

# Preface

The Conference Series on Aging in the Americas (CAA) was launched in 2001 to promote interdisciplinary collaboration on social science issues research on health of the growing population of older Hispanics in the United States and Mexico. The current volume contains scholarly research presented during the sixth installment of the series focused on “Aging in the Americas” and was sponsored by the National Institute on Aging of the National Institutes of Health (R-13 5R13AG029767). The conference series was initiated because the conference organizers believed that demographic transitions in aging occurring across the Americas in the first half of the twenty-first century would be transformative and create unprecedented social, economic, and political challenges. The populations of Mexico and the United States were a focal interest for the conference series due to the historic interlocking of the two societies, the long contested nature of migration and the border, and the dynamic population growth of the Mexican-origin population in the United States. Conference organizers were aware of a significant number of active and concerned scholars who were using unprecedented amounts of information from field surveys and administrative data collected in Mexico and the United States. This research had importance for advancing knowledge in social science, health and public policy, and an outlet was needed for organized presentation and publication to further develop the field.

This volume is an invitation to readers to participate in unraveling a very complicated story of Hispanic population diaspora and health. A comprehensive understanding of issues affecting health and aging of Hispanic populations in the Americas is a global research challenge. This volume has a two-nation perspective, Mexico- U.S., which nonetheless incorporates many general themes of relevance to global aging research. The topics covered in this volume span demography, migration, economics of sustainable aging, social networks and support, determinants of health risk, and medical and social services. Considerable attention is given to key policy issues in recognition that pose current and emerging problems that require effective societal responses.

The approach taken in the volume is rooted in social science methods and supplemented by other disciplines as required to provide comprehensive perspectives. There are four sections designed by our Co-Editors; Sect. 1: Demographic

and Economic Implications for Health and Well-being in Mexico and the USA (J. Angel); Sect. 2: New Data and Methodological Approaches on Aging in Mexico and the United States (K. Markides); Sect. 3: Binational, Transnational Migration Perspectives: Mexico, Latin America, and the USA (W. Vega); and, Sect. 4: Cost and Coverage: Fiscal Impacts (F. Torres-Gil).

The ethnic descriptors “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably in this volume to inadequately capture the rich histories and distinctive nationality of Spanish-speaking people with origins in the Western Hemispheres. Hispanics (or Latinos) have a great linguistic diversity including dialects of Spanish and indigenous (native) tongues and equally diverse physical—phenotypic features derived from mixed African, Native Indian, and European heritage. This rich diversity is reflected in the Mexican-origin population which is the point of interest in this volume. The ethnic diversity of the Americas is relevant to patterns of migration, resettlement, and social behavior in the United States. These aspects of social life and social adjustments have been underappreciated and understudied in the past, especially as they affect aging people, and are essential for accurately characterizing critical health-related processes.

The tools and methods for doing transnational research are improving steadily, and we now have more than two generations of experienced investigators in the field. More importantly, there is a greater receptivity and capacity in the academic research world to provide accurate and actionable information for improving public and private services benefitting the well-being of older people. Today social science researchers can have greater confidence that the implications of their work, when appropriately focused for community, organizational, and governmental audiences, will be understood and appreciated. It is now evident in both Mexico and the United States that public policy and health policy must be designed to address social determinants of health to keep aging people functioning at the highest level for as long as possible, and to provide Hispanic elders with information to live well and become effective advocates for their own health—not simply consumers of late life medical and social care.

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