



Ageism Fact Sheet

Compiled by the American Society on Aging Ageism & Culture Advisory Council

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Defining Ageism

Ageism refers to stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) toward others or oneself based on [age](#).

Ageism shows up in many ways, including:

- **Internalized ageism:** How we feel about ourselves as aging people, even to the extent that older people marginalize and discriminate against other older [people](#).
- **Implicit ageism:** The unconscious bias that includes attitudes, feelings and behaviors toward people of other age groups that operates without conscious awareness or [intention](#).
- **Interpersonal ageism:** Ageist comments and behavior that happen when people interact. This can be implicit or unconscious. It can be negative, but can also come from positive intent, but still be based on stereotypes. Some examples:
 - **Benevolent ageism** includes paternalistic beliefs that older people [need to be protected](#), as well as positive stereotypes like calling older people adorable.

- **Elderspeak**, or addressing an older adult as if they can't make decisions on their own. People may speak in a higher pitch and more slowly, with simple words, as if speaking to a child. It is demeaning and patronizing, even when unintentional.
- **Cultural ageism**: The everyday, invisible, profoundly ingrained and normalized negative messages about aging and old people embedded in movies, literature, songs, jokes, news commentary, [etc.](#)
- **Institutional ageism**: Unfair age-based restrictions in laws, policies, and the practices of public and private [institutions](#).
- **Societal Ageism**: Age based discrimination manifesting in social institutions, influencing the broader society that can impact the individual.

How Ageism Shows Up

- Ageism is one of the most widespread and socially accepted forms of [prejudice](#).
- Ageism can impact us [at any age](#). Ageism happens whenever we rely on stereotypes about someone because of their age. We are affected whether we face discrimination ourselves or it impacts those we care about and support.
- Stereotypes about age are often internalized at a young age. Even by age 3, children are familiar with age stereotypes, which are then reinforced over their [lifetimes](#).
- In the U.S. ageism in medicine and society can result in less effective care, like denial of treatment options, underdiagnosis or misdiagnosis of mental health symptoms, particularly depression, and mismanaged [pain](#).
- Ageism in the media remains pervasive. One study found that only 1.5% of characters on television in the United States were older people. Most of them had minor roles and were often portrayed for comic effect, drawing on stereotypes of physical, cognitive and sexual [ineffectiveness](#). In the [media](#), older adults are under-represented and more often portrayed using [negative stereotypes](#).
- Ageism is common in marketing and advertising. An [estimated 5% to 10% of marketing budgets are devoted to attracting people older than age 50](#). Only 5% of advertising images of people over 50 show them using

technology, and even then it's usually a younger person teaching an older person.

How Ageism Impacts Us

- A [2020 poll](#) found that 82% of adults ages 50 to 80 experience ageism daily. Those experiencing multiple forms of ageism are more likely to have chronic health conditions and depression.
- Ageism intersects with, and [worsens](#), other discriminatory “isms,” including racism, sexism and ableism. Multiple intersecting forms of bias compound disadvantages and worsen the effects of ageism on individuals' health and [well-being](#).
- Older individuals with more positive self-perceptions of aging live 7.5 years longer than those with a less positive perception of [aging](#). Also, higher optimism has been associated with a more positive self-perception of aging, which can lead to positive health [consequences](#).
- “The single most important factor in determining longevity—more important than gender, income, social background, loneliness or functional health—is how people think about and approach the [idea of old age](#),” said Dr. Becca Levy.
- Ageism harms our financial well-being. Older workers face longer periods of unemployment, discrimination during the hiring process, and fewer professional development [opportunities](#).
- Ageism harms our economy: AARP estimated \$850 billion in lost gains to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a result of involuntary retirement, underemployment, and unemployment among older [workers](#).
- Levy and colleagues (2020) estimated that ageism caused \$63 billion in healthcare costs in just one [year](#).

Ageism in Healthcare

- Older adults are not included in clinical trials and are less likely receive preventive [care](#)

