



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Centre on Aging

Age-Inclusive Guide

An introductory guide to enhance
age-inclusivity in higher education

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Preface

Colleges and universities bring together people of many ages—students, faculty, staff, alumni, retirees, and members of the broader community. Yet age is often overlooked as an important aspect of diversity in higher education. As the world’s population ages and people study, work, and engage with institutions across longer lifespans, campuses are experiencing greater age diversity than ever before. These shifts present an opportunity for higher education institutions to rethink longstanding assumptions about who participates in academic life and how they are represented and supported.

The Age-Friendly University (AFU) movement, launched in 2012, encourages institutions to respond to demographic change by fostering welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environments for people of all ages. Higher education has historically centered younger adults, and this focus can unintentionally shape policies, programs, services, and campus culture. Integrating age-inclusive practices can help address these gaps, strengthen belonging, and contribute to healthier, more equitable learning and working environments for everyone.



This guide was developed to support that shift. It offers foundational knowledge about aging and ageism, along with practical strategies for applying age-inclusive communication and design, and promoting age-inclusive engagement across campus contexts.

About the Guide

This guide provides an introduction to age-inclusive thinking and practice in higher education. It is intended for anyone who interacts with students, faculty, staff, alumni, retirees, or community members—whether through teaching, research, operations, communications, or other forms of campus engagement.

Readers can expect to:

- **Build foundational understanding** of what aging is and how it varies across individuals and contexts.
- **Develop awareness** of how ageism operates and how it affects experiences in higher education.
- **Learn practical approaches** for applying age-inclusive practices across campus settings.
- **Use practical strategies** to apply age-inclusive language, visuals, and accessible design practices that support understanding and enable participation across ages and abilities.



This guide is designed to be relevant across many areas of higher education. It is not exhaustive; rather, it offers a starting point for reflection, conversation, and ongoing learning about age-inclusive practice.

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Understanding Aging

Learning Objectives

After reading this section, readers will be able to:

- Describe aging as a multidimensional, lifelong process shaped by many factors.
- Identify common determinants and predictors that influence aging trajectories and outcomes.
- Distinguish between key concepts related to aging and understand why aging itself is not considered a disease.
- Recognize how definitions of “older adult” vary by context.

What Do We Mean by Aging?

Aging is a universal, lifelong process shaped by the interaction of biological, behavioural, psychological, social, and environmental factors. From a life course perspective, experiences and exposures accumulate over time, influencing how people develop, adapt, and participate in everyday life.^{1,2}

Biologically, aging reflects the gradual accumulation of molecular and cellular damage, which can reduce physical and mental capacity and increase vulnerability to disease.³

Defining “True” Biological Aging

Scientists use a set of criteria to distinguish normal biological aging from changes caused by disease, injury, or other factors.⁴ These describe aging as a process that is:

- **Universal:** Occurs in all members of a species.
- **Intrinsic:** Arises from internal biological processes.
- **Progressive:** Gradually accumulates over time.
- **Deleterious:** Reduces function or resilience.

These criteria provide a high-level definition of biological aging, though researchers continue to investigate the mechanisms that drive how and why aging occurs.

However, while the biological perspective is essential, it is insufficient on its own for understanding aging holistically. It is well established that external influences interact with biology to shape aging trajectories.⁴ These influences can be categorized as determinants or predictors, and include things such as lifestyle behaviours, psychosocial factors, social conditions, and the environments in which people live.¹ As a result, the biological changes associated with aging are neither uniform across individuals, nor directly linked with chronological age, leading to diverse experiences of aging.^{1,5}

Determinants influence long-term aging trajectories:¹

- Genetic predispositions
- Cognitive ability
- Psychosocial influences
- Life experiences

While **predictors** are measurable factors associated with different outcomes related to aging:¹

- Schooling and education
- Cognitive abilities and mental health
- Emotional health and well-being
- Spirituality and religiousness
- Adaptation and resilience
- Autonomy and independence
- Diet and nutrition
- Physical activity
- Social and community engagement
- Engagement in life
- Financial security and independence

Defining Healthy Aging

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines healthy aging as “the process of developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age,” emphasizing both an individual’s intrinsic capacity—their physical and mental abilities—and the environments in which they live and interact.^{5,6} Functional ability reflects the combination of these abilities, the environments that support or constrain them, and the way the two interact to enable people to do what they value and live the life they choose. This framework promotes a holistic understanding of aging and highlights how different determinants and predictors shape a person’s capabilities within their unique contexts.

