

Challenging Ageism

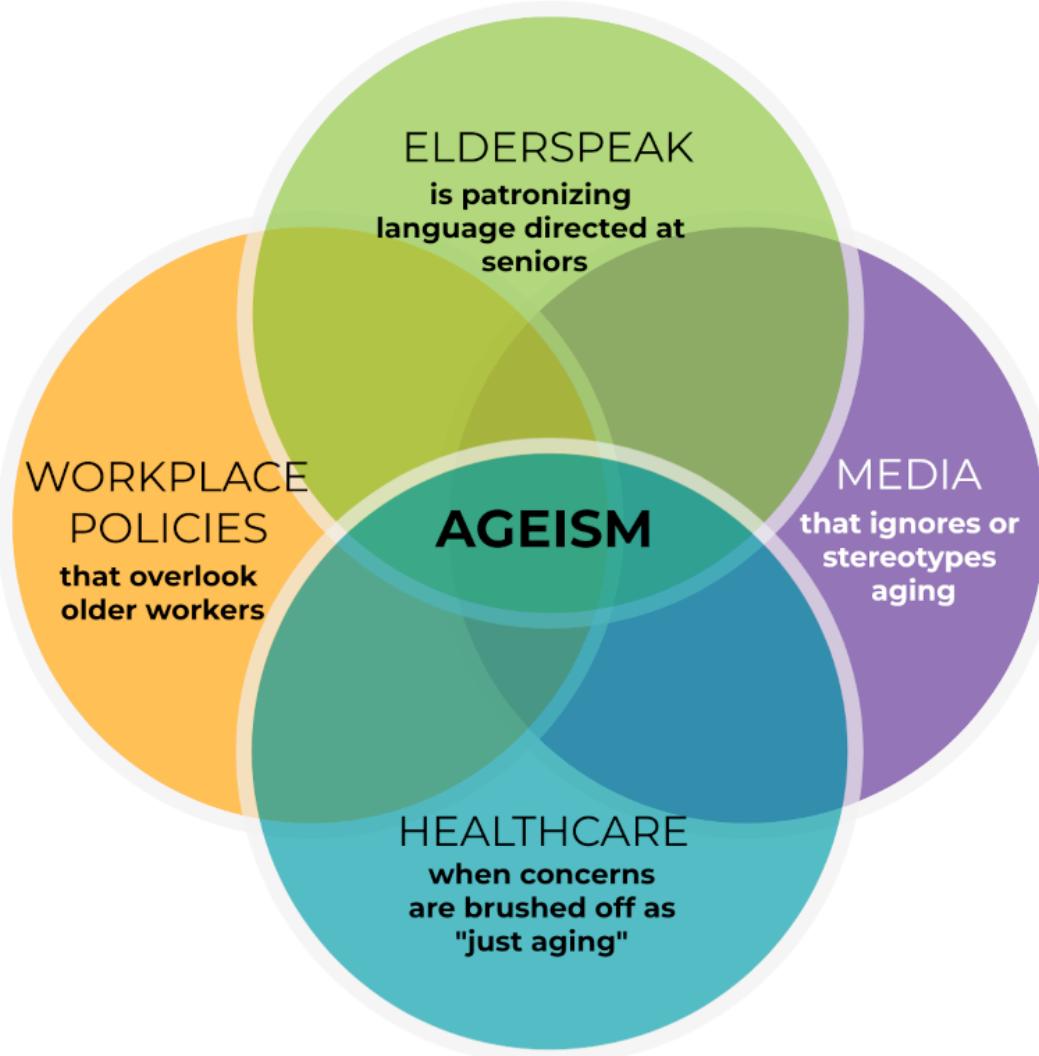
Ageism is a bias we ignore. It is the only form of discrimination seen as socially acceptable.



Age is one of the first things we notice about someone, but it's also often used to divide us.

Challenging Ageism

When age leads to
unfair treatment
or negative
assumptions,
that's **ageism**.



Unpacking Stereotypes About Aging

Myths vs. Realities —
Building a More Age-
Inclusive Community

Ageism affects
everyone. Awareness is
the first step toward
changing perceptions.

Myth #1: **“Aging means decline and dependency.”**

Reality: Most older adults live active, independent lives, contributing to their families and communities every day.

Aging is a process of adaptation, not decline.

When we focus only on decline, we overlook the strength, experience, and wisdom that come with age.

Myth #2: **“Older people can’t learn new things.”**

Reality: People learn and grow at every age.

Older adults are mastering technology, starting businesses, and discovering new hobbies.

This assumes that learning is just for the young — that once you reach a certain age, your brain is “set in stone.”

Myth #3: “Older workers are less productive.”

Reality: Experience matters.

Older workers bring a wealth of knowledge, practical skills and institutional memory.

Including older workers benefits everyone: it eases labour shortages, expands access to talent, helps businesses serve an aging market, and could boost Canada’s GDP.

Myth #4: “All older people are the same.”

Reality: Older adults are one of the most diverse groups in society.

The 65+ population includes people who may differ by **three + decades in age**, multiple generations in worldview, and infinite variations in health, culture, and life experience.

When we lump all “seniors” together, we erase individuality and reinforce stereotypes.

Recognizing diversity among older adults leads to **better policies, services, and respect.**

Myth #5: **“Older adults are a burden on society.”**

Reality: Older adults are vital contributors — as volunteers, caregivers, taxpayers, and community leaders.

They strengthen families and communities every day.

In many cultures, elders are often consulted for guidance and decision-making, for dispute resolution, and cultural preservation.

Myth #6: “Ageism isn’t a big problem.”

Reality: Ageism is one of the most accepted forms of discrimination.

Changing perceptions about aging helps to bring equitable services and treatment with **respect, dignity, and inclusion.**

People who feel valued at every age have better mental and physical health.

Ageism affects young people too — it shapes how they imagine their own futures.

Challenging ageism benefits everyone – individuals, workplaces, and communities.

Reframing Aging

See people, not age.

Shift the focus:

From seeing age as a problem → to seeing it as a shared human experience

From limitations
→ to strengths and contributions

From patronizing
→ to empowering

From stereotypes
→ to individuality and diversity

From “elderly” → to “older adult” or “senior”

Small changes in perception can create big shifts in attitude.

Reframing Ageist Language

Our choice of words can reinforce stereotypes or reduce dignity.

Avoid patronizing terms such as "dear", "sweetie", older-timer.

Use neutral language or the person's preferred name.

Avoid simplified or exaggerated speech that assumes the listener can't understand.

Speak clearly, naturally, and at a normal pace unless requested otherwise.

Avoid talking about or around the person.

Include older adults in conversations rather than speaking for them.

Avoid collective pronouns such as saying "Are we ready to go shopping?" instead of "Are you ready?"

Address the individual directly, which honours their autonomy and competence.

Call to Action

Let's change the story about aging — together.

Notice and challenge stereotypes.

Use age-inclusive language.

Appreciate the contributions of older adults.

Aging is a natural part of life — a stage we may all reach, and it deserves respect.

Credits

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For more resources on ageism, visit
DontCallMeDear.ca