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Inter-University Network for Healthy Aging, Latin America and the Caribbean (RIES-LAC): a university contribution to the Decade of Healthy Aging

Rede interuniversitária para o envelhecimento saudável, América Latina e Caribe (RIES-ALC): uma contribuição universitária para a década do envelhecimento saudável

Red interuniversitaria de envejecimiento saludable, Latinoamérica y Caribe (RIES-LAC): un aporte universitario a la década del envejecimiento saludable

Iván Palomo^a , Margarita Murgieri^b , Rafael Pizarro-Mena^c ,

Diego Andrés Chavarro-Carvajal^d , María Fernanda Lopez^e , Jeanine Mongelos^f ,

Aldo Sgaravatti^g , Patrick Alexander Wachholz^h  , Jorge Gamonalⁱ , Robinson Cuadros^j 

^a Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud, Universidad de Talca – Talca, Maule, Chile.

^b Escuela Superior de Ciencias de la Salud, Universidad de Morón, Morón, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

^c Facultad de Odontología y Ciencias de la Rehabilitación, Universidad San Sebastián, Sede Los Leones – Providencia, Santiago, Chile.

^d Instituto de Envejecimiento, Facultad de Medicina, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana – Bogotá, Colombia.

^e Facultad de Ciencias Médicas, Universidad Católica de Asunción – Asunción, Paraguay.

^f Facultad de Psicología, Universidad de Buenos Aires – Buenos Aires, Argentina.

^g Facultad de Medicina, Universidad de la República – Montevideo, Uruguay.

^h Faculdade de Medicina de Botucatu, Universidade Estadual Paulista – Botucatu (SP), Brazil.

ⁱ Facultad de Odontología, Universidad de Chile – Santiago, Chile.

^j Comité Latinoamericano y del Caribe de la Asociación Internacional de Gerontología y Geriatria – Bogotá, Colombia.

Correspondence data

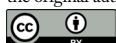
Ivan Palomo Gonzáles – Facultad de Ciencias de la Salud, Universidad de Talca, Chile – 1 Poniente 1141, Talca, Chile. E-mail: ipalomo@utalca.cl

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The world's population is aging¹⁻³, and the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region is no exception.⁴⁻⁶ Currently, 8% of the LAC population is over 65 years old, and this number is estimated to increase to 30% by 2050.⁷

The aging process is known to involve molecular, physiological, functional, psychosocial, and social changes.⁸ We all age; the point is to age healthily. As this is not always the case, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the period from 2021 to 2030 as the Decade of Healthy Aging.⁹ The Decade is a global collaboration involving diverse sectors and stakeholders (governments, civil society, international organizations, professionals, academic institutions, the media, and the private sector) to improve the lives of older people, their families, and communities. The collaboration is centered on four closely interconnected pillars of action: changing how we think, feel, and act towards age and aging; ensuring that communities foster the abilities of older people; providing person-centered integrated care and primary health services responsive to older people; and providing access to long-term care for older people who need it.^{9,10}

In light of this situation, what can academics from universities in LAC do? If we organize ourselves and unite efforts, we can contribute to the Decade of Healthy Aging and, consequently, influence the quality of life of older people.

Therefore, following the proposal of Dr. Robinson Cuadros, President of the LAC Committee (COMLAT) of the International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG), Professor Iván Palomo, Director of the Inter-University Center for Healthy Aging of public universities in Chile, proposes the creation of an Inter-University Network for Healthy Aging in LAC (RIES-LAC) before COMLAT.

At the session held on Thursday, June 8, 2023, the COMLAT took into consideration the following:

- Professor Palomo's letter requesting the creation, within the scope of COMLAT, of RIES-LAC.
- The current and future demographic situation regarding aging of the population in the LAC region.

- c) WHO's declaration of 2021-2030 as the Decade of Healthy Aging.
- d) The significant number of academics in the LAC region, from several public and private universities, involved in research/studies on aging and old age.
- e) The need for professors interested in sharing their research, studies, and activities on aging and old age to connect in a network to enhance the quantity and quality of results.
- f) COMLAT-IAGG's desire to lead actions and lines of work to link research groups and centers on aging and old age, strengthening each National Society and Association of Geriatrics and Gerontology with members of RIES-LAC, thereby promoting the publication of scientific articles, organizing meetings, promoting derived products, and working collaboratively as a Region.
- g) The favorable opinion of the Pan American Health Organization regarding the creation of RIES-LAC, expressed by Dr. Enrique Vega, Chief of the Healthy Life Course Unit.
- h) The enthusiastic support for the proposal (RIES-LAC) from participants at the IX COMLAT-IAGG Congress in May 2023, Medellín, Colombia, which unanimously approved the creation of RIES-LAC.

The initial governance of the Network will include a Coordinator, Area Coordinators (Geriatrics and Gerontology), and Inter-Area Managers (collaboration networks, research, advanced human capital formation, interaction with the environment, and public policies). A Substitute Coordinator, Substitute Area Coordinator, and Substitute Inter-Area Manager will also be designated. Additionally, within each area, members will be part of micronetworks/thematic lines, each managed by a leader. Two collegiate bodies will be created: the Central Committee (Coordinator, Substitute Coordinator, and Coordinators of the two areas) and the Executive Committee (Central Committee plus Inter-Area Managers). RIES-LAC will interact with COMLAT through the Education area.

The general objective of RIES-LAC is to promote network collaboration among academics from universities in the LAC region, strengthen research and human capital formation in aging and old age, and, consequently, establish connections with the environment and develop proposals for public policies that promote healthy aging and improve the quality of life of older people.

The specific objectives in the domain of aging are:

- a) To promote the creation of Collaborative Networks.
- b) To foster basic and applied research (clinical and others).

- c) To collaborate with advanced human capital formation.
- d) To encourage interaction with the environment.
- e) To generate proposals for public policies.

The micronetworks, depending on the area, are as follows:

- a) Gerontology (Physical Activity and Healthy Eating; Psychoneurology, Neurosciences, and Mental Health; Functionality, Rehabilitation, and Accessibility; and Social, Community, and Institutional Gerontology).
- b) Geriatrics (Clinical; Psychogeriatrics; Functionality and Social).

Currently, 140 academics are affiliated with 83 universities in 17 countries in the LAC region (in decreasing order of membership: Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Uruguay, Cuba, Guatemala, Dominican Republic). Approximately 60% work in the field of Gerontology and 40% in Geriatrics. There is gender parity (45% of men and 55% of women), involving both older and younger individuals from diverse professions (over 30), postgraduates, and specialists.

Some of the expected outcomes are as follows:

- a) Collaborative networks (intra-areas and inter-areas).
- b) Research (projects funded by national and international sources and scientific publications).
- c) Human capital formation (international coordination projects, thesis co-supervision, internships for doctoral students, academic visits).
- d) Interaction with the environment (conferences, lectures, workshops, videos, interviews, social media, website).
- e) Public policies (documents on healthy aging and older people to be presented to COMLAT-IAGG, university rectors, government authorities, legislators, international organizations, etc.).

RIES-LAC's vision is to be internationally recognized as a leading network in Gerontology and Geriatrics, characterized by collaboration between academics and universities for innovation and development of research, advanced human capital formation, and connections with the environment, contributing to the formulation of public policies, with an interdisciplinary approach and excellence to achieve healthy aging.

We hope that RIES-LAC will transform the perspective of universities in the LAC region regarding healthy aging. Therefore, we invite academics from universities to continue joining the Network and publishing their research in LAC journals.

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Conflict of interest

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IP: conceptualization, validation, visualization, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing. MM: conceptualization,

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