Why Terminology Matters in Understanding Aging

Clear terminology supports accurate understanding of aging and creates a foundation for addressing age-based assumptions discussed later in this guide.



Chronological age

Time passed since birth. Chronological age alone does not provide information about health, function, or participation.



Biological aging

The gradual decline in the condition or function of the body over time, caused by accumulated damage in cells and tissues.³ Biological aging varies widely between individuals and is only loosely tied to chronological age.



Disease

A health condition defined by specific signs, symptoms, and abnormal changes that affect how the body functions.⁷ Although the risk of many diseases (e.g., heart disease, stroke, hypertension, dementia, cancer) increases with chronological age, diseases can occur at any stage of life. Age-related changes, by contrast, are typical changes that occur universally with aging and may be beneficial, neutral, or negative, varying across individuals.⁶ Importantly, aging itself is not a disease and does not inherently imply poor health or frailty.^{8,9}



Frailty

A state of physical, cognitive, and/or social vulnerability that increases the risk of adverse health outcomes, diminished quality of life, and greater reliance on support systems compared to others of the same age.¹⁰ Not all older adults are frail, though the likelihood of frailty increases with age.

Who Are Older Adults?



The term **older adult** is often defined using chronological age, commonly set at 65 and older. However, this cutoff is somewhat arbitrary, and age thresholds differ across policy, program, and social contexts. Other common benchmarks include 50 and 55, especially in programming and service settings.

While age cutoffs can be useful for eligibility, a more meaningful approach in many contexts is to consider functional ability and the surrounding social and physical environments.

In Canada, age 65 became the standard marker of older adulthood largely due to the development of public income-support programs in the mid-20th century. When the Old Age Security program was introduced in 1952, benefits began at age 70, and provincial assistance supported those aged 65-69.¹¹ By 1970, Old Age Security eligibility was lowered to age 65, solidifying this threshold in public policy and reflecting workforce patterns and life expectancy at the time.¹¹



The Age-Friendly University (AFU) Global Network emphasizes that old age is complex and adopts the following definition from the WHO and United Nations:¹²

“The concept of old age is multidimensional, which includes chronological (based on a birthdate), biological (related to human body ability), psychological (concerned with psycho-emotional functioning), and social age (related to social roles).”

In practice, many colleges and universities assessing age-friendly policies, programs, and services often use age 50 as a starting point.¹³ While no specific rationale for this cutoff is provided, it aligns with common midlife transitions, such as career shifts, retirement planning, and proactive health practices, that may influence how adults engage with higher education institutions.

Key Takeaways

- Aging is a natural, universal, lifelong process that is distinct from disease.
- Individuals experience aging differently, shaped by interactions among biological, behavioural, psychological, social, and environmental factors.
- Healthy aging focuses on functional ability, which reflects both a person's intrinsic capacity and the environments that support or limit what they are able to do.
- The term older adult is context-dependent. In Canada, it often refers to people aged 65 and older, while within the AFU Global Network age 50 is commonly used.

Reflection Questions

1. How has your understanding of aging changed after reading this section?
2. Which factors that shape aging stood out to you, and why?
3. How does separating the concept of aging from disease influence how you think about older adults' needs and abilities?
4. How do age-based cutoffs such as 50, 55, or 65 influence the way you think about aging and older adults?

Understanding Ageism

Learning Objectives

After reading this section, readers will be able to:

- Define ageism and describe the different levels and forms in which it operates.
- Understand how ageism intersects with other forms of inequality and why its effects vary across groups.
- Explain why addressing ageism toward older adults is important in higher education.
- Recognize how ageism can appear across various areas of campus life.
- Describe evidence-based strategies for reducing ageism and how they can be used within higher education settings.

What is Ageism?

Ageism refers to how we think (stereotypes), feel (prejudice), and act (discrimination) towards others or ourselves based on age.¹⁴ It can affect people at any stage of life and often appears in subtle, normalized ways. Ageism can be difficult to recognize because many age-based assumptions feel like cultural norms or everyday habits rather than intentional bias.

Ageism occurs at different levels:¹⁵



Institutional ageism: Organizational policies, practices, and norms that disadvantage people based on age (e.g., age-restricted programs or services; assumptions that certain opportunities are suitable only for specific age groups).



Interpersonal ageism: Everyday interactions shaped by assumptions about someone's age (e.g., making age-related jokes; using a patronizing tone; excluding someone based on assumptions about their abilities).



Internalized (or self-directed) ageism: Age-based beliefs that people adopt and apply to themselves (e.g., believing you are “too young” for leadership; assuming you are “too old” to learn new skills).

