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A significant rise in global life expectancy by nearly five years is projected by 2050, according to the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021. This comprehensive study indicates that global life expectancy will increase from 73.6 years in 2022 to approximately 78.1 years by 2050.

The study highlights that men are expected to see their life expectancy rise from 71.1 years to 76 years, while for women, it will increase from 76.2 years to 80.5 years. Notably, countries with currently lower life expectancies are predicted to experience the largest increases.

The trend is attributed to advancements in public health measures combating cardiovascular diseases, COVID-19, and various communicable, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases (CMNNs). Dr. Chris Murray, a prominent figure in health metrics sciences and director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, emphasized the decrease in geographical disparities in life expectancy despite persistent health inequalities.

However, the improvement in life expectancy is slower compared to the three decades preceding the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also underscores a significant ongoing shift from non-communicable diseases (NCDs)—such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and diabetes—to NCD-associated risk factors, including obesity, high blood pressure, unhealthy diets, and smoking.

Furthermore, while overall life expectancy is projected to increase, global healthy life expectancy—years lived in good health—will see a modest rise from 64.8 years in 2022 to 67.4 years in 2050, suggesting an increased duration of life spent in poor health.

The study also reported a nearly 50% rise in years lost due to poor health and early death attributed to metabolic risk factors like high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and high body mass index (BMI) since 2000. Conversely, there was notable progress in reducing disease due to maternal and child health risks, unsafe water, sanitation, and smoking between 2000 and 2021.

Dr. Emmanuela Gakidou of IHME highlighted the need to address risk factors like obesity, air pollution, and tobacco use through global health policies and exposure reduction to mitigate health risks and improve population health. Dr. Murray pointed out the significant potential to influence future global health by addressing rising metabolic and dietary risk factors.