

AGEISM FACT SHEET

OVERVIEW OF AGING IN AMERICA

- The number of Americans ages 65 and older is projected to more than double from 46 million in 2016 to over 98 million by 2060.¹
- The older population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse with non-Hispanic whites projected to decrease from 78.3 percent to 54.6 percent between 2014 and 2060.²
- The changing racial and ethnic composition of the population under age 18, relative to those ages 65 and older, has created a “diversity gap” between generations.³
- In 2014, older adults, ages 65 and older, were working longer with 23 percent of men and about 15 percent of women in the labor force. This is expected to increase to 27 percent for men and 20 percent for women by 2022.⁴
- There are wide economic disparities across different population subgroups: 18 percent of Latinos and 19 percent of African Americans, ages 65 and older, were living in poverty in 2014 as compared to older non-Hispanic whites (8 percent).⁵
- Education levels are increasing. Among people ages 65 and older in 1965, only 5 percent had completed a bachelor’s degree or more. By 2014, this share had risen to 25 percent.⁶
- Average U.S. life expectancy increased from 68 years in 1950 to 79 years in 2013, in large part due to the reduction in mortality at older ages.⁷
- The gender gap in life expectancy is narrowing. In 1990, there was a seven-year gap in life expectancy between men and women. By 2013, this gap had narrowed to less than five years (76.4 years versus 81.2 years).⁸
- Many parts of the country—especially counties in the rural Midwest—are “aging in place” because disproportionate shares of young people have moved elsewhere.⁹
- The poverty rate for Americans ages 65 and older has dropped sharply during the past 50 years, from nearly 30 percent in 1966 to 10 percent today.¹⁰

WHAT IS AGEISM?

- Robert N. Butler, a psychiatrist and strong advocate for older adults, was the first person to coin the term “ageism” in 1969.¹¹

- When we behave differently toward a person or group based on how old we think they are, we are “ageist”.¹²
- Someone who is ageist has a tendency to regard older persons as debilitated, unworthy of attention, or unsuitable for employment.¹³
- Although youth populations such as teenagers are affected by ageism, older persons are particularly subject to ageism as it is generally defined as discrimination and stereotyping on the basis of a person’s age.¹⁴

AGEISM’S IMPACT

- Ageism, like racism and sexism, becomes institutionalized, affecting hiring decisions, medical care, and social policy.¹⁵
- Societal norms marginalize older people, treat them with disrespect, and make them feel unwelcome. Older people are generalized as being all the same.¹⁶
- Age discrimination is perpetuated by television shows and movies, employers, organizations and society as a whole.¹⁷
- "Age stereotypes are often internalized at a young age - even by the age of four, and are reinforced over their lifetimes."¹⁸
- The media's portrayal of older adults fuels the effects of age stereotypes. Often older people are portrayed as dependent, helpless, unproductive and demanding rather than deserving.¹⁹
- In a survey of people 60 and older, 80 percent reported experiencing ageism—such as other people assuming they had memory or physical impairments due to their age.²⁰
- The most frequent type of ageism was being told a joke that pokes fun at older people.²¹
- Almost a third of older people state that they have been ignored or not taken seriously because of their age.²²
- Age stigma can result in humiliation, anxiety, helplessness, loss of productivity, loss of self-esteem, shorter life spans, depression and fear of getting treatment.²³
- Black women, who face racial discrimination as well, do not live as long as white women on average.²⁴

WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

- 1 in 5 Workers in the U.S. is age 55 or older.²⁵
- 64 percent of workers say they have seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace.²⁶

- 58 percent of workers between the ages of 45 and 74 believe age discrimination begins when people hit their 50s.²⁷
- Some job seekers over age 35 cite age discrimination as a top obstacle to getting hired.²⁸
- If you work in the high-tech or entertainment industries, your chances of experiencing age discrimination are even higher.²⁹
- While 72 percent of women between the ages of 45 and 74 think people face age discrimination at work, only 57 percent of men in the same age range agree.³⁰
- In 2017, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) reported having received 18,376 complaints filed under the Age Discrimination in Employment Act.³¹ This number is actually down for the first time since 2006.
- 16 percent of worker retirees say that they may have to return to work because they cannot make ends meet.³²
- On average, it takes someone age 55 or over three months or longer to find a job than a younger person.³³
- The *Monthly Labor Review* indicates that there is statistical evidence of age discrimination in hiring for both men and women.³⁴
- Older applicants, those 64-66 years of age, experience more age discrimination than middle age applicants ages 49-51.³⁵
- Older women experience the worst degree of age discrimination.³⁶
- Though they will represent 75 percent of the workforce by 2025, millennials are currently said to be falling victim to stereotypes (that prevent them from being hired or retained) called out: as being entitled, hard to train, and uncommitted to their positions or longevity at a workplace.³⁷

AGEISM AND HEALTH

- "Ageism in American medicine and society is a matter of life and death-- as dangerous as any incorrectly prescribed medicine or slipped scalpel."³⁸
- Older patients are often viewed by health professionals as set in their ways and unable to change their behavior.³⁹
- Problems such as cognitive impairment or psychological disorders, caused at least in part by complex pharmacological treatments, often go unrecognized and untreated in older adults.⁴⁰
- Not only are negative stereotypes harmful to older people, but they may even shorten their lives.⁴¹

- Those with more positive self-perceptions of aging lived 7.5 years longer than those with negative self-perceptions of aging.⁴²
- Older adults exposed to positive self-perceptions have significantly better memory and balance, whereas negative self-perceptions contributed to worse memory and feelings of worthlessness.⁴³
- People's positive beliefs about and attitudes toward older people appear to boost their mental health.⁴⁴

THE GOOD NEWS

- 90 percent of the population live to celebrate their 65th birthday, mostly in good health.⁴⁵
- The “young-old” will remain productive for longer, not because they need to, but because they can.⁴⁶
- Older persons can add great economic value both as workers and as consumers.⁴⁷
- Intergenerational conflicts in the workplace can be viewed in a more compatible, positive light if companies adopt the changes that older workers are looking for such as flexible hours, a working space designed for wellness in mind, and the opportunity to keep learning.⁴⁸
- Academics have found that older people in multigenerational teams tend to boost the productivity of those around them and such mixed teams perform better than single generation ones.⁴⁹
- An “older economy” is emerging indicating that people over 50 will soon account for 70 percent of disposable income according to a Nielsen study.⁵⁰
- 40 percent of adventure travelers are over age 50.⁵¹
- Persons in their 80s now have a fitness coach, use a smartphone, book travel on the web, and set up dating profiles.⁵²
- Consumption in the developed world’s cities will come mostly from those who are over 60.⁵³
- Many older people are now part of the “gig economy” which suits them well because they are content to work part-time and are not looking for a career progression.⁵⁴

WAYS TO REDUCE AGEISM

- Heighten sensitivity to the stereotyping of older people.⁵⁵
- Create greater exposure to diversity in the personal characteristics of older people.⁵⁶

- Have greater commitment to recognizing and responding to diversity in dealings with older people.⁵⁷
- Make deliberate use of perspective to see the older person as an individual.⁵⁸
- Seek out opportunities to promote the social attractiveness of older people.⁵⁹
- Strengthen institutional practices that promote the norm of human-heartedness.⁶⁰
- Desensitize ourselves to the stigma of degeneration and dependency.⁶¹
- Review policies and practices for evidence of stigmatizing through disrespect, particularly by *not* treating older people as an indivisible group.⁶²
- Mandate inclusiveness of older people in policy planning and implementation.⁶³

ENDNOTES

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