Ageism also occurs in different forms:^{15,16}

Benevolent



Benevolent ageism: Well-intentioned attitudes and behaviours that limit autonomy (e.g., assuming younger adults need extra oversight; assuming older adults need help without asking).

Ambivalent ageism: A mix of positive and negative attitudes about age that result in inconsistent or unequal treatment (e.g., praising younger people for being “tech-savvy” while assuming they lack professionalism; valuing the experience of older people while presuming they struggle with change).

Hostile ageism: Openly negative attitudes or behaviours toward people based on age (e.g., dismissing a young person’s input because they are “too inexperienced;” expressing frustration with an older person because they are perceived as “slow”).

Ambivalent



Hostile



Across these forms, ageism reinforces inaccurate expectations about what people can or cannot do at different ages. These expectations, in turn, influence how individuals of all ages participate in higher education environments.

However, ageism does not operate in isolation. It frequently overlaps with other forms of inequality. Recognizing these intersections helps clarify why people do not experience its effects in the same way.

Intersectionality and Ageism

Ageism often intersects with other forms of inequality—such as ableism, sexism, racism, and classism—creating compounded barriers for individuals who belong to multiple equity-deserving groups.^{17,18} **Intersectionality** refers to the idea that people’s experiences are shaped by multiple social identities such as age, gender, or race, and these identities interact to shape their experiences of advantage or disadvantage.

One of the most common intersections occurs between ageism and ableism. Many stereotypes about age—especially in later life—are based on assumptions about physical or cognitive decline, even when a person has no such limitations.^{19,20} These assumptions can appear in various ways, including:



Reduced academic expectations for older students

Instructors or peers may assume that older learners will struggle with digital tools, group work, fast-paced discussions, or new instructional formats. These assumptions can limit opportunities to take on complex tasks, lead projects, or fully participate in class activities.



Lowered expectations for older faculty and staff regarding performance or long-term contributions

In the workplace, older employees may be passed over for training, leadership roles, or collaborative projects because of beliefs that they will have difficulty adopting new technologies, innovating, or staying in their roles long enough to justify investment. These assumptions can influence decisions about development, evaluation, and advancement.^{13,21}

Understanding these intersections helps shift attention away from age-based expectations and toward what individuals actually need to participate and succeed. This approach supports the creation of learning and working environments that accommodate diverse physical, cognitive, sensory, and social needs across age groups.^{20,22}



Why Focus on Older Adults in Higher Education?

Although ageism can affect people at any stage of life, this guide focuses on ageism directed at older adults because colleges and universities have historically been structured around younger and middle-aged students and employees. These longstanding assumptions about who “fits” in higher education can create barriers for older adults pursuing learning or employment, such as:

- Limited flexibility in courses, programs, or institutional processes, which may not accommodate varied schedules, responsibilities, or life circumstances.
- Insufficient supports for entering, re-entering, or advancing within higher education, whether as learners or employees.
- Assumptions about suitability or belonging, including treating older adults as exceptions rather than integral members of the campus community.

Older adults bring valuable experience, mentorship, and institutional knowledge to campus communities. Yet, age-based assumptions may still influence how they are perceived and included. For example, campus activities or communications may implicitly target younger adults, unintentionally signalling that older participants fall outside the expected norm.²³

As campus demographics change, developing age-inclusive policies, programs, and services helps address longstanding gaps in access and belonging. Creating higher education environments that support engagement across the lifespan benefits everyone by normalizing age diversity in learning and work.¹⁵



How Ageism Appears in Higher Education

Ageism can appear in many areas of campus life. The *Age Inclusivity Domains of Higher Education (AIDHE) Model* identifies key parts of higher education institutions where age-inclusive practices are especially important.²⁴ Common examples include:



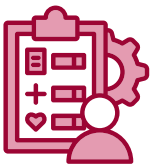
Teaching and learning: Course design or classroom interaction may be shaped by assumptions about pace, ability, or preferred learning styles. Age-inclusive practices use flexibility and universal design to support learners at different life stages.



Research: Older adults may be excluded due to age cutoffs that are not methodologically necessary. Age-inclusive research meaningfully involves older adults—as collaborators, advisors, or participants—when appropriate.



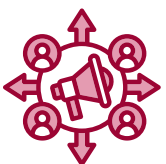
Student affairs: Services and programs often focus on traditional-age students, signalling that older learners fall outside the norm. Age-inclusive practices acknowledge diverse life circumstances, including work and caregiving responsibilities.



Personnel (human resources): Hiring, development, promotion, and retirement practices may be influenced by assumptions about adaptability or productivity. Age-inclusive approaches value experience and support growth across the entire career span.



