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the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are aged 65 and over has increased by 1.5 million, and the number of people aged 75 and over has increased by 1 million (Office of National Statistics 1999). The number of people aged 65 and over is projected to increase to 10.5 million by 2026, and the number of people aged 75 and over to 5.5 million (Office of National Statistics 1999).

There is a growing awareness of the need to develop strategies to meet the needs of the ageing population. The Department of Health (1999) has published a strategy for ageing, which sets out the government's commitment to improve the health and well-being of older people. The strategy is based on three main principles: (1) to improve the health and well-being of older people; (2) to ensure that older people are able to live independently; and (3) to ensure that older people are able to participate in society.

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