



## Ageism Fact Sheet

Compiled by the ASA Ageism & Culture Advisory Council

### I. 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; and ageism in which older adults 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 between people when they interact. This can be implicit and unconscious or conscious. This may be negative, but can also come from positive intent, but still be based on stereotypes.
  - **Benevolent ageism:** Patronizing, paternalistic beliefs or behaviors that older people need to be protected, because they are no longer able to make decisions for [themselves](#).
  - An example of benevolent ageism is **Elderspeak**. This is when an older adult is addressed as if they can't make decisions on their own. People may speak in a higher pitch and speak more slowly, with simple words, as if speaking to a child.
- **Cultural ageism:** The everyday, invisible, profoundly ingrained and normalized negative messages about aging and old people embedded in movies, TV, songs, jokes, [etc](#).

- **Institutional ageism:** Unfair age-based restrictions in laws, policies, and practices of public and private [institutions](#).
- 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](#).
- A [2020 poll](#) found that 82% of adults ages 50–80 experience ageism daily. Those experiencing multiple forms of ageism are more likely to have chronic health conditions and depression.

## II. How Ageism Harms Us

- Ageism intersects and exacerbates all the other “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](#).” 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 intersects with, and [exacerbates](#), other discriminatory “isms,” like racism.

### III. Where Ageism Shows Up

- “Ageism in American medicine and society is a matter of life and death, as dangerous as any incorrectly prescribed medicine or slipped scalpel. These negative stereotypes often result in less effective care, like denial of treatment options, underdiagnosis of 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 and 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 in marketing and advertising is just as bad. “Only an estimated 5% to 10% of marketing budgets are devoted to winning them [people older than 50] over. 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 to use a [device](#).”
- 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 have started using social media to form peer support groups and normalize the caregiving experience using #dementia and #caregiving to build their [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](#).

#### IV: **Ageism in Healthcare**

- Older adults are not included in clinical trials and less likely receive preventive [care](#).
- “It was found that the 1-year cost of ageism was [\\$63 billion](#), or one of every seven dollars spent on the 8 health conditions (15.4%), after adjusting for age and sex as well as removing overlapping costs from the three predictors.”
- Ageism negatively impacts how older adults seek & 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 that age group](#) [older adults], and a major cause of confusion, depression, falls, disability, and loss of independence.”
- “One out of five adults over the age of 50 years experiences discrimination in [healthcare settings](#). One in 17 experience frequent [healthcare discrimination](#), and this is associated with new or worsened disability by 4 years.”
- People aged 60 years and older who experienced ageism were more likely to have [poorer mental health](#) than those who did not perceive or experience ageism.
- 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 certain 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, and is not valued as a profession:
  - 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 to care for older patients, but currently, only 50% of geriatricians practice [full-time](#). More than a third of 384 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 prove this connection, and limited empirical research connecting the [two](#).
  - Approximately 1 in 10 Americans ages 60 and older have experienced some form of elder [abuse](#); but only 1 in 24 cases are reported to [authorities](#).
  - In about 60% of elder abuse and neglect incidences, the perpetrator is a family [member](#).
  - Elder financial abuse and fraud costs to older Americans range from [\\$2.6 billion](#) to [\\$36.5 billion](#).

## V: Ageism in the Workforce

- The labor force participation rate of individuals aged 55 and above 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 cost \$850 billion USD 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](#).