Services and resources: Supports such as technology help or advising may be based on assumptions about who needs assistance. Age-inclusive approaches focus on individual needs rather than presumed abilities.



Outreach and engagement: Engagement efforts may prioritize recent graduates, overlooking opportunities to meaningfully involve alumni and retirees in intergenerational activities, mentoring, and lifelong learning initiatives.



Physical environment: Campus design may not fully consider diverse mobility, sensory, or stamina needs. Universal design features improve accessibility for all ages.

Strategies to Combat Ageism

The WHO has identified three evidence-based approaches for reducing ageism: policy and law, education, and intergenerational interventions.¹⁵ In higher education, each of these strategies can help build more age-inclusive environments.

Policy and law

Policy interventions focus on creating systems and practices that prevent age-based discrimination and ensure fair access for people at every stage of life. These measures help establish campus environments where individuals of all ages can participate fully and equitably.



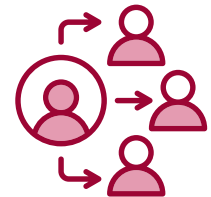
Education

Educational interventions aim to correct misconceptions about aging and reduce bias by providing accurate, realistic information.^{15,25} These efforts help foster age-positive attitudes among campus members.



Intergenerational

Intergenerational activities—bringing people of different ages together—are especially effective for reducing stereotypes and prejudice.^{15,26} In higher education settings, these experiences enhance understanding across age groups, challenge assumptions, and strengthen campus connections.²⁶⁻²⁸



Key Takeaways

- Ageism is a form of discrimination based on age that can affect people at any stage of life, often in subtle ways that may go unnoticed.
- Ageism can manifest in different ways—institutional, interpersonal, internalized, benevolent, ambivalent, and hostile—that reinforce inaccurate expectations about what people can or cannot do at different ages.
- Ageism intersects with other forms of inequality, such as ableism, sexism, racism, and classism, leading to compounded barriers for those who belong to multiple equity-deserving groups.
- Higher education systems have historically centered younger adults, creating barriers for older students, faculty, and staff that require intentional age-inclusive strategies.
- Ageism can appear across many areas of campus life, including teaching and learning, research, student affairs, personnel, services and resources, outreach and engagement, and the physical environment.
- Reducing ageism requires a comprehensive approach, including equitable policy and structures, education and training, and meaningful intergenerational engagement.

Reflection Questions

1. What examples of ageism—subtle or overt—have you witnessed or experienced in higher education?
2. In what ways might ageism be shaping policies, programs, services, or everyday practices in higher education—even when not explicitly acknowledged?
3. What barriers might older students, faculty, or staff encounter that are not immediately visible?
4. In your own role, where could you shift from age-based assumptions to practices that focus on individuals' actual abilities, needs, and goals?
5. How might intergenerational opportunities benefit your area of study or work?

Recommended Resources

WHO Global Campaign to Combat Ageism Toolkit

The WHO's Global Campaign to Combat Ageism Toolkit provides clear, accessible guidance on understanding ageism and practical ways for reducing it. The toolkit includes key messages, conversation guides, event templates, and social media materials to support awareness-building efforts.²⁹

Ageism Awareness and Education Module & Toolkit

The Canadian Coalition Against Ageism developed an educational module and action-oriented toolkit designed to build awareness of ageism and support reflection, dialogue, and positive change.³⁰

Age Inclusivity in Higher Education: Quick Start Guide

The Gerontological Society of America, in collaboration with the National Center to Reframe Aging, developed a guide to provide examples, strategies, and reflection questions that support age-inclusive communication and practice across key areas of higher education.²⁴

Age-Friendly University Best Practices Database

The AFU Global Network created a database of age-friendly resources contributed by member institutions, offering practical examples and inspiration for implementing age-inclusive practices.³¹

Age-Inclusive Practices

Learning Objectives

After reading this section, readers will be able to:

- Apply guiding principles of age-inclusive practice to communications and interactions in higher education settings.
- Identify opportunities to integrate age-inclusive approaches across different areas of campus life.
- Use age-inclusive language that avoids stereotypes, assumptions, and deficit-based framing.
- Select visuals that accurately and respectfully represent older adults and reflect diversity in identities and roles.
- Design accessible and inclusive materials that support access and understanding across ages and abilities.

Guiding Principles for Age-Inclusive Practice

Age-inclusive practice begins with recognizing that people of all ages bring valuable experiences, strengths, and perspectives to higher education. These principles provide a foundation for the language, visual, and design strategies described in the rest of this section.



