

The Role of State Agencies in Promoting Elderly Health: Sustainable Public Policy Management in Thailand

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Abstract.

Thailand is undergoing a rapid demographic transition, with individuals aged 60 and above projected to account for nearly 20% of the population by 2030. This shift presents critical challenges for public health systems, social services, and government policy implementation. State agencies play a central role in promoting elderly health through policy formulation, coordination, and evaluation. This study explores the role of Thai state agencies in implementing sustainable elderly health policies, emphasizing local governance, interagency coordination, and academic collaboration. A qualitative research approach was employed, including document analysis of national and local policy reports, program evaluations, and semi-structured interviews with government officials, local administrators, public health practitioners, and representatives from Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU). Findings indicate that interagency coordination, participatory community-based programs, and evidence-based policy design significantly enhance policy sustainability. Academic institutions contribute expertise through research and social innovation initiatives, which facilitate the integration of evidence, community engagement, and policy implementation. Challenges identified include fragmented funding, limited local administrative capacity, and digital literacy gaps among older adults. The study recommends strategies to strengthen institutional coordination, sustainable financing, digital inclusion, and participatory monitoring. These findings offer actionable guidance for policymakers to develop resilient and effective elderly health policies in Thailand.

Keywords: Elderly Health Policy, Public Administration, Sustainable Governance, Aging Society

1. Introduction

Thailand's aging population is increasing rapidly, creating new challenges for healthcare provision, social protection, and public policy planning. According to the National Statistical Office (2023), individuals aged 60 years and above are projected to represent nearly 20% of the population by 2030. State agencies, including the Ministry of Public Health, Department of Older Persons, and local administrative organizations, have been tasked with formulating and implementing policies to ensure the well-being of older adults.

The success of these policies relies on institutional capacity, coordination across agencies, integration with local community services, and collaboration with academic institutions. Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU) has contributed through community-based health promotion projects and social innovation initiatives, which serve as models for evidence-based

and participatory public policy (SSRU, 2024). Despite these efforts, challenges such as unstable funding, digital exclusion, and insufficient local monitoring remain prevalent. This study examines how state agencies can implement sustainable elderly health policies in collaboration with academic partners and local communities.

1.1 Research Objective

This study aims to examine the role of Thai state agencies in promoting elderly health through sustainable public policy. It focuses on governance structures, interagency coordination, and community-based initiatives, with the goal of providing practical recommendations to enhance policy sustainability, participation, and inclusivity.

2. Literature review

Institutional Coordination and Governance

Effective elderly health policy requires clear coordination among multiple state agencies. Fragmented governance can hinder implementation and create service delivery gaps. Harnngkiatiwong and Choptammasakun (2023) emphasize the need for integrated approaches that combine health, social welfare, and local governance for sustainable elderly care.

Community-Based and Participatory Governance

Community engagement in program design and implementation enhances policy sustainability. SSRU's "Integrated Elderly Health Promotion Project" combines exercise, nutrition education, and mental health support, demonstrating participatory governance that builds community ownership (SSRU, 2024). Research on political participation of older adults in Bangkok highlights the importance of involving seniors in decision-making to improve policy relevance and acceptance (Sukcheun, 2023).

Sustainable Financing and Resource Allocation

Stable financing is critical for long-term policy sustainability. Project-based funding can undermine continuity. Ring-fenced budgets and public-private partnerships are recommended to maintain consistent elderly health services (Jam Sai, Chotichaistit, & Juyamungsri, 2021).

Digital Inclusion and Innovation

Digital health technologies offer opportunities to enhance elderly care, yet many older adults face barriers due to limited digital literacy. SSRU programs address these gaps through community training and peer-led initiatives, ensuring that digital innovation is integrated with policy planning (SSRU, 2024).

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback

Monitoring and evaluation systems are crucial to policy sustainability. Local governments often lack robust data infrastructures, limiting evidence-based adjustments. Participatory feedback mechanisms, including inputs from older adults and community stakeholders, are essential for responsive policy governance (Phangnirund, 2023).

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the role of Thai state agencies in promoting elderly health and the sustainability of related public policies. Data were collected through multiple sources, including national and local policy documents, municipal reports, and project records from Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University (SSRU). In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, such as government officials, local administrators, public health practitioners, and SSRU project staff, to gain in-depth insights into policy implementation and community-based initiatives.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who were directly involved in the design or implementation of elderly health programs, ensuring that the data reflected practical experiences and expert perspectives. Data analysis followed a thematic approach, focusing on patterns related to governance structures, interagency coordination, community participation, resource allocation, and the sustainability of elderly health initiatives. This approach allowed the study to identify critical factors influencing the effectiveness and long-term impact of public policies for elderly health in Thailand.

4. Research Findings

The study revealed several key findings regarding the promotion of elderly health through state policies in Thailand.

Institutional coordination across relevant agencies remains fragmented, which limits the effectiveness of policy implementation. Overlapping responsibilities and unclear mandates often hinder the delivery of consistent services to older adults.

Community-based models have proven effective in enhancing policy sustainability. Initiatives by SSRU illustrate participatory care models that integrate health promotion, social engagement, and civic activities, fostering community ownership and resilience among the elderly population.

Financial sustainability remains a significant challenge. Many programs rely on short-term, project-based funding, which jeopardizes continuity. The lack of ring-fenced budgets for elderly health limits long-term planning and resource allocation.

Digital inclusion issues present barriers for older adults in accessing health services. Limited digital literacy and technology access prevent full participation, although community training programs have partially mitigated these challenges by providing skills and peer support.

Monitoring and feedback mechanisms are underdeveloped at the local level. Participatory feedback from community members and elderly beneficiaries is crucial for adaptive governance and evidence-based adjustments, yet such systems are often lacking, reducing opportunities to refine programs and improving accountability.

5. Results

To promote sustainable elderly health policies, several strategies are recommended based on the study's findings. Strengthening institutional coordination is essential; establishing inter-ministerial task forces can help align responsibilities across health, social welfare, and local governance agencies, reducing overlaps and improving service delivery.

Academic partnerships and collaborations with research institutions can provide valuable expertise to enhance program quality and support evidence-based policymaking. These partnerships facilitate the integration of research findings into community-based interventions, ensuring that policies are relevant and effective.

Ensuring financial sustainability is another critical factor. Implementing ring-fenced budgets for elderly health and encouraging public–private partnerships can help maintain long-term program continuity and reduce reliance on short-term project funding.

Digital inclusion must also be addressed, as limited digital literacy among older adults hinders access to health services. Programs that provide digital literacy training and subsidized access to technology can empower seniors to participate in modern healthcare initiatives and enhance the reach of policy interventions.

Finally, developing robust monitoring and evaluation systems is vital for adaptive governance. Participatory monitoring that incorporates feedback from the elderly and community stakeholders allows policymakers to refine programs, ensure accountability, and respond effectively to local needs, thereby improving the sustainability and impact of elderly health policies.

6. Conclusion

State agencies play a critical role in promoting elderly health in Thailand. However, challenges such as fragmented governance, unstable funding, and digital exclusion need to be effectively addressed. Collaboration with academic institutions and research-based initiatives can support the integration of evidence, community engagement, and policy development. Strengthening institutional coordination, ensuring sustainable financing, promoting digital inclusion, and implementing participatory monitoring systems are essential for designing resilient, inclusive, and effective elderly health policies that respond to the needs of Thailand's aging population.

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