

ENDING AGEISM: ADVANCING AGE EQUITY



RRF | Foundation
for AgingSM

Everyone deserves to age in a society in which they are valued, respected, and included.

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RRF Foundation for Aging has made Age Equity¹ a core priority area within its 2026–2030 Strategic Plan. Through this work, the Foundation seeks to reduce ageism and age bias. By challenging harmful assumptions, policies, and practices, we can advance equity and opportunity across the lifespan and build stronger, more inclusive communities. Ending ageism is possible, but it will take all of us.

Ageism is stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination based on age.² Age bias is one of the most widely experienced—yet least challenged—forms of discrimination in U.S. society. Ageism harms all of us—it limits opportunities, weakens connections across generations, and prevents older adults from being recognized and included as valuable members of our communities.

About RRF Foundation for Aging

The mission of RRF Foundation for Aging (RRF) is to improve the quality of life for older people. Our vision is that ALL older people will continue to be valued and respected as participants in and contributors to our communities. In addition to age equity, RRF's grantmaking focuses on four other priority areas—caregiving, economic security, housing, and social connection.

Ageism shapes how we see and value ourselves, how we think about growing old, how we design policies and institutions, how we invest in communities, and how we treat people across the lifespan. Negative assumptions about older people are embedded in healthcare, employment, higher education, housing, public policy, media, communities, and families. These negative assumptions limit everyone's opportunities.

A substantial and fast-growing body of research documents the harmful effects of ageism on individuals and organizations.³ Public attitudes must evolve beyond dated stereotypes and how we think about older people, as well as how we think about our own abilities, opportunities, and limitations.

Policies and institutional practices must reflect changing demographics, not long-held misconceptions. Organizations must identify and eliminate age bias within their own systems. Researchers must continue building the evidence base for interventions that effectively reduce ageist beliefs. Philanthropy has an important role to play by supporting innovation, collaboration, and leadership that advances age equity.

At RRF Foundation for Aging, we believe that our investments in efforts to change narratives, reform systems, and strengthen the field can advance a world where everyone has the opportunity to move through life with purpose and dignity.

Why Age Equity Matters

Millions of Americans are living longer, healthier lives, contributing to their families, workplaces, and communities in countless ways. This represents one of the defining demographic shifts of our time. Public perceptions, societal expectations, and social structures have yet to acknowledge this remarkable and unprecedented opportunity to tap into the social and economic capital it represents.

Researchers have identified three types of ageism.⁴

Institutional ageism: Age-based stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination embedded in policies, practices, laws, and systems that limit opportunities, resources, and equitable treatment.

Interpersonal ageism: Age-based stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination expressed in interactions between individuals that shape how people think, feel, and act toward others because of their age.

Internalized (self-directed) ageism: Negative stereotypes and beliefs about aging that people absorb and apply to themselves, which shape how they view their own aging and abilities. Self-directed ageism has been associated with poorer physical and mental health, reduced longevity and well-being, harmful personal behaviors, and slower recovery from disability.

Research shows that ageism can influence medical decision-making, employment and training opportunities, housing choices, access to services, and public investment. Negative beliefs about aging and older people even affect how we view ourselves, weakening social connections, contributing to poorer physical and mental health outcomes, and reducing opportunities for meaningful participation in society.⁵

Ageism is not only an individual experience: it creates costs that are borne by health systems, employers, governments, and society as a whole.⁷

Ageism exacerbates other forms of bias. For people of color, people in the LGBTQ+ community, women, immigrants, and refugees, the effects of discrimination and prejudice are compounded across the life course. Advancing age equity therefore requires addressing how age intersects with race, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other identities and creates cumulative disadvantage in later life.

“AGEISM IS BAD FOR OUR HEALTH, BAD FOR BUSINESS, AND BAD FOR ACHIEVING AN EQUITABLE SOCIETY.”⁶

Tracey Gendron

AGEISM IS PERVASIVE: **82%** of U.S. adults ages 50 to 80 report regularly experiencing at least one form of everyday ageism.⁸



A Comprehensive Approach to Aging



“LET’S NOT SPEAK ABOUT OLDER ADULTS AS ‘THEM OVER THERE’ AND ‘US OVER HERE.’ IN FACT, WE ARE ALL AGING. ‘US’ IS THEM.”⁹

Nancy Morrow-Howell

Reducing ageism requires a concerted, coordinated effort. This priority area builds on the work of the National Center to Reframe Aging, Washington University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Yale University, and others. Lasting progress will come from transforming public narratives, reforming institutions, strengthening research, and building cross-sector partnerships.

