

Successful aging: More issues that need addressing at election time

By Helen Dennis, LA Daily News

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Given that it is election time, this week's column is a little different.

It is a call to action for our presidential candidates to address a compelling 21st century age agenda and for good reasons.

America is aging. One out of eight Americans is 65 and older; in 2030, that will be one out of five. Additionally, 11,000 individuals celebrate their 65th birthday each day.

(Note: This column is transpartisan, a non-political term coined by thought leader [Ken Dychtwald](#), founder and CEO of [Age Wave](#).)

We have made progress in addressing the needs and aspirations of older adults in our society, but there is much more that needs to be done.

Dychtwald recently conducted a press conference asking the question: "[Will the Aging of America be a Triumph or a Tragedy?](#)" He also identified five issues and questions the candidates need to address.

Social innovator [Marc Freedman](#), founder and CEO of [Encore.org](#), also seized the opportunity to identify, "[What the Presidential Candidates are Missing with Older Voters](#)" in his Wall Street Journal report.

Here is a variation of the five issues outlined by Dychtwald, which integrates his thoughts and perspectives from Freedman and me:

Issue No. 1: Aging America

Forty-two percent of the entire federal budget is spent on Medicare and Social Security. According to the Congressional Budget Office, this will exceed 50 percent by 2030.

Questions: How can this be sustained? What has to change?

Issue No. 2: Alzheimer's Disease

Dementia affects almost one in two people age 85 and older (45 percent of those 85-plus suffer from the disease). Without a breakthrough, the number of victims will likely increase from more than 5 million to more than 15 million with an accumulative cost of \$20 trillion in 2050.

Yet for every dollar currently spent on Alzheimer's care, less than half a cent is spent on scientific research. Note that some presidential candidates have addressed the subject, but we need more from

them.

Questions: What specific measures will you take to find the cause(s) and cure(s) for Alzheimer's disease? What will you do to make it a national priority? How will our nation care for the victims of the disease and its caregivers?

Issue No. 3: Averting poverty

According to the Government Accounting Office, about one half (52 percent) of all households near retirement headed by someone age 55-plus have no retirement savings. And about half of our population has no pension beyond Social Security.

Additionally, we are not fostering financial literacy in our schools. More states provide mandated sex education than financial education.

Questions: How will you motivate Americans to save enough to afford living longer? Will you make financial literacy among the young a priority?

Issue No. 4: Eliminating ageism

Our society is somewhat youth-centric and ageist, often unintentionally. Homes were not built for aging bodies, with less than 2 percent of our housing stock built to be accessible for older adults, according to Dychtwald. In the media, advertisers will be pay networks more for 30-year-old viewers than those who are 60.

Although illegal, age discrimination in the workplace exists. AARP reports that over two-thirds of workers have seen or experienced such discrimination in their work environment.

Questions: How would you address ageism in America? How can we create more age-friendly communities? What would you do to eliminate age discrimination in the workplace?

Issue No. 5: Creating new roles for maturity

Most older adults are not frail or dependent. Freedman writes: "Can you imagine Clinton, Sanders or Trump characterizing themselves as 'seniors' or 'elderly?'"

Our country has tens of millions of people in later life who want to continue contributing, need to earn income from work and are seeking purpose and connection, writes Freedman. About 4.5 million Americans over 50 are in their encore career — combining work and giving back. Some 21 million want to do the same and are looking to find a pathway through education, retooling opportunities, internships and fellowships.

Questions: How do we make the most of this increased longevity? How will we prepare those 50 and older to transition to meaningful work, paid or unpaid, that gives back to the community?

To ignore our older population (who vote) in national debates, political platforms, interviews and articles is ignoring the elephant in the room. Regardless of our age, each one of us is a stakeholder in the dialogue.

As citizens, let us raise these questions when the opportunity strikes.

Send email to Helen Dennis at helendenn@aol.com, or go to www.facebook.com/SuccessfulAgingCommunity

URL: <http://www.dailynews.com/seniors/20160516/successful-aging-more-issues-that-need-addressing-at-election-time>

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