

Analysis of the Current Situation and Countermeasures for Qinhuangdao City's Active Response to Population Aging and the Construction of Elderly Care Service System

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Abstract: With the continuous development of global technology and the improvement of medical standards, the aging of the population is an inevitable consequence. In recent years, the decline in birth rate and mortality rate has accelerated the proportion of the aging population in China. However, public elderly care institutions still mainly focus on providing basic support, while private elderly care institutions face issues such as incomplete infrastructure, weak professional service capabilities in rehabilitation nursing and emotional support, insufficient follow-up funding, management and operation mechanisms that need improvement, conflicts with traditional ideologies, and high elderly care costs. In recent years, various regions across the country have actively explored new models of socialized home-based elderly care services. However, due to deviations in social awareness and the weakness of professional service teams, it is more important to fully leverage the government's role in leading socialized home-based elderly care services.

Keywords: Aging of population; Pension services; Qinhuangdao City

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1. Research background and significance

1.1. Research background

In the context of developing healthy aging, the issue of population aging brings new challenges to China's socio-economic development and transformation^[1]. Simultaneously, it presents new opportunities for the elderly industry to drive economic growth and stimulate consumption. Since the implementation of the "14th Five-Year Plan", various regions across the country have taken multiple measures to seize the "window period" and actively address population aging. With the continuous deepening of the coordinated development strategy for Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei, the cross-regional allocation of resources has created new opportunities for the development of

elderly care services. As a tourism and resident city, Qinhuangdao, Hebei Province, is not only a famous summer resort in China, but has also been listed as a pilot city for comprehensive reform of the national elderly care service industry, comprehensive innovation in the national rehabilitation assistive device industry, community rental services of rehabilitation assistive devices, and the special action of nationwide city-enterprise linkage for inclusive elderly care ^[2]. Therefore, Qinhuangdao has unique advantages in developing the elderly care industry.

1.2. Research significance

1.2.1. Qinhuangdao faces new challenges in the construction of its elderly care service system

Like most cities in China, Qinhuangdao faces new challenges as the demand for elderly care services continues to increase. Firstly, there is insufficient dynamism in the coordinated development of home-based and community-based elderly care, and social capital investment in elderly care services is not yet sufficient to achieve profitable development. Secondly, the target population is still focused on elderly individuals with disabilities, semi-disabilities, or injuries that burden family caregivers, leaving a gap in meeting the diversified needs of elderly care services. Thirdly, the quality of service provided by elderly care institutions varies, and the overall service level needs to be improved ^[3]. Fourthly, the needs of rural elderly individuals for daily care, health management, emotional support, and other services are not yet effectively met.

1.2.2. The importance and impact of developing the elderly care industry in Qinhuangdao

With the deepening implementation of the coordinated development of Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei, Qinhuangdao fully utilizes its comparative advantages in location and ecology. It insists on developing both elderly care undertakings and industries simultaneously, fully opens up the elderly care service market, encourages and guides Beijing's elderly care projects to extend their layout to the city, and actively promotes the integrated development of elderly care in Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei. Firstly, the local government has applied to include Qinhuangdao in the scope of the extension layout of elderly care projects around Beijing, effectively enhancing the influence of Qinhuangdao's elderly care industry in the Beijing-Tianjin region. Secondly, it explores and amplifies the superimposed policy advantages of the Beidaihe Life and Health Industry Innovation Demonstration Zone, continuously and efficiently promoting the accelerated transformation and development of training and treatment institutions. According to the local civil affairs department, as of now, 17 high-end elderly care institutions, such as Ping'an Qinkang Yiyang, have been put into operation as health and wellness projects for the transformation of training and treatment institutions. Qinhuangdao's characteristic elderly care service system, which coordinates home and community institutions and combines medical and health care, has basically been formed ^[4]. Thirdly, in 2023, Qinhuangdao also applied for funding support for two elderly care institution renovation and upgrading projects, namely the Hebei Ping'an Health Group's Beidaihe Comprehensive Health and Wellness Project and the Changli County Centralized Supply Center (public-private partnership) renovation and upgrading project, with a total investment of over 139 million yuan. This article summarizes and refines the problems and reasons faced by local elderly care services through interviews with government departments, institutions, communities, and the elderly, providing guidance for the next step of elderly care service work in Qinhuangdao and also providing a reference for similar regions to carry out elderly care services.

