

The population ageing presents multifaceted challenges for health systems, with implications for healthcare delivery and health and well-being outcomes. Innovative integrated-care approaches are needed to promote healthy aging and the quality of life of older people. Social Prescribing (SP) has emerged as a promising strategy to address the complex health and social needs of populations, including those older, offering non-medical interventions that encompass social, cultural, and community-based activities. SP has been implemented in Portugal since 2018 and currently target different subgroups, including elderly. This study aims to examine referral and uptake of older people to SP in Portugal. This cross-sectional study analysed sociodemographic, health condition, referral and uptake-related data from older patients ( $\geq 65$  years) engaged in SP, collected through a survey and registries at primary healthcare units in Lisbon between 2018-2023. Of the 1060 patients referred to SP, 43.9% (n = 465) were aged 65 years or older. Within this age group, 38.1% were 71-80 years old and 36.1% were 81-90 years old; 67.5% were female. Around 48% were referred to SP for social isolation, 40% for social and financial support, and 32.5% for functional dependency. Two thirds had two or more chronic conditions, with cardiovascular disease (59,1%), mental health disorders (29,2%), and obesity (27,1%) being the most frequent. The SP consultations uptake rate was 59.1%, and patients were referred to a range of activities provided by third-sector organisations, as psychosocial support, home care, senior university classes, arts activities, and support in medicine management. The elderly population accounts for a large proportion of SP referrals. Further efforts are needed to identify the factors that influence patients' acceptability and adherence and to promote the sustainability of SP and the well-being of the population.

**Key messages:**

- Older people referred to SP initiative in Portugal have complex health-social needs, which reinforces the relevance of adopting a holistic centred-care approach to respond to the aging challenges.
- Through SP older people have been integrated in community-based activities that promote their health and wellbeing, thus it is needed to develop tailored strategies to improve patient uptake.

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**Social prescribing for healthy ageing: insights from older people referral and uptake in Portugal**

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