- [A study found](#) that the 1-year cost of ageism was \$63 billion, or one of every seven dollars spent on 8 health conditions.
- Ageism negatively impacts how older adults seek and receive care. Older adults who accept that depression, fatigue, and chronic pain are normal parts of aging may not seek medical [attention](#).
- Pain is consistently undertreated in older adults in some areas and overtreated in others, including testing & procedures that [lack benefit](#).
- Medication-related problems are estimated to be one of the [top five causes of death in older adults](#), and a major cause of confusion, depression, falls, disability, and loss of independence.
- In a 2008 study, one out of five adults over age 50 experienced discrimination in [healthcare settings](#). One in 17 experience frequent discrimination in these settings, and this is associated with new or worsened disability.
- People ages 60 and older who experienced ageism were more likely to have [poorer mental health](#) than those who did not.
- Research also found that experiences or perceptions of ageism or age discrimination were associated with an increase in stress and anxiety.
- Many healthcare providers and older adults assume that things like depression, fatigue and pain are normal parts of aging, leading to a lack of [treatment](#) for addressable issues.
- Healthcare for older adults isn't adequately funded or compensated:
 - The average salary for a geriatrician is \$233,564, whereas anesthesiologists are paid twice that and cardiologists and radiologists' salaries top [\\$500,000](#).
 - Geriatricians care for patients requiring more time and resources than average Medicare beneficiaries, yet [reimbursement](#) is not increased.
 - By 2025, the United States will need about 33,200 geriatricians. Now, only 50% of geriatricians practice [full-time](#). More than a third of available slots for graduate fellowships in geriatrics—excluding geriatric psychiatry—went unfilled in [2019](#).
- Less than 1% of grant funds go to causes [related](#) to [age](#).
- It is presumed that ageism is a causal factor for elder mistreatment, but there is little research to [investigate this](#), despite the fact that

approximately 1 in 10 Americans ages 60 and older have experienced some form of elder [abuse](#) and only 1 in 24 cases are reported to [authorities](#). The cost of elder financial abuse and fraud in the United States is estimated to be between [\\$2.6 billion](#) and [\\$36.5 billion](#).

Ageism in the Workforce

- The labor force participation rate of individuals ages 55 and older has been steadily increasing, reaching a [projected 25% in 2024](#).
- 64% of older workers believe that they face age discrimination and 41% report experiencing ageism in their [workplace](#).
- The economic [cost of age discrimination](#) against older workers was estimated to be \$850 billion in lost GDP in 2018. This is from factors like the inability to find work and earn promotions.
- Companies and organizations can gain a competitive advantage from [multigenerational workforces](#).
- Age diversity is rarely included [in workplace initiatives](#). However, addressing age equity increases [worker's feelings of belonging and productivity](#).
- More than half of small business owners are older than age 50 and [older entrepreneurs have higher rates of success](#).

The Diverse Experience of Aging

- The number of 65+ people who identify as members of racial and ethnic minorities [increased from 9 million](#) (21%) in 2012 to 14.5 million (25%) in 2022. This is projected to increase to 26.6 million in 2040 (34% of older adults).
- Higher poverty rates are [experienced by African-American, Asian and Hispanic older adults](#) than white, not Hispanic, older adults.
- Research has shown that [repeated experiences of discrimination can lead to long-term negative health outcomes](#).

- Nearly 3 million people [ages 50 and older are estimated to identify as LGBTQ+](#), a number projected to rise to about 7 million as the aging population grows.
- LGBT elders are [more likely to be on their own](#): twice as likely to live alone, five times less likely to have been married and two times less likely to have children.
- LGBT elders rely on families of choice and [nearly a third of elder LGBT people provide care to a friend](#).

Breaking Stereotypes About Older Adults

- Older adults are not necessarily wealthy. The [2022 median income of older people was \\$29,740](#). In 2022, nearly 1 in 10 people ages 65 and older (10.2% or 5.9 million) lived below the poverty level.
- Older adults work. In 2023, [11.2 million Americans ages 65+ were in the labor force](#).
- Older adults use technology. As of 2021, 90% of adults ages 65 and older [own computers](#), and more than 60% [use smartphones](#)—numbers that are growing.
- Older adults support our economy. In terms of direct spending, 56 cents of every dollar spent in 2018 in the United States was [attributable to the ages 50 and older population](#), and this is set to increase to 61 cents by 2050. In 2018, people ages 50 and older [supported 88.6 million U.S. jobs](#), through jobs they hold or create, directly or indirectly. This is projected to grow to 101.7 million jobs in 2050.
- Older adults are contributing in ways we don't always see. Compared with other age groups, [caregivers ages 65 and older were the most likely to provide care on a given day](#). Caregivers ages 65 and older were more likely than those in other age groups to care for a friend or neighbor (29%). In 2022, there were 1.1 million grandparents ages 60 and older responsible for most of the basic care of co-resident grandchildren under age 18.
- Older influencers are racking up big numbers on TikTok and other accounts—7.3 million followers for four gay men in their 70s, 14 million for a TikTok chef, and audiences view them as authentic and to be [trusted](#).



- Caregivers use social media to form peer support groups and normalize the caregiving experience and build [communities](#). At least 73% of people ages 50–64 use at least one social media site, and 45% of those older than age 65 do the same. However, older adult use of TikTok and Instagram still lags behind Facebook and [YouTube](#). Only 26% of people ages 55 and older follow any virtual [influencers](#).