The growth in average life expectancy ranks as one of the finest achievements of the 20th Century, affecting societies across the Global North and South. But this change in population raises major issues for all types of social and cultural institutions.

The Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA) is a leading international centre working to extend the research agenda on ageing, improve the quality of life of older people, and transform perceptions about ageing societies.

MICRA is working with a range of international and national organisations to develop research and policy issues relating to ageing. We are committed to developing research with local authorities in Greater Manchester and with Manchester City Council, the first UK city to join the World Health Organization’s network of age-friendly cities and communities.

With over 1800 public members including nearly 300 academics from the humanities, medical and human sciences, life sciences and engineering, MICRA is pioneering new approaches to many of the issues experienced in the later phases of the life course. Key areas of expertise at Manchester include: frailty, skin ageing, falls, dementia, cell biology, regenerative medicine, work, retirement and pensions, health and social inequalities in later life, minority ethnic ageing, and urbanisation and ageing.

MICRA is leading the way in developing new methodologies such as training older people as co-researchers, sharing the design, implementation and analysis of projects. This approach is proving especially valuable in reaching older people living in poverty or those experiencing social isolation.

Developing inter-disciplinary research is a key task for advancing work in the field of ageing.

Professor Chris Phillipson
Director, Manchester Institute of Collaborative Research on Ageing

Influencing the debate on ageing populations

Members of MICRA play an influential role shaping debates on different aspects of population ageing, with strong links to government, non- and intergovernmental organisations (eg the World Health Organisation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the European Union), local government, research councils and national charities.

Researchers linked with MICRA are playing a significant role in discussions around the impact of social and health inequalities across the life course, the global impact of dementia, issues relating to the biological and social determinants of frailty, and the research and policy implications of an extended working life.

Members of MICRA serve on a range of scientific advisory boards and editorial boards of international journals.
Selected research areas:

Skin ageing

Our skin ages in two distinct ways: naturally with the passage of time, and in response to external factors mainly through sun exposure. World-leading experts in clinical medicine, immunology, wound healing, and biology, explore both processes using a range of advanced techniques. Researchers are involved in extensive clinical trials to determine skin responses to anti-ageing products and to assess their effectiveness. These studies have been supported by a variety of commercial sources including L’Oreal and Boots.

Creating age-friendly neighbourhoods

Addressing physical and mental health issues does not mean neglecting the well-being and promotion of independence in older people. Communities need to support older people who choose to live in their own homes and maintain connections to communities, neighbours and families. We have developed a number of projects in the field of urbanisation and ageing, exploring the contribution of the social and built environment to improve the well-being of older people.

Dementia: from cell to society

The University has unrivalled cross-disciplinary breadth of expertise in research in the field of dementia. In collaboration with external partners, Dementia@Manchester aims to make a major contribution to understanding neurodegenerative mechanisms, identify potential treatments, advance evidence for prevention, and to explore how to live well with dementia as an individual with the support of carers and the community.

Sexual function and satisfaction

Our research is investigating the neglected topic of sexuality and intimacy in later life, with the aim of helping to predict future health service needs around sexual health. This research, covering over 8000 adults between 50 and 95 years of age, aims to challenge stereotypes about the nature of sexuality in old age. Evidence shows that sexual relationships have a positive impact on quality of life with benefits including better overall health and longer life.

Working with stakeholders

Organisations that work on behalf of older people play a critical role in how policies and services are developed and delivered. The University has a memorandum of agreement with Age UK, collaborating on research initiatives, seminars and publications. We create projects and resources with a range of stakeholders including the Government Office for Science, Royal Institute of British Architects, International Longevity Centre-UK and Manchester City Council.

Dr Neil Pendleton
Manchester Medical School, The University of Manchester

A healthy later life is everyone’s ambition. Our research draws on world-leading expertise from sociology to medicine, and engineering to architecture to address the challenges and the opportunities of an ageing population.

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