



Addressing Ageism in Healthcare

What is Ageism?

Ageism is age-related discrimination. It refers to “stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) toward others or oneself based on age.”¹



Ageism can be internalized at a young age.

Examples include:

- Internalizing the misperception that all older adults are frail and vulnerable
- Using ageist talk or elderspeak
- Attributing forgetfulness to age
- Seeing older patients as set in their ways and unable or unwilling to change
- Believing older adults lack the ability to learn new skills e.g., technology



Ageism has broader societal implications, and its impact on health and wellbeing⁴ of older adults includes:

- Risky and unhealthy behaviors e.g., poor diet, smoking
- Poorer mental health e.g., depression, anxiety
- Poorer physical health
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Lower quality of life
- Earlier mortality

Did You Know?

- Ageism is very prevalent among adults 50-80 years old in the US, with over 90 percent of adults reporting they experience at least one form of ageism in their day-to-day lives.²
- Ageism can also intersect and exacerbate other forms of disparities related to gender, race/ethnicity³, and disability status.
- Costs related to ageism have been estimated to be over \$69 billion annually.⁵
- Ageism can affect how healthcare providers treat and care for older adults, which can exacerbate poorer outcomes by either overtreating, undertreating, or misdiagnosing patients.





There are strategies that healthcare providers and others who serve older adults can use to address ageism:

- Viewing aging as a normal process and not necessarily one that is debilitating or declining
- Centering and caring for the whole person and focusing on the individual's needs
- Encouraging older adults to view their own aging in a more positive light by focusing on their experiences and accomplishments over time
- Promoting engagement and respectful inclusive communication in settings where both older and younger individuals are present
- Educating professionals on the importance of using appropriate language and behavior and avoiding ageist language
- Developing institutional policies and procedures that reduce age-based discrimination e.g., review of educational materials



Eliminating ageism promotes better health outcomes, quality-of-life, and productivity for older adults and promotes provision of equitable care.

Interested in learning more about ageism? Please contact:

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Resources

¹World Health Organization, "Ageism," 18 March 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism#:~:text=What%20is%20ageism%3F,Who%20does%20ageism%20affect%3F>

²Allen JO, Solway E, Kirch M, et al. Experiences of Everyday Ageism and the Health of Older US Adults. JAMA Netw Open. 2022;5(6):e2217240. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.17240

³Michelle M. Doty et al., How Discrimination in Health Care Affects Older Americans, and What Health Systems and Providers Can Do, April 21, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.26099/yffm-2x15>

⁴World Health Organization, "Ageism," 18 March 2021, <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism#:~:text=What%20is%20ageism%3F,Who%20does%20ageism%20affect%3F>

⁵Levy BR, Slade MD, Chang ES, Kannoth S, Wang SY. Ageism Amplifies Cost and Prevalence of Health Conditions. Gerontologist. 2020 Jan 24;60(1):174-181. doi: 10.1093/geront/gny131. PMID: 30423119; PMCID: PMC7182003.

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