

POSITION STATEMENT ON AGEISM

Understanding the Issue

Ageism influences how we think, feel, and act towards others and ourselves based on age. The World Health Organization (WHO) [defines ageism](#) as the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination directed towards people based on age. Ageism is highly prevalent across Canadian society. It can be directed at older adults and young people alike. However, our culture tends to value youth, so older adults more often experience age-based discrimination and its repercussions. Ageism towards older adults, stems from the belief, held by many, that an individual loses value as they get older. Unlike other forms of discrimination, such as heterosexism, racism, and sexism, ageism is still socially accepted, and often sadly and disappointedly unchallenged. Consider the following common examples:

- A family member who makes comments such as, “We don’t expect you to keep up with us.”
- Hiring processes that aim to root out older candidates, or employers that strongly encourage older adults to retire.
- Using the phrase “senior moment” when something is forgotten.
- Media depictions of aging as a process of loss, rarely featuring the cliché-defying older voices.
- Systemic ageism that impacts older adults directly (e.g. encouraging informal organizational norms that unfairly privilege one age group over another, not including older adults in decisions that affect their lives).

Ageism has serious negative effects on the physical and mental well-being of older adults. It is a barrier to the development of quality programs and policies for older adults. Relatively little is known about the effectiveness of strategies to reduce ageism in Canadian society.

CNPEA’s Commitment

Ageism can be insulting, frustrating, damaging. It can also pave the way for [mistreatment](#), prevent us from recognizing abuse and responding to it efficiently. **Ageism and a lack of social awareness of it render older adults who experience abuse invisible. Elder abuse is the most damaging and harmful consequence of ageism.**

Our commitment to the prevention of elder abuse requires us to examine ageism and its impact on older Canadians. CNPEA works to increase awareness of ageism, to encourage people to call it out and counter it systematically. Our goal is to build a safer, elder-friendly Canada to help promote better health and well-being among older adults.

We illustrate our commitment to combat ageism by:

- Valuing older adults and their ongoing contributions to Canadian society.
- Listening and responding to the needs of older adults.
- Advocating for the inclusion and participation of older adults in initiatives and research that relate to them.
- Providing educational webinars to enhance awareness and understanding of ageism and how it contributes to elder abuse.
- Supporting global campaigns to combat ageism such as the World Health Organization and the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People campaigns.
- Working collaboratively with our members and other stakeholders to improve understanding of ageism through support for research, tool development and better policies.
- Fostering the development of age-friendly communities and collective action to prevent ageism and elder abuse.

Our Approach

CNPEA is working together with its partners, stakeholders, members, and all levels of government. Our approach to combating ageism is informed by:

- [Our values as an organization](#)
- The [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)
- The [Canadian Human Rights Act](#)
- The [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)
- The World Health Organization's [Global Report on Ageism](#) (2021)

What you can do to address ageism:

- Be mindful of your own internalized ageism - the negative thoughts and attitudes you may have about yourself and others in relation to aging.
- When you notice ageist language or behaviours, call them out as such.
- Support the addition of ageism to your workplace's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training. Help change your work culture from the inside to be more age-diverse.
- Advocate for the rights of older adults in your community/organization/service/government.
- Work with your municipality to make your community age-friendly and insist on the inclusion of elder abuse prevention programs as part of the age-friendly initiative.
- Consult [Future Us](#), our Roadmap to Elder Abuse Prevention, for more recommendations and resources to support the prevention of ageism and elder abuse.