RRF Foundation for Aging organizes its Age Equity work around three interconnected strategies.

1. Changing Norms and Understanding

Aging is a powerful, lifelong, universal experience. The way society understands and frames aging shapes the policies we adopt, the services we provide, and the opportunities we offer. Society often views older people as a burden rather than active as contributors. Changing the way we all think about aging will help create the foundation for broader policy and systems change. Ultimately, it will encourage individuals, organizations, and communities to build connections, share experiences, and celebrate older adults and the valuable contributions they make to family and civic life.

RRF supports efforts that:

- reframe aging using research-based communications;
- challenge harmful stereotypes;
- elevate evidence about the negative impact of ageism;
- position ageism as a public health issue; and
- promote a more accurate, complete picture of aging that includes older adults of all abilities and aspirations.

2. Reducing Institutional Age Bias

RRF is particularly interested in work that produces sustainable systems change. This requires identifying age bias in organizational policies, professional practices, and public systems, and testing interventions that reduce or eliminate it.

This strategy goes beyond changing the negative ageist views of individuals and instead seeks to reshape the structures that influence older adults' everyday lives.

RRF supports initiatives that identify and challenge age bias in areas such as:

- community services;
- employment;
- family systems and structures;
- healthcare;
- higher education;
- housing; and
- public policy.



Productivity loss from the underemployment of adults aged 55-70 in the U.S. is \$113.5 billion.¹⁰



“AGING ISN’T A PROBLEM OR DISEASE. AGING IS LIVING.”

Ashton Applewhite



Photo Credit: Brissa Del Mar, Breeze Art Creatives

3. Strengthening the Age Equity Landscape

Ending ageism is a collaborative effort. It requires organizations, leaders, researchers, advocates, and practitioners to work collectively and individually to infuse age equity principles throughout their work. This will help ensure that age equity becomes an enduring component of broader conversations about health, community development, and social justice. RRF invests in efforts to strengthen the broader age equity movement by supporting:

- cross-sector partnerships;
- leadership development;
- learning communities;
- policy research;
- collaboration across disciplines; and
- shared knowledge that accelerates innovation.

How RRF Invests in Change

Within the Age Equity priority area, RRF emphasizes grantmaking approaches that can generate meaningful, lasting impact.

Advocacy

Supporting efforts that identify, challenge, and eliminate age bias and reform laws, public policies, and institutional practices that are influenced by age bias.

Knowledge Sharing and Awareness Raising

Investing in communications, narrative change, journalism, public education, and other initiatives that increase awareness and educate people about ageism. Equipping organizations, families, and individuals with practical tools for adopting age-inclusive perspectives and communicating more effectively about aging and older people.

Research

Supporting applied research that generates actionable evidence for reducing discrimination and advancing age equity. RRF prioritizes research with direct implications for policy, organizational practice, and field development.

These priorities build on existing work to end ageism and advance age equity that is already underway in communities. Together, we are creating a future where age no longer predicts or limits our outcomes, opportunities, or ability to thrive.

\$

**\$63
billion**

in healthcare
spending in a single
year is attributed to
ageism's effects on
health conditions.¹¹

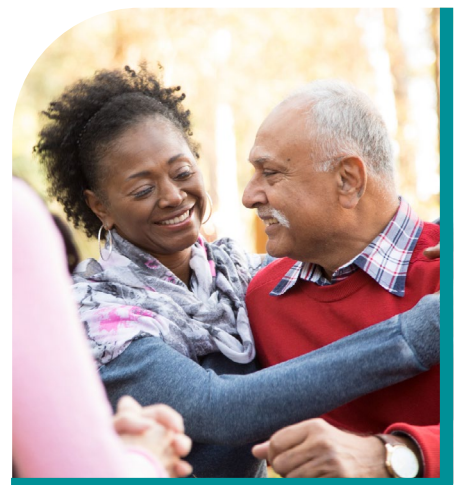
One AARP report
found that age
discrimination costs
the United States
an additional

**\$850
billion**

toward our GDP.¹²

"WE HAVE THIS MASSIVE LONGEVITY BONUS WHICH CAN LEAD TO ALL SORTS OF GOOD THINGS, INCLUDING OLDER PEOPLE AS INCREDIBLE RESOURCES FOR VOLUNTEER WORK, FOR EMPLOYMENT, AND FOR PRODUCTIVE SOCIAL CHANGE, BUT NONE OF THIS IS GOING TO HAPPEN IF WE EXCLUDE OLDER PEOPLE FROM IMPORTANT ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS."¹³

Karl Pillemer



Endnotes

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