



GROWING UP, GROWING OLDER

Addressing Ageism in the Public Policy Arena

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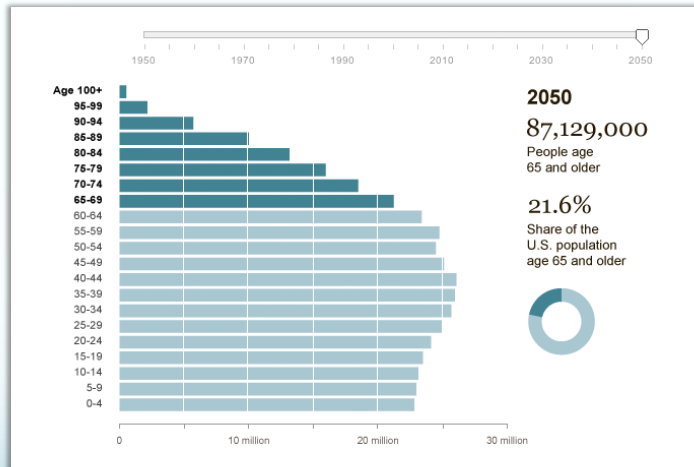
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This event is hosted by the **Public Policy Committee** of the American Society on Aging.

Visit www.asaging.org/membership to learn about the Public Policy Committee and other volunteer opportunities at ASA.





The New Largest Generation

- “Millennials” – those born after about 1985 – are now the largest generation in US history
- About the time the Boomers end, the Millennials start to turn 65
- **The aging of America is permanent**



Then WHY is aging so hard to sell?



Multiple Choice Question

- Americans don't want to think about aging because they are
 - a) Stupid
 - b) Delusional
 - c) Uncaring
 - d) Afraid
 - e) All of the above



New Research

- CEOs of 8 national aging organizations came together
- What can we do together that we can't do separately?
- Focused on the question: how can we change the way Americans think about aging?
- Need for in depth research, a new strategy, and a national push over a long period of time

LEADERS OF AGING ORGANIZATIONS COLLABORATIVE





Funding Partners

- Archstone Foundation
- The Atlantic Philanthropies
- Endowment for Health
- Fan Fox/Leslie R. Samuels Foundation
- John A. Hartford Foundation
- The Retirement Research Foundation
- Rose Community Foundation
- SCAN Foundation



Two Stage Project

- Working with the FrameWorks Institute
- Focused on how Americans “frame” aging – not just individual attitudes
- First stage is to understand the current frames of both the public and professionals who work in the field
- Second stage is to find better frames to use; only the first stage is complete
- Right now we are in the “swamp” – the challenges we need to overcome



Full Report Available

- <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/pubs/mtg/gaugingaging/index.html>
- Frameworksinstitute.org → Research Issues → Aging → Research tools and Applications → Gauging Aging
- Or google “gauging aging”
- Well worth your reading!



Welcome to the Swamp!

- The FrameWorks Institute calls the negative messages that already exist “The Swamp”
- The major individual elements are “alligators”
- We’re trying to make it out of the swamp without being eaten by the alligators



Key Findings

- Aging really *is* hard to sell (Good news: you're not crazy!)
- Understanding what we are pushing against is essential to finding better ways to communicate
- The negative frames are profound and deep. It will take a major effort to change them
- Professionals in the field often feed the very stereotypes we are fighting
- This is NOT about which term best describes aging



Two Models of Aging

- Americans hold two simultaneous but irreconcilable images of aging:
 - Vibrant aging (think of cruise ship or golf resort ads)
 - Helpless aging (sick, dependent, helpless, hopeless)
- There is no middle ground
- The vast majority of older people are somewhere in the middle but they are not represented in how we see aging



What To Do?

- Focus on the middle, but don't muddle the message
- Be careful about focusing solely on "heroic exemplars"
- Professionals in aging often work with those with the greatest need, but that means our messages fit into the frame of helplessness



Individualism

- A core American value
- Individuals are responsible for their fate
- If your aging process is unsuccessful, it is your fault
- Implication: why should the rest of us care?
- Professionals see the context that leads to a variety of aging experiences. The public does not.



What To Do

- Talk about context – what are the other factors that affect aging?
- Important to emphasize healthy aging, but be careful about the implication that if you make all the right health choices, you personally will have a perfect aging process
- Avoid words that trigger the individualism frame, such as “personal responsibility,” “personal control,” or “making good choices”
- We are all in this together



Us versus Them

- Americans perceive older people as “them” –someone other than themselves – even if they are old or know people who are
- Older people already receive many benefits that others do not. Why should they get more?
- Funding is a zero sum game: more money for older people means less for everything else



What To Do

- Avoid zero sum code words like “funding pie” or other words that imply fixed resources
- Show the intergenerational impact of aging programs
- Don’t assume that just showing the need of older people is a compelling message: it may have the opposite effect



Government Inefficiency

- Strong mistrust of the government and its ability to meet needs
- Even among those who strongly support Social Security and Medicare, there is a sense that these programs cannot be trusted to provide for them
- Government programs are seen as exclusively supporting older people



What To Do

- Talk about the role of these programs in the lives of all people, not just the elderly themselves
- Point out that Social Security is the most efficient program in America, with less than 1% operating cost
- Talk about the impact of the loss of these programs



