

The challenge of the Super Aged Society in Tokyo

- What is the meaning of “depopulating society”?

The total population in Japan started to decline in 2005. This turning point has come earlier than our expectation. The demographic change has forced us to reevaluate the basic premises of our social activities. A decreasing population cannot sustain continuous economic growth. Some pessimistic analysts warn that economic performance will shrink due to the decreasing labor force. The number of senior people will increase rapidly and the social security system will collapse soon.

Now, we are facing a fundamental issue for our society. “What is the true meaning of wealth?”, or “What kind of society are we aiming for?” We, as a society, are being asked these questions in terms of in political, economic and social activities.

- Current situation of aging population and declining birthrates in Tokyo

The residential population of Tokyo is 12.6million, which is about 10% of the total population in Japan.

In 2005, the birthrate in Tokyo was 1.00 and was the lowest rate in Japan, whose national birthrate was 1.26. The actual number of births in 2005 was 96,542. This was less than 50% of the number of babies born in 1965 during the second baby boom. This means that we are going to be suffering from a labor force shortage in the future.

The population of the elderly, aged 65 or over, in Tokyo was approximately 2.3 million by the end of 2005, which accounts for about 18% (aging rate) of the total population, compared with 20.1% nation wide.

The characteristic problems of Tokyo’s aging society are a) few homes with three generations living together, and b) a large, single elderly population. Adding to these problems, community relationships have weakened in urban areas. As a result of these combined issues, it is urgent for our society to support senior citizens and parents.

- Tokyo Metropolitan Health and Welfare Plan for Elderly

In 2000, the Long-term Care Insurance system was established in order to respond to society's major concern about aging, namely the care problem, whereby citizens can be assured that they will receive care and be supported by society as a whole. This system allows elderly people to use services of their choice and provide necessary welfare services and health and medical care services in a comprehensive and unified manner to persons requiring long-term care.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government formulated "Health and Welfare Plan for Elderly" to develop wide-ranging plans to cover welfare, health care and medical care for seniors.

The fundamental principles of this plan are:

- 1) Realization of a Society which supports the independence and dignity of seniors,
- 2) Extending an assured sense of security to the next generation

Along with the principles, TMG has been implementing various and wide-ranging measures:

- 1) Promote Prevention of Physical Deterioration and Encourage Health Development
- 2) Secure Community Life of Seniors
- 3) Maintain the Infrastructure and Improve Quality of Long-term Care Services
- 4) Establish a Practical and Accessible Long-term Care Insurance System
- 5) Promote Social Participation by seniors.

We are heading into a super-aging society, which has never been experienced before in the world. In 10 years, one in four residents of Tokyo, about 3 million people, will be 65 years or older.

TMG will promote senior citizens to play a highly active role in society utilizing their expertise and vigor. The goal is to change the image of senior

citizens from people who need support to people who invigorate society.

- Tokyo will experience the super aged society ahead of other countries. We will establish an advanced society invigorated by the power of senior citizens. Our experiences will hopefully contribute greatly to other Asian cities, in which the problem of an aging society is proceeding rapidly.