Age-Inclusive Language

WHY?

It is important to use **respectful and inclusive language** when referring to older adults in order to **avoid stereotypes and acknowledge their rich diversity**. The examples below highlight both **problematic and preferred terms**, along with explanations to support appropriate and considerate communication.

General Terms for Older Adults

Problematic:
- ❌ the elderly
- ❌ elders
- ❌ elderly people
- ❌ the aged
- ❌ aging dependents
- ❌ seniors
- ❌ senior citizens

Preferred:
- ✅ older adults
- ✅ older people
- ✅ the older population

Explanation:
The problematic terms often reinforce stereotypes or present older adults as a single, uniform group. For example, terms like "seniors" and "senior citizens" can carry outdated or patronizing connotations. The term "elders" is also avoided, as it can be confused with "Elders" - a specific term used in Indigenous communities to refer to individuals with deep knowledge of Indigenous histories, traditions, and ways of life. In this context, individuals are not defined solely by their age.

Conditions Affecting Older Adults

Problematic:
- ❌ suffering from dementia
- ❌ frail
- ❌ afflicted with
- ❌ stricken with

Preferred:
- ✅ living with dementia
- ✅ living with frailty
- ✅ diagnosed with
- ✅ experiencing

Explanation:
Problematic phrases can imply helplessness or reduce a person to their diagnosis. Use person-first language that recognizes individuals as more than their condition and avoids framing illness or disability in terms of victimhood.

Specific Ages of Older Adults

Problematic:
- ❌ old man

Preferred:
- ✅ older men
- ✅ men between the ages of 65 and 75
- ✅ octogenarians

Explanation:
Use precise language when possible. Referring to specific age ranges acknowledges the diversity of older adults and avoids vague or dismissive labels like "old."

Want to learn more?

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Bias-free language: Age. APA Style.

Gerontological Society of America. (n.d.). Reframing aging: Journal manuscript guidelines.