Cognitive Holes

- For professionals in aging, the most surprising finding was what people do NOT use facts (as we understand them) in formulating their frames
- Most people either do not know or do not accept the idea that the society as a whole is getting older
- Does not perceive ageism to be a problem
- If facts do not mesh with the frame, it is the facts that are discarded, not the frame



What To Do

- Develop better communications strategies to provide information in a way that will allow facts about aging to fit into existing and emerging frames
- Avoid the professional's tendency to feel that resistance to The Truth about aging means that people are stupid, uncaring, etc.
- Never assume that presenting the case for the needs of older people will be persuasive



An Example of What We Can Do

- Age Friendly Communities
- Based on the World Health Organization's Age Friendly Cities model
- Worldwide enthusiasm and acceptance
- Goes by a number of names



What We Have Learned

- Start where you start: show you are listening and have quick, visible successes
- Work with people who are not part of the aging network: planners, zoning offices, elected leaders
- Don't assume that only the aging network can do the job – or can do it better
- Find and cultivate leadership wherever you find it
- Won't be concerned if "aging" is not in the title



Important Idea

- "We need to spend other people's money"
- Mayor Bloomberg's strategy in New York City: how do we redeploy existing resources?
- Learn to speak another language
- Use an aging lens rather than develop new aging programs



Onward

- The challenges are great, but we hope the results of this work will help us focus on one of the bigger – how people understand aging
- The same message will not work
- We need to create compelling new ways to talk about aging
- That's the next phase!
- In the meantime, be aware of how these factors work in you own language



Thanks!

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The Public Policies We Need to Redress Ageism

Bob Blancato | June 14, 2016 | rblancato@matzblancato.com



2016 Election: One for the Ages

- Goal to keep this that way and not the ageist election
- Start with one basic fact—these are the oldest candidates in history to run against each other
- In the process, defeating an even older candidate whose claim to fame was his appeal to younger voters



2016 Primary Election

- Campaign where one candidate—not the oldest—was tagged as the “low energy” candidate
- The youngest candidate turned out to be the most robotic and rigid
- Then we have the yet to be decided VP selection—what will age have to do with that?



The General Election

- Now in general election mode—focus has to go to the older voter—because of their growth since 2012 (16% voting population to 23%) and their being reliable voters.
- Are they a swing vote in 2016?
- Republicans have captured their votes in all elections since 2010
- Reasons given: Obamacare—and Obama



What's Different This Time?

- In 2016—no Obama—and clear signs that Obamacare is helping to strengthen Medicare
- Polls show that older voters will be all about the issues
- To date—relative silence on the big issues beyond perfunctory comments



The Issues

- Social Security: all in favor—some with changes to help low income. Who addresses the benefit disparity between men and women? Who seeks to raise the retirement age and negatively impact those with shorter life expectancies?
- Medicare: all in favor but Trump has not addressed it in context of Obamacare; Clinton is for bolstering low income coverage and preventive benefits
- Many other issues belong on the table, but there is a difference between what COULD move visibly into the general election and what SHOULD



Potential Issues

- Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Who implements the national strategy and how?
- Long-term services and support/Medicaid reform
- End of life issues
- Elder justice
- Healthcare workforce going forward
- Medicare going forward, especially Part A—however, Part D may dominate the debate because of rising drug costs
- The ACA and its policies affecting seniors



Issue: Caregivers

- As stated in Generations—"there is an element of ageism in the failure of any comprehensive federal response to America's caregiving/caregiver challenge"
- Who steps up and how do they do it?
- Has to be more than the National Family Caregiver Support Program.
- Tax reform/tax credits
- Social Security reform/credits
- Respite care expansion
- Greater recognition of grandparents raising grandchildren



Work of Congress

- Second session winding down
- For concerns of older adults some highlights...
- Repeal of SGR under Medicare
- Suspending sequestration and providing for some increases in programs
- Passage of Older Americans Act



Probable/Possible Items This Year

- CARA (Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act) to combat the opioid epidemic: passed Senate and House in different forms. Dispute over funding levels. Growing linkage to elder abuse and opioid abuse. Will it be addressed?
- RAISE Family Caregivers Act: passed Senate
- 21st Century Cures: passed House, Senate working on own version
- Mental health treatment reform: working through both House and Senate, but may get stalled with gun control additions. Will grants provided help older adults?



Proposals Intro'd In 2016 (With An Eye Toward 2017)

- Chronic care
- Long Term Care
- ACA repeal or reform bill
- Elder justice
- Tax reform



Ageism in Policy

- Must be a more concerted national effort to weed out federal policies which contribute to ageism
- Having federal health funds spent in home and community-based care preferred by older adults
- Have the federal commitment to elder abuse match what has been done for child abuse/domestic violence
- Having more than one federal program to aid older workers (2017 is the 50th anniversary of ADEA)
- Lower the digital divide impacting older adults
- Promote higher vaccination rates among older adults
- A workforce that reflects the aging of America



Conclusions

- This election is a bellwether
- Many changes could result: White House/Senate/House
- Issues affecting older adults must be addressed
- National advocacy agenda of the future must include the recognition that ageism exists
- Policies and programs must be evaluated from the context of reducing or furthering ageism
- From Generations: "In our nation, not every person will be a victim of racism. Not every person will be a victim of sexism. However virtually everyone will have the chance to be a victim of ageism." Let's recognize, respond and above all, not regress any further.



Questions & Answers: Please Submit Using the "Questions" Box

