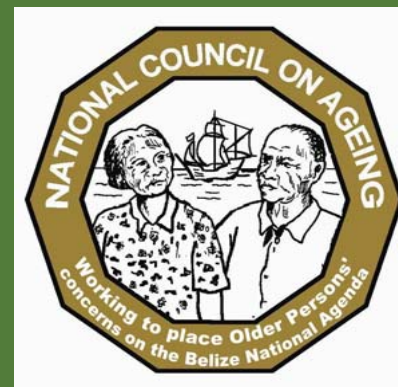


2nd Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing

4th – 6th December
Brasilia, Brazil



Lindy Jeffery
Executive Director
National Council on Ageing
BELIZE



Welcome to Belize



Introduction

- Belize is:
 - Only English speaking country in Central America.
 - Home to many people of different cultures and languages, which makes it unique to the region.
 - A young country both in terms of its people and development.
 - Gained independence from Great Britain on 21st September 1981

People of Belize

Cultures:

- Mestizo
- Creole
- Ketchi, Yucatec and Mopan Maya
- Garifuna
- East Indian
- German & Dutch Mennonites
- Chinese & Taiwanese
- Lebanese
- Arab
- African



Languages of Belize

- Although English is the official language of Belize the most common and widely spoken version is Creole. However, the Maya, Garifuna, Mennonite and Asian communities speak their own languages.
- Spanish is spoken by the majority of the population since the immigration of many Central American people throughout the 90's

**Belize: 2007 Mid-Year Population Estimates
By Age Group and Sex**

	Total	%	Male	%	Female	%
0 - 4	37,220	11.9	18,455	11.9	18,765	12.0
5 - 9	42,170	13.5	21,420	13.8	20,750	13.2
10 - 14	41,800	13.4	21,340	13.8	20,460	13.0
15 - 19	35,285	11.3	17,840	11.5	17,445	11.1
20 - 24	25,035	8.0	12,310	8.0	12,725	8.1
25 - 29	21,575	6.9	9,965	6.4	11,610	7.4
30 - 34	20,965	6.7	9,740	6.3	11,225	7.2
35 - 39	19,240	6.2	9,145	5.9	10,095	6.4
40 - 44	16,585	5.3	8,060	5.2	8,525	5.4
45 - 49	13,075	4.2	6,635	4.3	6,440	4.1
50 - 54	10,150	3.3	5,195	3.4	4,955	3.2
55 - 59	7,095	2.3	3,615	2.3	3,480	2.2
60 - 64	6,010	1.9	3,060	2.0	2,950	1.9
65 - 69	5,025	1.6	2,645	1.7	2,380	1.5
70 - 74	4,000	1.3	2,135	1.4	1,865	1.2
75 - 79	2,900	0.9	1,470	1.0	1,430	0.9
80 - 84	1,625	0.5	795	0.5	830	0.5
85+	1,725	0.6	840	0.5	885	0.6
TOTAL	311,480	100.0	154,665	100.0	156,815	100.0

Source: Statistical Institute of Belize

Demography

■ Mid Year 2007 Population Statistics

- Population of Belize: 311,480 people
- Older Persons 60 years +: 21,285 or 6.6%
- Male Persons over 60yrs: 10,945
- Female Persons over 60yrs: 10,340

- Population under 30yrs: 203,985 or 64.6%
- Population under 35 yrs: 224,050 or 71.8%