Recognize the diversity of aging

People age in different ways, shaped by individual capacities, environments, and life experiences. Avoid making assumptions about needs, abilities, or preferences based solely on age.¹⁵ This principle underpins the age-inclusive language, visuals, and design practices that follow.

Focus on individuals, not age groups

Treat age as one aspect of identity rather than a defining characteristic. Using precise and respectful wording when age is a relevant characteristic, while avoiding stereotypes, helps ensure that communication reflects people's real experiences rather than assumptions about their age group.³²

Represent aging realistically and respectfully

Visuals and examples should reflect older adults in a variety of roles and everyday activities—not only in scenes that emphasize frailty or extraordinary ability. Realistic representation helps counter narrow or misleading views of aging.³³

Support participation across ages

Information, services, and materials should be designed so people of all ages can understand and use them.³⁴ Clear layouts, readable text, and accessible formats help reduce barriers and promote fuller engagement.

Match communication to purpose and context

Choose terminology, images, and formats that fit the situation—whether academic, administrative, or public-facing—and reflect the preferences of individuals or communities when known.³⁴ Context-aware communication helps ensure that messages are accurate, respectful, and appropriate for the situation.

Applying Age-Inclusive Approaches Across Higher Education

Age-inclusive practices can be integrated into various areas of higher education. This section focuses on recognizing where adjustments can help create more welcoming environments. The examples below illustrate where age inclusivity can make a meaningful difference.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning shape how students encounter aging and experience inclusion within classrooms and course activities. Age-inclusive approaches can focus on using examples that reflect different life stages and offering flexible ways to participate.



Research

Research practices influence who is represented in studies and how aging is reflected in evidence and scholarship. Age-inclusive approaches can focus on using respectful language and designing recruitment and methods that include participants across ages while avoiding unnecessary exclusions.



Student affairs

Student affairs—such as recruitment, admissions, advising, and career services—affect whether learners of all ages feel they belong and can navigate the institution confidently. Age-inclusive approaches can focus on clear, inclusive messaging and flexible supports that do not assume a “typical” student profile.



Personnel (human resources)

Human resources practices shape how employees at different career stages experience hiring, development, and advancement. Age-inclusive approaches can focus on emphasizing skills and competencies rather than age-coded expectations, and ensuring opportunities are accessible across career stages.



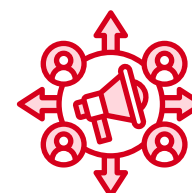
Services and resources

Campus services—such as IT support, libraries, and advising—influence how individuals access information and interact with the institution. Age-inclusive approaches can focus on providing clear information and multiple ways to access support without assuming who might need assistance.



Outreach and engagement

Outreach and engagement efforts—including alumni relations, retiree relations, community partnerships, and public communications—shape broader narratives about who participates in campus life. Age-inclusive approaches can focus on portraying older adults in varied roles and highlighting intergenerational engagement to support a more accurate and inclusive representation of the campus community.



The practical strategies outlined in the following subsections—language, visuals, and design—can be applied across all of these areas. For additional guidance on age-inclusive messaging in higher education, the *Age Inclusivity in Higher Education: Quick Start Guide* offers further detail.²⁴

Using Age-Inclusive Language

Language shapes how people understand aging, including conditions that may occur in later life. Small adjustments to word choice can help avoid stereotypes and contribute to a more inclusive campus culture.

This section explains why certain language choices are more respectful and how thoughtful communication can improve understanding.^{32,35,36}



General Guidance



- Consider whether age is relevant before mentioning it, and avoid making assumptions based solely on age.



- Use specific ages or age ranges when age is relevant, rather than broad or vague labels.



- Use age-neutral wording when age does not matter in the message.



- Use person-first or identity-first language as appropriate, and avoid wording that defines people by conditions or limitations.



- Choose terminology that fits the context, recognizing that policy, research, and everyday language may require different terms.



- Use the terms people prefer for themselves whenever that information is known.

Referring to Older Adults

Some commonly used terms carry negative or outdated connotations. Others may portray older adults as a single, uniform group rather than as individuals with diverse experiences.



Less Inclusive

- the elderly, the aged, seniors

These terms can sound clinical, impersonal, or paternalistic. They also often suggest frailty or dependency.



More Respectful

- older adults, older persons, the older adult population

These terms are neutral and describe a life stage without implying ability or dependency.



Context Matters

- **Senior** can refer to a person in a certain age group or to a position or hierarchy (e.g., senior staff). Use it only when required by the context or when an individual self-identifies with the term.
- **Elder** has a specific cultural meaning in many Indigenous communities, referring to a respected knowledge keeper. Use this term only when that cultural meaning applies.

