



GLOBAL  
CAMPAIGN  
TO COMBAT  
AGEISM

Credit: World Health Organization

# The Global Campaign to Combat Ageism calls on us to act together

Ahead of the release of the global report on ageism, the World Health Organization calls for everyone to take action to change the way we think, feel and act towards age and aging.

The term ‘ageism’ was coined by Robert Butler more than 50 years ago. Since then, research aimed at improving our understanding of age-based stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination has grown. However, little attention has been given to raising public awareness and promoting action to prevent or counter ageism. Today we have the political commitment, and with the upcoming publication of the first ever global report on ageism, we will have the evidence needed for action.

Ageism started to receive attention in international political and policy frameworks in 2002 with the adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the Political Declaration (<https://bit.ly/3io6syF>). Still, this international instrument mostly focused on discrimination in the workplace, thereby failing to recognize the multiple dimensions of ageism (stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination) and its impact beyond employment. More than a decade later, countries have recognized the detrimental impact that ageism can have on effective policy development and individuals’ health and wellbeing. As a result, in May 2016, the 194 member states of the World Health Organization adopted Resolution WHA69.3 (<https://bit.ly/3iowTnS>) and called on this United Nations (UN) agency to develop, in cooperation with other partners, a Global Campaign to Combat Ageism to achieve the ultimate goal of enhancing the day-to-day experience of older people and optimizing policy responses. Countries’ commitment to address ageism is again reaffirmed in the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), adopted on 14 December 2020 (<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/131>).

The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing is a global collaboration that brings together governments, civil society, international

agencies, professionals, academia, the media and the private sector to improve the lives of older people, their families and the communities in which they live. The plan of action for the decade is the result of an open consultative process with member states, civil society organizations, international and UN agencies, and includes “changing how we think, feel and act towards age and ageing”, that is, combating ageism, as one of the four action areas. It also highlights that combating ageism is a prerequisite for achieving the other three action areas, which include: developing communities in ways that foster the abilities of older people, delivering person-centred integrated care and primary health services responsive to older people and providing older people who need it with access to quality long-term care.

The World Health Organization needs to tackle ageism for three main reasons. Firstly, ageism is prevalent worldwide and is ubiquitous across institutions, including health and long-term care. Ageism is socially accepted, largely undetected and strongly institutionalized. Secondly, ageism is extremely detrimental to our health and wellbeing. For example, it is associated with poorer performance on physical and cognitive tasks, worse physical and mental health, slower recovery from disability and shorter lives. Thirdly, ageism influences social values and shapes the focus of research and policy, including the way problems are conceptualized, the solutions proposed and the way institutions develop and implement rules and procedures. Unless ageism is tackled and these fundamental beliefs and processes are changed, our capacity to seize innovative opportunities to foster a world for all ages will be limited.

The first ever global report on ageism will be launched on 18 March 2021 and offers a

framework for evidence-based action. The report brings together the best available evidence on the nature and magnitude of ageism, its determinants and its impact. It outlines what strategies work to prevent and counter ageism, which include policies and laws, educational interventions and intergenerational activities. It identifies gaps and proposes future lines of research to improve our understanding of ageism and what works to address this phenomenon across age groups, countries, cultures and contexts. Importantly, the report provides specific recommendations for governments, UN and development agencies, civil society organizations, businesses, research institutions and individuals to take action to change the way we think, feel and act towards age and aging.

Aging is universal, and we all have a stake in creating a world for all ages. Combating ageism is important to prevent harm, reduce injustice and foster intergenerational solidarity. We have the political commitment and very soon the evidence on what works to combat ageism. We now need a global coalition that brings together stakeholders across countries, contexts and cultures to raise awareness, implement and scale effective interventions, fill research gaps and monitor progress. We need to act together – now. Join the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism. □

Demographic Change and Healthy Ageing Unit  
Vânia de la Fuente-Núñez <sup>✉</sup> and Alana Officer  
World Health Organization, Geneva, Switzerland.  
<sup>✉</sup>e-mail: [delafuentenunezv@who.int](mailto:delafuentenunezv@who.int)

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