Attitude to Older Persons

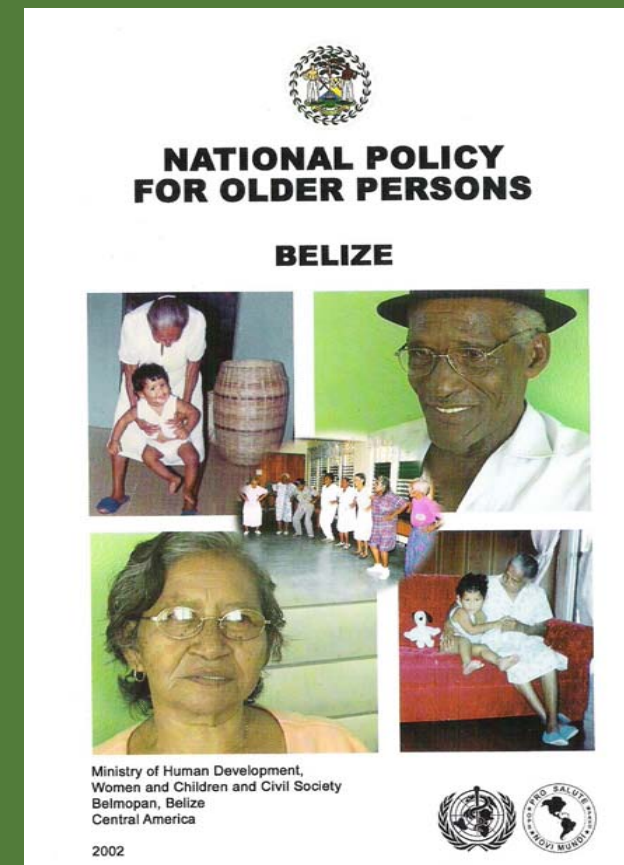
They are
Invisible

Violence & Discrimination

- Although violence is an issue in Belize it affects the youth and few reported incidences of violence against older people - so few that the Department of Human Services and police are unable to provide statistics.
- However, discrimination is evident in so many areas of Belizean society. Older People are invisible and society tends to forget that they exist because they are small in number and older people themselves have lacked the will and support to fight against the discrimination.

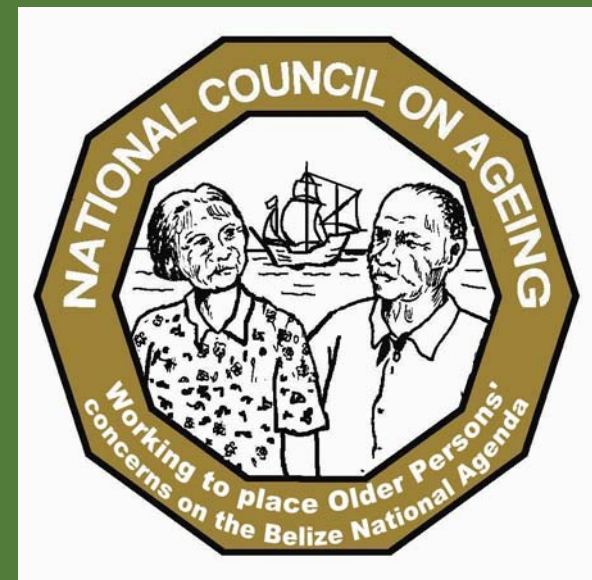
Government of Belize response to issues of Ageing

- National Policy for Older Persons adopted by Cabinet in June 2002.
- It identifies 9 programme areas:
 - National Mechanism
 - Education & Media
 - Health & Nutrition
 - Social Welfare
 - Income Security
 - Housing & environment
 - Family
 - Legal
 - Research



The **National Council on Ageing** was established in February 2003 and is the advisory, advocacy and coordinating mechanism of Government and acts to promote, implement, monitor and evaluate the national policy.

- An **Executive Director** was appointed in November 2003
- A **Secretariat Office** was opened in July 2004.
- A **Programme Officer** was appointed in July 2007



NCA

- The NCA is a Quasi-Government organization.
- **Executive Committee** of 17 representatives from Government, Non-Government, Civil Society, International & Business Community, the Church and of course Older Persons
- Presided over by a chairperson appointed by the Minister of Human Development.
- Operational funding 2007/8: \$114,000 / \$57,000 US plus Official Charities Fund of \$50,000 / \$25,000 US for programme support.
- Projects regularly funded by PAHO & UNFPA

Service Organizations

- NGO's that provide a service to older persons in the social & health related areas are under resourced both human & financial.
- Only 4 receive a subvention from Government, which does not cover their complete operational costs.
- Approximately \$306,712 = \$153,356US for 2007/8

Social Services

3 Residential Care Homes in Belize offer less than 100 beds for older people most in need, many with chronic illness or dementia.

- Only one home is completely funded by Government whilst the other 2 are part funded so rely upon charitable donations and community support.
- 2 Homeless Shelters: 1 managed by Salvation Army & 1 by GOB occupied largely by older people

GOB Budget allocation for 2007/8: Approx:
\$670,598 = \$335,299US

NCA as Advocate

National Plan of Action for Older Persons:

Directs action on:

- Raising public awareness
- Facilitating training
- Introducing programmes to support member organizations working with older persons in the community
- Acknowledging the Human Rights of Older People

VOICE

Representative Organization of Older Persons in Belize

Officially launched on 1st October 2007 on International Day of Older Persons.

