapted specifically to the needs and preferences of the elderly.

Older people with disabilities can apply to their local municipality for home adaptation grants, the aim being to enable them to continue to live there. The municipality pays the entire cost if the grant is approved, regardless of the financial status of the applicant.

Senior housing popular

A growing number of the elderly in Sweden want to live in senior housing, i.e. ordinary homes for people 55 and over. In such homes, accessibility is a priority. Some are newly built, while others are regular homes that have been made more accessible in conjunction with conversion or renovation work.

Nowadays, property owners of many different kinds offer senior housing – private landlords, municipal housing companies, tenant-owner associations and foundations. Senior housing is available in the open housing market. This means that all citizens who have reached a certain age can apply for such a home themselves.

The level of adaptation varies. Occupants can be provided with home-help services and home medical care. To give the elderly a greater sense of security, many such housing areas now have special hosts. Premises where people can gather – such as kitchens for making communal meals – are also available in some facilities.

Special housing

Just over 17 percent of the country's inhabitants over 80 years of age live in special housing where staff are on duty day and night. Such housing is needs-assessed and allocated by the municipalities. Most of those in need of care and support around the clock suffer from dementia. ■

READ MORE**THE SWEDISH INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH SCIENCES**

A national venue for research and development in the field of health care and social service in close cooperation with universities and health care authorities.

www.vardalinstitutet.net

THE DEMENTIA ASSOCIATION

The Swedish National Association for the Rights of the Demented protects the interests of those stricken with dementia as well as their relatives.

www.demensforbundet.se

THE SWEDISH INSTITUTE OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

A national resource center for assistive technology and accessibility for people with disabilities.

www.hi.se

THE NATIONAL BOARD OF HEALTH AND WELFARE

Plays a fundamental role as the central government's expert and supervisory authority.

www.socialstyrelsen.se

THE SWEDISH ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND REGIONS

Represents the governmental, professional and employer-related interests of Sweden's 290 municipalities, 18 county councils and the two regions, Västra Götaland and Skåne.

www.ski.se



PHOTO: JOHAN ALP/JOHNER

Many elderly lead active lives.

Preventive care makes older people healthier

Several new forms of preventive health care for the elderly have been introduced in recent years. Studies show that they have proved effective.

One example is physical activity on prescription, both for preventive purposes and as a form of treatment. Older people are prescribed not just exercise in general but a certain type of physical activity, sometimes in combination with medication. Doctors monitor the results.

Personal injury is one of the main health problems among older people. Considerable efforts are made to reduce injuries from falls. Information is made available to the elderly, and special municipal "fixers" help them with things like curtain-hanging and changing light bulbs in their home.

Care guarantees cover all links in the

care chain. Anyone who needs care, for instance, must be treated by a doctor within seven days. After referral, specialist care is supposed to be provided within 90 days. The care guarantee has shortened waiting times for special health care in Sweden.

It is now easier to obtain advanced medical care in the home. In recent years, the care of severely ill and dying patients has been increasingly transferred from hospitals to special housing and older people's own homes. Consequently, municipalities are under heavy pressure to have trained medical staff working in their elderly care services. ■

Useful links

www.fhi.se – The Swedish National Institute of Public Health

www.msbmyndigheten.se – The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency

www.pro.se – National Pensioners' Organization

www.redcross.se – The Swedish Red Cross

www.scb.se – Statistics Sweden

www.vr.se – The Swedish Research Council

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