2. Current status and main issues of elderly care service system construction in Qinhuangdao City

2.1. Analysis of population aging trends in Qinhuangdao City

According to the results of the “Seventh National Population Census”, the permanent population of Qinhuangdao is 3.1369 million, of which 732,600 are aged 60 and above, accounting for 23.36%; 509,100 are aged 65 and above, accounting for 16.23%^[5]. The proportion of the population aged 60 and above and 65 and above is 4.66% and 2.73% higher than the national average, respectively. By comparing the results of the three population censuses in **Table 1**, it can be seen that the population aged 65 and above has increased from 215,600 in 2000 to 509,100 in 2020, more than doubling in number. At the same time, the proportion of the population aged 65 and above has also increased from 7.83% to 16.23%. This indicates that the number of elderly people in Qinhuangdao is increasing year by year and showing an accelerated upward trend. Assuming that the birth rate and death rate remain relatively unchanged from current levels, it is estimated that over the next 30 years, the proportion of the population aged 65 and above in Qinhuangdao’s permanent population will exceed 25%. The continuous expansion of the elderly population would result in the increasing number of elderly people with disabilities and dementia, the increasing burden on society and families, and the changing demand for elderly care services, medical security, and health services.

Table 1. List of Qinhuangdao City’s aging population

Year	Permanent city population (Person)	Number of people aged 60 and above	The proportion of the population aged 60 and above	Number of people aged 65 and above	The proportion of the population aged 65 and above
2000	2753962	312942	11.36%	215603	7.83%
2010	2987605	432948	14.49%	282550	9.46%
2020	3136879	732638	23.36%	509121	16.23%

Note: Data source: Fifth, sixth, and seventh national population censuses in Qinhuangdao City

2.2. Current status of elderly care service system construction in Qinhuangdao

In recent years, Qinhuangdao has continuously strengthened the foundation of elderly care services, addressed shortcomings and weaknesses, and focused on building an elderly care industry brand with unique characteristics of Qinhuangdao, featuring “healthy aging and ecological aging”, to high-quality meet the demand for elderly care services. As of the end of 2022, there were 62 elderly care institutions in the local area with a total of 10,171 beds, and nursing beds accounted for 55% of the total. 61 community home-based elderly care service centers have been established. There are 192 daycare service facilities in 168 coded communities across the city, achieving full coverage, full operation, informatization, and remote monitoring and management of community daycare service facilities, which has always been in a leading position in the province.

2.3. Main issues in the construction of the elderly care service system in Qinhuangdao

2.3.1. Low overall occupancy rate of elderly care service institutions

The occupancy rate of local elderly care institutions is less than 35%. Some institutions have a “shortage of beds”, while others have “vacant beds”, indicating unreasonable resource allocation. For example, some public nursing homes have outdated facilities, poor food quality, and a poor living environment. Mid-to-high-end private elderly care institutions emphasize personalized demand services, but they usually charge higher fees, which most elderly

people cannot afford, resulting in a significant gap in inclusive elderly care institutions^[6]. The lack of operating entities for community day care stations has led to most home-based elderly care services being provided by community staff as part-time jobs, and there is an urgent need to improve operational capacity.

2.3.2. Gaps in the public welfare philosophy of elderly care service institutions

With the advent of the silver hair wave, various social capital has entered the elderly care industry, involving multiple fields such as home-based, community, and institutional care. The profit-seeking nature of social capital has led some businesses to invest blindly, pursue large projects, and take a high-end approach, aiming to pursue high returns. Some even target high-end healthy elderly individuals. Therefore, the government needs to further guide and strengthen the public welfare philosophy, actively build a diversified elderly care service market that meets the needs of multi-level elderly individuals, and increase care and attention for low-income and disadvantaged elderly groups.

