



**African Population and
Health Research Center**

Transforming lives in Africa through research.



Transforming Early Childhood and Long-term Care in Africa through Research, Policy and Action

Introduction

The provision of early childhood and long-term care lies at the core of both social well-being and economic development, yet these forms of care remain persistently undervalued and under-resourced across societies. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) defines the “care economy” as encompassing both unpaid and paid care work across all life stages. It also emphasizes that without adequate recognition, support, and investment in care, gender inequalities will persist.

The burden of care is multi-dimensional, spanning emotional, physical, and economic strains for both unpaid and paid caregivers. Unpaid caregivers often experience time poverty and diminished access to paid employment, while formal care workers face low wages, job insecurity, and limited recognition, conditions that reinforce systemic gender disparities (Barrett et al., 2025). With the growing global demand for both early childhood and long-term care, driven by demographic shifts, urbanization, and changing family structures, there is an urgent need for coherent strategies and policy reforms to build sustainable, equitable, and resilient care systems (ILO, 2018).

The African Population and Health Research Center work on the care economy seeks to nurture and inform the development of transformative care systems in Africa, which embrace the solidarity, and distinctive contexts in the region whilst addressing gender and social inequalities. We focus on care across the life course, perceptions and practices, care infrastructure and services, policies, and programs, in pursuit of improving care outcomes for both care recipients and providers.

Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Care

APHRC has a holistic approach to early care with the aim of promoting the health and wellbeing of children aged 0 - 8 years. Guided by the nurturing care framework, the Center conducts research and engages policymakers to address barriers that limit access to good health, adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, safety and security and opportunities for early learning. The ECD unit aims to improve ECD outcomes through quality childcare environments that align with the nurturing care framework.

Focus Areas:

Childcare Patterns: We work on establishing ways to promote quality childcare, especially for the urban poor, and demonstrate its impact on children's developmental outcomes. Our work also operationalizes and prioritizes the nurturing care framework components that promote child development, particularly among vulnerable children. Under this program, our work also examines gender roles in childcare, focusing on the nexus between unpaid care work and women's economic empowerment.

Integration of ECD into the Healthcare System: This program is dedicated to advancing the integration of ECD into healthcare systems to ensure that young children receive comprehensive support during their most critical developmental stages. By embedding ECD services into existing healthcare systems, we aim to enhance early care through regular health check-ups, developmental screenings, and parental empowerment. Health facilities are ideally positioned to support early childhood by providing access to nurturing care, cognitive stimulation, and timely interventions for developmental delays, all of which can be incorporated into routine maternal and child health services.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Africa: This program of work establishes how to support young children and their families from the prenatal period to middle school at age eight. We employ an approach that promotes equitable access to high-quality early childhood experiences. We explore ways to enhance school readiness as children enter the school system at the age of four, ensuring their success in education.

Why Early Childhood Matters:

The first 1,000 days of life – from conception to age three – are the foundation for lifelong health, learning, and well-being. Scientific evidence confirms that the early childhood period shapes brain architecture, cognitive function, emotional regulation, and social behavior. Yet, millions of children across Africa experience poor nutrition, limited early learning opportunities, inadequate caregiving, and unsafe or unstimulating environments. These deprivations compromise their ability to thrive during the early years, academic outcomes and later in life, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.



Long-term Care (LTC) for Older People

LTC for older people is the formal and informal care provided to elders who are no longer able to live independently without the assistance of others. There is a growing and often unmet need for LTC for older people in Africa amidst rapidly changing demographic, social, epidemiological and environmental context. These shifts contribute to substantial increases in chronic and age-related conditions leading to a rise in disease and disability burden, consequently, demand and need for LTC. Despite this growing demand, aging and care needs of older people remain largely under-researched and under-prioritized in policy, programming, and public discourse across the continent. Older people often face unique and intersecting vulnerabilities including poverty, poor health access, ageism, neglect, and limited social protection.

Focus Areas:

Understanding the gaps, limitations and opportunities for LTC:

At APHRC, we seek to understand the strains in the informal care systems, the emerging formal LTC economy and the capabilities of the LTC economy to meet the needs and demands for LTC in the region.

Integration of LTC into health systems: An integrated healthcare system enables organization of healthcare and social care services in a coordinated continuum of care particularly for older persons with complex care needs. APHRC advocates for LTC systems integrated within the healthcare systems and are adopted for the Africa context and strengthens community-based services through partnerships between the state, the private sector, and not-for-profit organizations.

Social protection: Africa has various contributory and non-contributory social protection schemes. While there are none that exclusively provide LTC insurance, these systems indirectly contribute to LTC needs. APHRC evaluates the reach and adequacy of social protection systems and safety nets in meeting the LTC needs of older people.



**Access APHRC research
by scanning the QR code provided below**



References

Barrett, A., Consolandi, M., Fattorini, E., & Vecchione, K. (2025). Altruistic ageing: how age inequality contributes to care work's construction as a burden.

Ageing and Society, 1–18. doi:10.1017/S0144686X25100342

International Labour Organization (ILO). (2018). Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work. International Labour Office.

https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/pub-lic/%40dgreports/%40dcomm/%40publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf

International Labour Organization (ILO). (n.d.). The care economy.

Retrieved October 23, 2025, from

<https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/care-economy>