



Canadian Coalition Against Ageism
Coalition Canadienne Anti-Âgisme



International Longevity Centre Canada
Centre international sur la longévité – Canada (ILC Canada)

Human Rights do not have a best before date
Support a U.N. Convention on the Rights of Older Persons

Les droits humains à tout âge.
Appuyez une Convention des Nations Unies relative aux droits des personnes âgées

Ageism 101: A Primer on Ageism Against Older Persons

Overview

Ageism is a form of discrimination and stereotyping based on age, which predominantly affects older individuals. [The World Health Organization \(WHO\) published a comprehensive global report on ageism](#) in March 2021, highlighting the pervasive and detrimental impacts of ageism on older adults.

Definition and Forms of Ageism

Ageism encompasses:

1. Stereotypes: Generalized beliefs about aging and older people (e.g., older adults are frail or unproductive).
2. Prejudice: Negative feelings towards individuals based on their age.
3. Discrimination: Unfair treatment and practices targeting people because of their age.

Ageism manifests in various contexts, including:

1. Institutional: Policies and practices within organizations and institutions that disadvantage older adults.
2. Interpersonal: Direct interactions between individuals where ageist beliefs are expressed.
3. Self-directed: Internalized ageism where older adults accept and apply negative stereotypes to themselves.

Prevalence and Impact

Ageism is widespread, affecting individuals globally regardless of culture or socioeconomic status. The WHO report identifies that one in two people hold moderate to high ageist attitudes. The impact of ageism is amplified by other prejudices e.g. racism, sexism, mentalism, ableism, homophobia and others. This widespread bias has severe consequences, including:

1. **Health:** Ageism contributes to poorer physical and mental health outcomes. It can lead to increased stress, depression, and a decreased will to live.
2. **Well-being:** Older adults subjected to ageism may experience reduced quality of life and life satisfaction.
3. **Social Participation:** Ageism limits opportunities for older adults to engage in social, economic, and civic activities, leading to social isolation.
4. **Economic Costs:** Ageism in the workplace can result in early retirement, unemployment, and underemployment, contributing to economic losses.

Strategies to Combat Ageism

The WHO report outlines a multi-faceted approach to combating ageism:

1. **Policy and Law:** Implementing and enforcing anti-ageism legislation and policies. This includes promoting inclusive policies that recognize the rights and contributions of older adults.
2. **Educational Interventions:** Increasing awareness and understanding about aging through education. Programs that challenge ageist stereotypes and promote positive attitudes towards aging can be integrated into school curricula and professional training.
3. **Intergenerational Contact:** Encouraging interactions between different age groups to foster mutual understanding and respect. Intergenerational programs in communities, workplaces, and schools can break down ageist prejudices.

Role of Various Partners and Sectors

1. **Governments:** Enact and enforce laws against age discrimination, develop public awareness campaigns, and promote inclusive policies.
2. **Healthcare Providers:** Ensure equitable access to healthcare services, train professionals to recognize and address ageism in clinical settings.
3. **Employers:** Promote age diversity in the workforce, implement training programs to combat workplace ageism, and support lifelong learning and career development for older employees.
4. **Media:** Portray aging and older adults in a positive and realistic manner, challenge ageist narratives, and highlight the contributions of older adults to society.
5. **Community Partners:** Promote age friendly and inclusive spaces, services & intergenerational activities
6. **Academic:** Promote research and education, including intergenerational activities to eliminate ageism and support human rights in all sectors
7. **Individuals of all ages:** Reflect on personal biases and challenge ageist attitudes, support policies and practices that promote age equality, and engage in intergenerational activities.

Conclusion

The WHO's 2021 global report on ageism underscores the urgent need to address ageism against older persons. Combating ageism requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society to create an inclusive and equitable world where individuals of all ages are valued and respected. Through policy change, education, and intergenerational initiatives, it is possible to reduce the prevalence of ageism and its harmful effects on older adults.