Using Specific Ages and Age Ranges

Certain phrases can be vague, reinforce stereotypes, or carry judgment.



Less Inclusive

- old man, old woman, old person

These phrases can feel dismissive or reductive and focus on age as the defining characteristic.



More Respectful

- older man, older woman, older person
- adults aged 65–75, people in their 70s, octogenarians, centenarians

The use of specific ages or age ranges helps avoid stereotypes and supports accuracy, especially in teaching, research, and policy contexts.

Talking About Health and Disability

Language used to describe health or functional differences can unintentionally imply decline, victimhood, or helplessness.



Less Inclusive

- “suffering from,” “afflicted with,” “stricken with”
- “confined to a wheelchair,” “wheelchair bound”
- “frail person”

These phrases reduce the person to their condition and can suggest they are someone to be pitied.



More Respectful

- experiencing, living with, diagnosed with
- uses a wheelchair

These phrases focus on the person, not the condition, and avoid casting them in a passive or negative role.

Some individuals and communities prefer person-first language (e.g., person living with dementia), while others prefer identity-first language (e.g., disabled person). When possible, use the terminology preferred by the individual or community you are referring to.

Reflection Questions

1. When you mention age, is it necessary and respectful?
2. What spoken or unspoken assumptions might accompany the words you choose?
3. Would the language feel acceptable if it were used to describe you?

Using Age-Inclusive Visuals

Similar to language, visuals influence how aging is understood. Images that feature only younger adults—or portray aging solely through depictions of frailty or exceptional ability—can reinforce stereotypes and limit how people perceive later life.

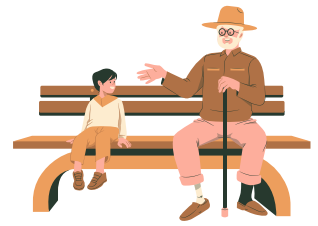
This section outlines visual choices that support more accurate and inclusive portrayals of aging. These guidelines offer key considerations for choosing respectful and realistic imagery.^{33,37-39}



General Guidance

- Portray older adults with diversity—including differences in abilities, gender, race, culture, and other identities—rather than relying on a single, uniform image of aging.
- Show older adults engaged in everyday activities, not only scenes of decline, caregiving roles, or “superhuman” accomplishments.
- Choose images that feel natural and authentic, avoiding overly staged or clichéd photos that do not reflect real experiences.
- Avoid tokenism by ensuring older adults are represented meaningfully, rather than included as isolated or symbolic figures.
- Consider context and purpose—images depicting someone living with frailty may be appropriate in certain situations, but they should be accurate, respectful, and not used as the default representation.
- Avoid visuals that imply pity, limitation, or novelty, unless they are contextually accurate and necessary.
- Shift the visual focus when a suitable, non-stereotypical image is not available rather than relying on portrayals that reinforce harmful stereotypes.

As you review the images on the following page, consider the general guidance above, including whether the images offer meaningful representations of older adults and the contexts in which they may or may not be appropriate.



What Inclusive Visuals Look Like


Teaching materials that include age-diverse or age-neutral icons or graphics, avoiding features that imply a specific age (e.g., stylized youthful body shapes, exaggerated poses, or assumptions about who uses technology).

Example: Course Slide

Technology Required for This Course

- D2L (Course materials, announcements, grades)
- Top Hat (In-class questions and participation)
- Zoom (Online tutorials and office hours)

Confused about how to use these or where to find them?



Support is available through:

- D2L Help / Student Guides on website
- University IT Support
- Library or Teaching & Learning Services

Technology Required for This Course

- D2L (Course materials, announcements, grades)
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In this example, replacing the age-coded depiction of confusion with a neutral symbol communicates that learning new technologies is normal and supported at any age.

Research materials that depict older adults participating meaningfully in study activities, such as contributing expertise or engaging in collaborative processes.

Example: Recruitment Poster



Now Recruiting!
**Help Improve
Dementia Care
Through Lived
Experience**

We are inviting people with lived experience of dementia and caregiving to contribute to a research study focused on improving care practices in the healthcare system.



