

Ageism: Key facts and stats



Updated **January 2024**

The Age Without Limits

Key Facts and Stats

Age Without Limits

Age Without Limits is a campaign from the Centre for Ageing Better to challenge ageism for the benefit of us all as we grow older.

Ageism is the prejudice that's hidden in plain sight. It's embedded in our society and even accepted as normal by those of us who are older. We see and hear casual ageism every day in the media, on TV, at work, in pubs / cafes, on social media, in family conversations.

Ageism is often dismissed as being harmless, but research shows that ageist ideas or beliefs can be incredibly damaging for us as individuals and for wider society. They affect how we think about and act towards other people - how we talk to older people and how we talk about them, how we treat older people in our workplaces, in our communities, and even in health settings.

We also internalise these negative ideas about ageing. They become a self-fulfilling prophecy, affecting our self-esteem and what we think we are capable or worthy of as we get older. Then we can start to limit our opportunities and activities such as our physical activity or the way we dress.

It doesn't have to be this way. Thinking negatively about ageing and older people has been accepted and ignored for too long. The Age Without Limits campaign aims to spark a debate and conversation about what ageism is and to change the way we all think about ageing.



Public attitudes



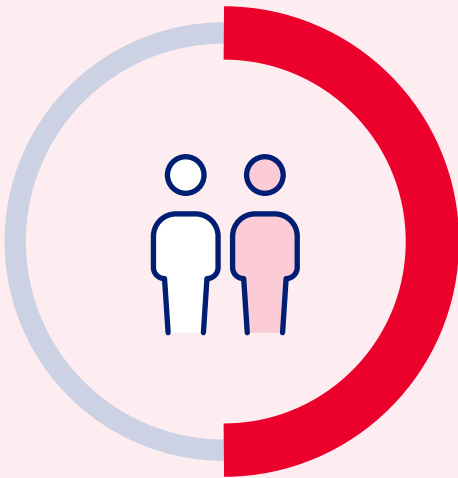
Over 40%

of people have **never really thought about ageism** before¹



1 in 10

people believe that **ageism doesn't exist**²



More than 50%

of the public believes **UK society is ageist**³



Half of people

of people **worry about getting older** - and one in five worry about it often⁴



Over half

of people think older people are **less visible in society**⁵



Only 30%

of the general public think that the **treatment of older people is good**⁶



1/3 of people

think older age is characterised by **frailty, vulnerability and dependency**⁷



Just 2.5%

of older people (aged 65 and over) **live in care homes**⁸ yet the public thinks it's 25%⁹



Children as young as three

begin to **develop stereotypes** about older people¹⁰

Ageism in work and society

Employment



Older applicants are **less likely to be hired**, and once employed, less likely to receive training¹¹



1 in 3 people aged over 50 believe they have **been turned down for a job because of their age**¹²



1 in 5 employers believe that **age discrimination occurs** in their organisation¹³

Community



Older adults are the **most likely to volunteer, vote and provide unpaid care**, alongside their contributions to the economy as workers and consumers¹⁴



1 in 5 older people live in poverty, yet the idea of the rich baby boomer remains common in the media¹⁵

Economy



Older consumers are responsible for **half of all household spending**, yet businesses do not adequately serve this market in terms of products, services or advertising¹⁶



4 in 5 people aged over 55 say their favourite retail brand **no longer understands them or their needs**¹⁷

Ageism and health



Stereotypes, including that depression is normal in older age, lead to older people with common mental health conditions (such as anxiety and depression) being **less likely to be offered talking therapies** than younger people, but **more likely to be on tranquillisers**¹⁸



Older people have been found to be **systematically excluded from health research**, despite many conditions being more common in older age¹⁹



In areas including alcohol treatment, breast and colorectal cancer treatment, and knee surgery, **referral rates for treatment decrease at older ages**²⁰



The use of **remaining life expectancy** as a criterion to determine willingness to pay for drugs and interventions **discriminates against older people**²¹



People with a negative idea about later life might **delay seeking medical help for a health issue** if they consider health issues to be a normal part of ageing²²

Ageism in the mass media



UK media is among the most ageist

A study of the use of language related to older age in web-based magazines and newspapers found that of 20 English-speaking countries, **the UK was the most ageist of all**²³



Just 1 in 4 TV ads feature characters aged 50 or older and one in 20 feature characters aged 70 or older²⁴



4 in 5 ad professionals think their industry is seen as ageist²⁵

What harm does ageism cause?