2.3.3. The quality and capability of the elderly care service talent team need to be improved

The management and operational levels of elderly care service institution operators vary widely, and the construction of a professional management team has not yet been formed. Due to traditional beliefs, regional economies, and other factors, practitioners generally face issues such as low overall quality, professional level, and lack of professional care knowledge. In particular, elderly care service institutions lack professional talents such as rehabilitation technicians, nutritionists, and senior nursing staff. There are also deficiencies in assessment and incentives. Many years of cultivating excellent elderly care practitioners have been lost due to the attraction of high-paying areas such as Beijing and Tianjin, further leading to a shortage of talent in elderly care service institutions.

3. Suggestions for the future development of the elderly care service system in Qinhuangdao City

3.1. Strengthen the promotion of elderly care services and guide the updating of the traditional concept of “providing for the aged”

Some people believe that the stereotype of sending elderly parents to elderly care institutions is a sign of children’s disrespect, and this mindset is deeply ingrained. The government needs to continuously increase the promotion of elderly care services. By inviting the elderly and their children to visit and experience elderly care institutions, people’s understanding of institutional care can be enhanced, and a correct concept of elderly care can be established. At the same time, it is necessary to deepen the reform of elderly care institutions, improve the operational efficiency of public elderly care institutions, optimize the diversified supply of elderly care services, establish positive access and negative exit mechanisms, and continuously enhance the vitality of elderly care institutions^[7]. For the service needs of the elderly who are advanced in age, disabled, intellectually disabled, living alone, or empty-nesters, a dynamic management information database for special groups of elderly people should be established, the scope of aging-friendly renovations should be expanded, and professional social organizations or institutions should be entrusted to strengthen service guarantees for these special groups.

3.2. Strengthen institutional normalization guidance to further accelerate the development of elderly care service institutions

The government should implement preferential policies and financial subsidies, encourage various types of social

capital to invest in the elderly care service industry, establish elderly care service institutions for different income groups, and guide more enterprises to provide affordable and inclusive elderly care services that are affordable for most elderly people. Adhere to the principles of government leadership, social participation, market operation, overall planning and development, basic security, and diverse inclusivity. Develop practical implementation details and evaluation methods, and promote the standardization and normalization of elderly care services. Improve the comprehensive supervision mechanism of elderly care service institutions and promote the construction of a social credit system in the field of elderly care services. Implement full-process, full-chain, and comprehensive supervision of elderly care service institutions, and implement disciplinary measures for elderly care service institutions and personnel who have lost trust and violated laws and regulations, creating a stable environment for elderly care ^[8].

3.3. Strengthen the diversified construction of elderly care services and continuously optimize the supply of elderly care services

The integrated development of medical and elderly care services should be promoted. The government should promote the transformation and upgrading of elderly care institutions, increase nursing beds and facilities, support elderly care institutions and medical and health institutions to sign cooperation agreements, and encourage medical institutions to provide “mobile” rehabilitation, nursing, medication, and other home-based services ^[9]. Use community health service stations to enhance the medical and nursing capabilities of community daycare centers. Enrich public cultural service products to meet the entertainment and social needs of the elderly and alleviate their spiritual loneliness. In terms of rural elderly care, actively promote services such as centralized dining assistance, mobile medical assistance, fixed-point entertainment assistance, and home-based care assistance. Guide mature elderly care institutions in urban areas to open branches in rural areas, encourage the development of chained, standardized, and large-scale elderly care service groups, cultivate elderly care service brands, combine rural revitalization with local conditions, develop mutual assistance elderly care models that are suitable for rural characteristics, and gradually continue to promote them.

3.4. Improve and strengthen the construction of the elderly care service talent team

The government has taken multiple measures in terms of employment mechanisms, benefit guarantees, and vocational training to continuously improve the training mechanism for elderly care service talents. Build a three-in-one elderly care service talent training model that integrates “academic education + continuing education + practical training” to promote the professionalization and specialization of elderly care workers. Encourage vocational colleges to add majors related to elderly care services, build elderly care service training bases, strengthen pre-job and on-the-job training for elderly care practitioners, and continuously improve the quality of elderly care service practitioners ^[10]. Leveraging the resource advantages of medical and nursing institutions in Beijing and Tianjin, adopt methods such as entrusted training or targeted recruitment to better meet the needs of home-based elderly care services.

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