

GERONTOLOGY

Bill of Rights for Aged

A bill of rights for senior citizens was approved by delegates to the White House Conference on Aging. It included the right and responsibility to keep active and independent.

► DELEGATES to the White House Conference on Aging in Washington, D. C., approved a nine-point bill of rights for senior citizens and outlined the obligations of persons over 65.

The central theme of both the obligations and the rights is to keep the elderly person working, active, productive and independent as long as possible.

The rights mapped out included "freedom from want in old age," a fair share of the community's recreational, educational, and medical resources, the right to obtain decent housing suited to needs of later years, to live independently, as one chooses—to live, to die, with dignity.

At the present level of income, it will be difficult for persons over 65 to enjoy freedom from want. Between 50% and 60% have incomes of less than \$1,000 per year, and medical costs in this age group are twice those for the average American.

The odds for maintaining mental and physical health through age 75 are good and getting better. For this group, the right to

be useful and to keep on working is particularly pertinent.

Another point in the report is that many women will be entering the labor market for the first time after age 50, indicating the right to begin working at a relatively late date. The report was drafted by the section on Population Trends: Social and Economic Implications.

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Kin of Aged Should Help

► A PROPOSED RESOLUTION drawn up by delegates to the White House Conference on Aging in Washington, D. C., is aimed at making relatives contribute to support of the elderly.

Of 2,359,000 persons now receiving OAA (old age assistance) payments, 74% have living children, but only one in every five is receiving support from the children.

In some states relatives are required to contribute to the support of elderly persons. This amount is deducted from the amount paid by the state, and state and Federal funds are used to make up the balance. In some cases the relatives do not contribute, and the aged person receives only a fraction of his requirements from the state and Federal governments.

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Depression Masks Disease

► IF AN OLDER PERSON is depressed, it is very likely he or she has a serious illness without knowing about it.

Dr. Ewald W. Busse, chairman of Duke University's psychiatry department, told SCIENCE SERVICE that detailed clinical examinations of emotionally depressed older persons showed many of them had serious illnesses, such as cancer or a heart condition, without having any symptoms.

Physicians once thought that depressions in older persons were due to their surroundings and their adjustment to them, Dr. Busse said. Now it seems that the origin of much old-age depression is not social but physical.

Dr. Busse said studies have shown that rejection of the oldsters by the younger generation usually begins after the older person is already depressed. He said that "silent physical change" is a much greater factor in producing mental disturbances than realized before. Many psychoneurotic reactions in older persons are really psychosomatic.

Dr. Busse was a delegate to the White House Conference on Aging, and chairman of medical research for the Conference.

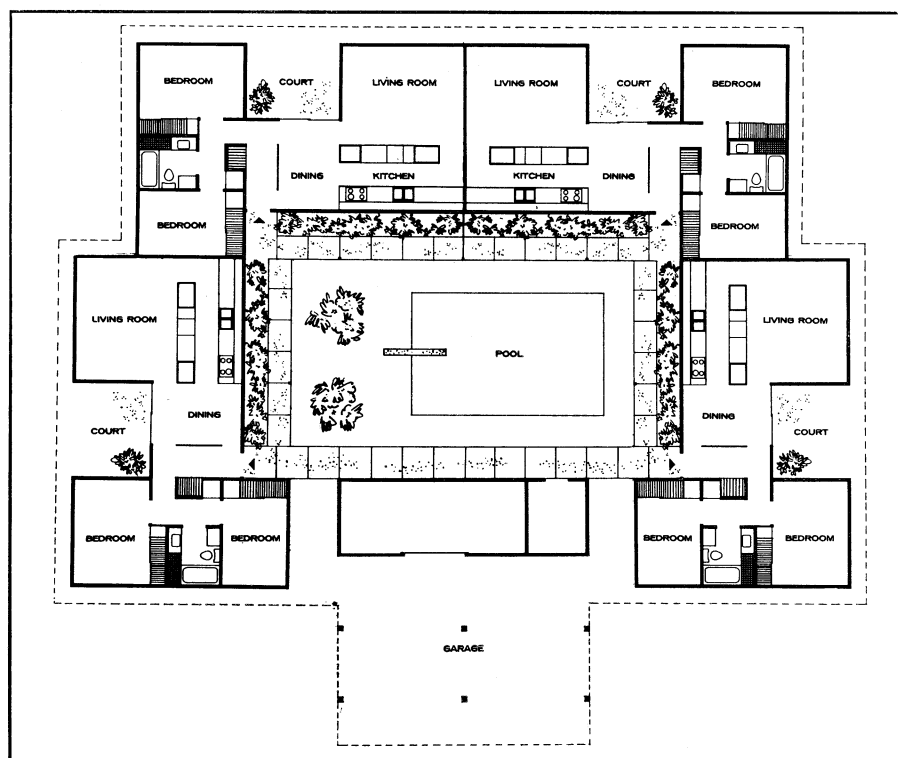
Dr. Busse said one recommendation likely to result from the Conference is establishment of a national institute for aging, such as already established for cancer and heart disease as part of the National Institutes of Health. At the proposed institute, the problems and diseases especially prominent in advanced age groups would be studied.

Studies at such an institute should also include all diseases in persons above a certain age, especially cancer and heart disease, since they are the greatest killers among older persons, Dr. Busse said.

He called the study of the aged over periods of years, which has thus far been neglected, of great importance. This study could provide accurate histories, important to the understanding of the aging process. Histories taken from the patients' memories are not always reliable as study material as many persons suffer memory loss about what has happened to them as they grew older.

Present programs at the NIH along these lines need strengthening, Dr. Busse said. He noted that studies of the aging process in animals, especially in monkeys and chimpanzees, would be of great value for understanding the aging process in humans.

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RETIREMENT FOURPLEX—Shown is a fourplex plan of the basic Freedom House, built in Washington, D. C., for the White House Conference on Aging. Designed and built by Douglas Fir Plywood Association, Tacoma, Wash., in cooperation with the American Association of Retired Persons, Freedom House has non-skid floor coverings, low-set light switches for persons in wheel chairs and bath with built-in seat for sit-down showers.