Ageism affects how we feel about ourselves and limits our lives and opportunities. It affects our job prospects and our health.²⁶

Impact on mental health

Repeated negative portrayals of older people, or the absence of positive portrayals, can lead to poor body image or increased pessimism and anxiety about getting older.

Impact on physical health

In some cases, older people receive different medical treatment because of their age or don't seek help for medical problems because they assume they are a normal part of ageing. Ageism can also lead to people limiting the activities that promote better health such as physical activity (due to negative ideas about appearance, suitability or physical capability). During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw attempts to limit the lifesaving resources available to older people, with 'do not attempt resuscitation' decisions being made without consultation with individuals or their families.

Impact on finances

Ageism in the workplace means older people not being able to work for as long as they want to. This can lead to people being locked out of employment and potentially facing financial insecurity and poverty in later life.

Impact on the economy and wider society

Ageism has a detrimental impact on the workforce - 460,000 people aged 50-64 are currently out of work but would like to be in work and ageism is one of the key barriers older workers face. Shutting older people out of the workforce has repercussions for the economy through the effect on income tax and national insurance receipts as well as the welfare bill. It also exacerbates the current skills and labour shortages faced by many industries.

Ageism by omission leads to a failure to design and build age-friendly homes and communities (including transport, accessible streets and public spaces and facilities such as toilets) despite the increasing need from an ageing population.



To learn more, visit our website

[AgeWithoutLimits.org](https://www.AgeWithoutLimits.org)

References

Public attitudes

- 1 Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Age Without Limits Campaign Wave 1 Tracker Survey by Solutions [unpublished]
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Reframing ageing: Public perceptions of ageing, older age and demographic change. Available online: ageing-better.org.uk/resources/reframing-ageing-public-perceptions-ageing-older-age-and-demographic-change
- 4 Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Age Without Limits Campaign Insights Survey by Basis [unpublished]
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Reframing ageing: Public perceptions of ageing, older age and demographic change. Available online: ageing-better.org.uk/resources/reframing-ageing-public-perceptions-ageing-older-age-and-demographic-change
- 8 ONS (2023) Older people living in care homes in 2021 and changes since 2011. Available online: ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/articles/olderpeoplelivingincarehomesin2021and-changesince2011/2023-10-09 NB "The proportion of the usual resident population aged 65 years and over living in a care home decreased from 3.2% in 2011 to 2.5% in 2021." Note also that 60% of people in care homes are aged 85 or older.
- 9 Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Age Without Limits Campaign Wave 1 Tracker Survey by Solutions [unpublished]
- 10 Flamion A, Missotten P, Jennotte L, Hody N, Adam S. Old Age-Related Stereotypes of Preschool Children. *Front Psychol.* 2020 Apr 28;11:807. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00807. PMID: 32411060; PMCID: PMC7198741. Available online: ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7198741

Work and society

- 11 Policy Exchange (2012) Too much to lose. Available online: policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/too-much-to-lose.pdf

- 12 Centre for Ageing Better (2021) Shut out: How employers and recruiters are overlooking the talents of over 50s workers. Available online: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/shut-out-employers-overlooking-over-50s-workers>
- 13 Centre for Ageing Better / YouGov survey (2022): <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/employer-attitudes-evidence-cards>
- 14 Centre for Ageing Better (2023) State of Ageing. Available online: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/summary-state-ageing-2023-4>
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Centre for Ageing Better (2021) The missing market: How home retailers can better meet the needs of over 50s consumers. Available online: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/resources/missing-market-how-retailers-meet-needs-over-50s-consumers>
- 17 Ibid.

Health

- 18 Centre for Ageing Better (2023) State of Ageing. Available online: <https://ageing-better.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing-state-ageing-2023-4#conditions-that-cause>
- 19 World Health Organisation (2021) Global report on ageism (2021) . Available online: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240016866>
- 20 Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Ageism, What's the harm. Available online: ageing-better.org.uk/resources/ageism-whats-harm
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.

Mass media

- 23 Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Ageism, What's the harm. Available online: ageing-better.org.uk/resources/ageism-whats-harm
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Campaign readers YouGov survey: <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/why-ageism-adlands-next-frontier/1416455>

Ageism harms

- 26 All the examples in this section taken from Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Ageism, What's the harm. Available online: ageing-better.org.uk/resources/ageism-whats-harm