VOICE seeks to raise awareness of older persons concerns and issues and advocate through collective action to make changes that will improve the quality of life for older people





Prime Minister Said Musa attended launching of VOICE to provide key note address.

Public Awareness

- Use of every possible means to educate public about population ageing and concerns of older persons.
- Publications / Posters
- Media: New initiative - The Golden Years

The Golden Years

- 1 Hour Radio Programme, aired twice per month on a national radio station, to inform and educate the population about issues relating to ageing and older persons. It is co-hosted by an older person and provides older persons with an opportunity to discuss issues and concerns.



Both Mrs. Gwen Gillett & Ms. Leotine Gillett-Lewis are over 80 years old

Training

- Human Rights & Fundamental Freedoms of Older Persons.
- Capacity Building for older persons
- Home Healthcare of Older Persons as a support to family and community

Networking / Collaboration

- Establishing & Maintaining good and effective relationships within areas that will make a difference to the lives of Older People

Belize Social Security Board

- **2003**: Introduction of NCP for women 65 years plus of \$75.00BZ (\$37.50US) per month.
- **Dec 2007**: Increase to \$100.00 (\$50.00US) per month.
- **January 2008**: Introduction of NCP for men 67 years
- **Issue**: Inequality of benefits

Ministry of Health

- **2005**: Introduction of National Health Insurance Scheme in poorest area of Belize City (Southside).
- **2006**: Introduction to Southern Districts of Belize in Toledo and Stann Creek considered to the poorest areas of Belize
- **December 2007**: Complete coverage of NHI to country of Belize.
- Free **available** medication for older people

Trends...

- Belize is seeing a definite increase in problems related to human behaviour and lifestyle:
- Hypertension; Diabetes; Personal Injury; Road Traffic Incidents; Tobacco Related Illness; Violence including Domestic Violence; Adolescent Pregnancy; Abortion; HIV / AIDS; STIs and Suicide.

Issues

- Older people are living longer
- Life expectancy at birth is increasing
69.9yrs for men & 74.4yrs for women.

However.

- Childbirth is also increasing, as can be seen from statistics, & therefore programmes geared towards health & education of young people will remain a priority.
- Rise in chronic health conditions mean older persons are not living a good quality life

Challenges

1: Planning for Old Age

- If Belize is to achieve MDG Goal #1, the Government needs to develop a strategy to provide financial security through Universal Pension Fund for older people.
- Younger people must also learn to plan for their old age – no guarantees in life for long term care.

2: Public Awareness

- Reduce invisibility of older people by promoting a more positive image of ageing.
- Promotion, support and capacity building of **VOICE** to become the strong organization that it has the potential to be.

3: Intergenerational work:

- The Generation Gap is widening largely due to the disparity in population % of older persons to younger persons, therefore important to bring old & young together to develop mutual respect & understanding.

4: Research & Collection of Qualitative Data

The NCA needs to keep up-dated on the situation of older persons in Belize in order to qualify why changes in policy and practice are necessary.

5: The Poverty of Old Age

- The majority of older people are poor and live below the poverty line.
- NCP & Social Assistance Benefits are inadequate and fall below the poverty level.

Legislation

- At the present time there is no legislation that protects older persons from discrimination and abuse so they are easily taken advantage of.
- The NCA is currently drafting an **Older Persons Act** which will provide greater legal protection and increase their basic human rights.
- The draft Act will be completed by the end of December 2007 and be submitted to the office of the Solicitor General.
- **Draft Regulations for Residential Homes for Older Persons** is currently with Solicitor General's office
- October 2007: Amendments to the Domestic Violence Act were passed through Cabinet to cover all women in a home including older women.

Lessons Learnt

- Older People are definitely not a priority group in Belize. Acknowledged for their vulnerability but not in societal conscience as a section of the population whose needs should be taken seriously.
- NCA as an advocating organization needs to work harder to remind Government of its responsibilities and Belizean society of 'the things to come' – the future problems

