

Guide to Age Positive Language



Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age^[1].

The **way we talk about age** influences the way we feel about ageing and the way we act towards different age groups. We need to shift the association of older people being linked to frailty, homogeneity and dependency and use language that does not categorise older people as “diminished”, “irrelevant” or a “drain” on resources. These stereotypes can influence the attitudes of the community, industry and government decision making.

Combating ageism is one of the four action areas of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)^[2]. Changing how we think, feel, and act towards age and ageing is a prerequisite for successful action on healthy ageing.

The UNSW Ageing Futures Institute has developed the following **Guide to Age Positive Language** for researchers regarding appropriate terminology when working with, and communicating about, older people.



Suggested age positive terminology

Context	Suggested examples	Avoid or Don't use
When communicating about older people	Older people Older persons Older adult Older Australian	Elderly Senior citizens The aged Pensioners Old lady, old man
When communicating with older people	Use the person's name and ask them their preference on how they wish to be addressed	Infantilising or patronising language e.g. old dear
When referring to people living in aged care	Aged care facility Resident rather than patient Acknowledging that aged care also extends to ageing at home	Old peoples home Nursing home
When using imagery to depict older people	Reflect diversity Use positive but realistic depictions	Unnecessary or mocking depictions of frailty, homogeneity or dependency
When referring to older people with varying cognitive conditions	Person/people with dementia Person/people living with dementia Person/people with a diagnosis of dementia	Victim or sufferer of dementia Demented person
When referring to the context of an ageing society	"Ageing population" Using words like "opportunities"	"Silver tsunami" Using words like "burden"



Language matters and a concerted effort, through campaigning and messaging, is required to raise awareness and call out damaging narratives that are embedded in our cultural discourse.

References

- [1] World Health Organization, Global Report on Ageism (2021) ix.
- [2] UN. Resolution A/75/L.47 United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030). Seventy-fifth United Nations General Assembly, Dec 8, 2020. New York: United Nations, 2020.