Now Recruiting!
**Help Improve
Dementia Care
Through Lived
Experience**

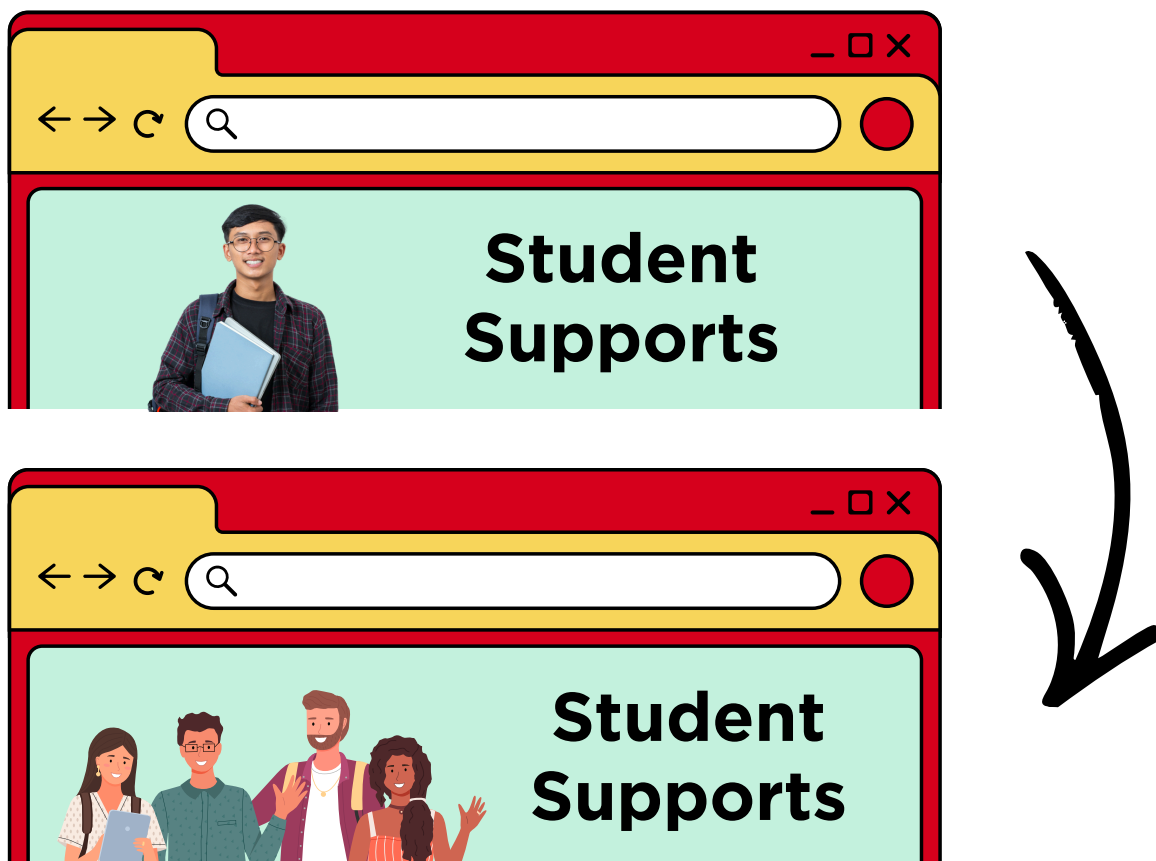
We are inviting people with lived experience of dementia and caregiving to contribute to a research study focused on improving care practices in the healthcare system.



Support can be shown without reducing a person solely to a care recipient. While the first image reflects a valid caregiving experience, it omits the person living with dementia as a key holder of knowledge. The second image remains imperfect but better reflects a healthcare context without relying on deficit-based imagery.

Student service materials that represent learners at different life stages, illustrating that people engage with campus supports across adulthood.

Example: Student Services Webpage Banner



Age-ambiguous and diverse visuals can help signal that campus supports are relevant across adulthood without tying them to a single life stage. While representation is important for learners to see themselves reflected, it is also worth considering when imagery is necessary and when the services themselves can take priority.

Reflection Questions

1. Who appears in your images—and who is missing?
2. How well do your images reflect diversity among older adults, such as differences in abilities, gender, race, and culture?
3. Do your visuals depict extremes (e.g., frailty or “super-agers”) rather than everyday experiences?
4. Are older adults shown in a variety of roles and activities?

Using Accessible and Inclusive Design

Accessible and inclusive design helps ensure that materials are clear, readable, and usable for people with diverse needs and preferences. Structure, layout, and formatting all play a role in how effectively information is understood.

This section outlines design practices that support equitable access to materials across ages and abilities.^{40,41}



General Guidance

- Keep layouts clear and simple. Use headings, spacing, and consistent structure to make information easy to scan.
- Use readable text. Choose clear fonts, adequate text size, and strong contrast between text and background.
- Use plain language whenever possible. Aim for wording that is easy for a wide range of readers to understand.
- Do not rely on colour alone to communicate meaning. Pair colour with text labels, icons, or patterns.
- Ensure a logical reading order. Arrange content so it flows naturally for all readers, including those using assistive technologies such as screen readers.
- Provide alternatives for key content. Add captions to videos, alt text to images, and transcripts for audio.

