



## Ageism Factsheet

Compiled by the  
Ageism & Culture Advisory Council

### I. Defining Ageism

- Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) toward others or oneself based upon [age](#).
- There are many forms of ageism, including:
  - Internalized ageism:** How we feel about ourselves as aging people; and ageism in which older adults marginalize and discriminate against other older [people](#).
  - Cultural ageism:** The everyday, invisible, profoundly ingrained and normalized negative messages about aging and old people embedded in movies, TV, songs, jokes, [etc.](#)
  - Implicit ageism:** The unconscious bias that includes attitudes, feelings and behaviors toward people of other age groups that operates without conscious awareness or [intention](#).
  - Benevolent ageism:** Patronizing, paternalistic beliefs or behaviors that older people need to be protected and taken care of by younger people, because they are no longer able to make decisions for [themselves](#).
    - Ex. *Elderspeak* When an older adult is addressed as if they are much younger and can't make decisions on their own—the voice may rise to a higher pitch, simple words are used and spoken more slowly as if speaking to a child.
- Ageism is one of the most widespread and socially accepted form of [prejudice](#).
- **Ageism and Age stereotypes are often internalized at a young age—long before they are even relevant. Even by the age of 3, children are familiar with age stereotypes, which are reinforced over their [lifetimes](#).**



## II. How Ageism Harms Us

- Ageism intersects and exacerbates all the other “isms,” including racism, sexism and ableism. Multiple intersecting forms of bias compound disadvantage and worsen the effects of ageism on individuals’ health and [well-being](#).
- Ageism affects our health and longevity. Older individuals with more positive self-perceptions of aging live 7.5 years longer than those with a less positive self perception of [aging](#). Also, higher optimism has been associated with more positive self-perception of aging, which can lead to positive health [consequences](#).
- 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 in just one year, \$63 billion in healthcare costs were due to [ageism](#).

## 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 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](#).

- 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 wracking 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](#).
- There are 8,220 full-time practicing geriatricians in the United States, and there will be a 50% increase in demand for geriatricians between 2018 and 2030. About 30% of adults older than age 65 need a [geriatrician](#).
- 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 that require more time and resources than average Medicare beneficiaries, yet reimbursement is not correspondingly [increased](#).
- By 2025, the United States will need about 33,200 geriatricians to care for older patients, but currently, 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. Pillemer et al. have studied the proposed conceptual pathways 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](#).

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The Ageism & Culture Advisory Council is formed of American Society on Aging members that are dedicated to developing anti-ageism resources and ambassadors, while also supporting older adults' recognition in the arts and expanding society's understanding of cross-cultural views on aging.