Layout and Navigation





- Use clear headings and section breaks to guide readers.
- Avoid clutter or overly complex layouts.
- Ensure content follows a logical reading order, especially for screen readers.
- Use bullets and white space to break up dense information.

Font and Text

- Use sans-serif fonts for clarity (e.g., **Gotham**, **Arial**, **Calibri**, or **Verdana**).
- Use at least 12-point text for printed materials and 16-pixel text for digital content. Use larger font sizes for headings.
- Keep spacing and alignment consistent to support readability.
- Avoid all caps (**ALL CAPS**), italics (*italics*), or large blocks of uninterrupted text.

Colour and Contrast

- Use high contrast between text and background (e.g., black text on a white background). 
- Avoid light grey or low-contrast text, especially on coloured backgrounds. 
- Do not use colour alone to convey meaning (e.g., relying only on red to indicate “stop” or “important”).

Multimedia

- Add alt text to visual elements, such as images, icons, and graphics, to explain their context or purpose.
- Caption videos and provide transcripts for audio content.
- Make clickable elements large enough and spaced apart for ease of use.
- Avoid fast animations or transitions, which may distract users or cause motion sensitivity.

Reflection Questions

1. If someone skimmed your material, would the structure and flow be clear?
2. Is the text easy to read and understand, including on smaller screens or at different viewing distances?
3. How might someone with different sensory, cognitive, or motor needs experience your material?
4. Have you used headings, spacing, and contrast in ways that make information easier for everyone to access?

Key Takeaways

- Age-inclusive practice begins with recognizing the diversity of aging and avoiding assumptions based on age alone.
- Age inclusivity can be applied across teaching, research, student services, human resources, campus supports, and public-facing communications.
- Age-inclusive language uses neutral, precise terms and avoids stereotypes, vague labels, or wording that portrays people in passive or negative ways.
- Inclusive visuals show older adults in varied, everyday roles and avoid portrayals that emphasize frailty, dependency, or exceptionalism.
- Clear, readable, and well-structured materials support access and understanding for people across ages and abilities.

Reflection Questions

1. Which guiding principle feels most important for your study or work, and why?
2. Where in your role do you have opportunities to influence how people of different ages are represented, welcomed, or supported?
3. How might integrating age-inclusive practices strengthen access, participation, or belonging in the areas you influence most?
4. What is one meaningful change you could introduce—big or small—to help create a more age-inclusive environment in your classes, workspaces, or campus activities?

Recommended Resources

Age-Inclusive Communication

Changing the Narrative – Age-inclusive Communication Guide

A resource offering practical strategies to avoid ageist language and imagery, promote respectful representation of older adults, and support positive narratives about aging.⁴²

Embracing Age Diversity: A Guide to Inclusive Language and Images

A practical guide that helps organizations choose age-inclusive language and select realistic, respectful images of older adults. Includes links to additional communication and representation resources.⁴³

Age-Friendly Communication: Facts, Tips, and Ideas

A guide from the Public Health Agency of Canada that offers tips for creating age-friendly communications, including selecting appropriate communication formats and crafting clear, inclusive messages.³⁴

Hemmingway Editor

A plain-language tool that helps make written materials clearer and more readable for student-facing and public communications.⁴⁴

Age-Positive Images

Age-Positive Image Library

A searchable collection of age-positive images for public use, featuring older adults in diverse and realistic roles.⁴⁵

Reframing Aging Collection (Unsplash)

A curated set of photographs from Changing the Narrative that depict aging in positive, everyday contexts.⁴⁶

Disrupt Aging® Collection (Getty Images)

A collection created in partnership with AARP to challenge outdated stereotypes and portray older adults in modern, authentic ways.⁴⁷

Accessible and Inclusive Design

Making Documents More Accessible – Accessible Canada Regulations Guidance

A step-by-step guide from Employment and Social Development Canada with practical advice on improving document accessibility, including clear language, headings, tables, hyperlinks, alt text, and links to tools, style guides, and accessibility testing software.⁴⁰

Web Accessibility Overview (W3C)

A high-level introduction to core accessibility principles and why they matter when creating digital communications and materials.⁴¹

WebAIM Colour Contrast Checker

A tool that helps ensure sufficient contrast between foreground and background colours for clear, readable, and inclusive design.⁴⁸

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