

REFRAMING AGEING  
BRITISH COLUMBIANS' THOUGHTS ON AGEISM

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OFFICE OF THE  
**SENIORS** ADVOCATE  
BRITISH COLUMBIA



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# MESSAGE FROM THE SENIORS ADVOCATE

When I meet with older people around the province, I see many who are redefining ageing, identifying and combating ageist stereotypes in their daily lives, and making incredible contributions to their families and communities. However, many seniors are also struggling to make ends meet and access the services and supports needed to remain healthy and safe. Their challenges are further exacerbated by ageism – either imposed upon them or self-imposed.

Unfortunately, some people have a bias that seniors are frail, needy and in a state of decline. In reality, many seniors around the province face barriers to access important programs and services such as affordable housing, health care and transportation. They are identifying discrimination in employment such as age-bias in job recruitment or workplaces denying them promotions or training opportunities.

For these reasons, I wanted to examine the effects of ageism on older British Columbians. This work is important at this time in our history because our province and country are at the beginning of a significant increase in the seniors' demographic that will peak over the coming decade. Therefore, I am pleased to present the first-ever report on ageism from the Office of the Seniors Advocate.

In undertaking the survey, which is the basis for this report, I wanted to know more about the extent to which British Columbians believed ageism is an issue and hear from seniors to better understand how ageism impacts their lives. Ageism is a broad subject that affects all generations. Our engagement was an essential first step to gauge how ageism impacts older people in our province. While many of the stories are heartbreaking, they also emphasize the importance of valuing seniors' contributions, ensuring their participation in decision-making, and learning from their stories.

What can British Columbians do to combat ageism in our province? As individuals, we can reframe ageing as something positive. Embrace that next birthday. Celebrate how old we are. Stop hiding or lying about our age. Other "isms" in our society are rightly unacceptable – and we must no longer tolerate ageism as well. We can work on getting to know each other as people, across multiple generations because each generation has something to learn from the other.

This report also contains some ideas about how to begin to address ageism on a systemic basis to help ensure that human dignity, independence, security, full participation, fairness, and equal rights of older British Columbians are protected and upheld. It is an area that our office will be exploring further in the future.

Discriminating against people based on their age is unacceptable. I am committed to working to ensure older people in B.C. are recognized for their abilities, knowledge, and past, current and future contributions to our society. Ageing isn't an issue – ageism is.




Dan Levitt  
BC Seniors Advocate





# TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGMENT



With respect and gratitude, the Office of the Seniors Advocate acknowledges this report was prepared on the territories of the ɫəkʷəŋən People, the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, whose deep connections with this land continue to this day. The information provided for this report was contributed from the territories of First Nations throughout B.C.

# WHAT IS AGEISM?

## AGEISM CAN TAKE PLACE THROUGH:

### INSTITUTIONAL AGEISM

Laws, rules, social norms, policies and practices that disadvantage individuals because of their age

### INTERPERSONAL AGEISM

Interactions between two or more individuals (i.e., social interactions)

### SELF-DIRECTED AGEISM

Occurs when a person internalizes negative stereotypes and apply them to themselves

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), “ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age.”<sup>1</sup> Ageism can affect people of all ages and it can be institutional, interpersonal or self-directed. It can also intersect with other forms of discrimination, including racism, sexism and ableism and can result in people being categorized and divided.

Most research to date has focused on how ageism negatively impacts older people, including the workplace where older workers are less likely to be employed or offered training; in healthcare settings where seniors face inequities in access to and provision of healthcare on the basis of age; in everyday conversations where older people are patronized, ignored, insulted or others assuming they are incapable of making decisions.<sup>2</sup>

Ageism can be difficult to quantify, but the trends in Canada and other countries indicate it is an increasingly significant issue for seniors. The WHO reports that globally, one in two people are ageist against older people.<sup>3</sup> A 2024 survey by the National Institute on Ageing found 68% of Canadians (50+) reported experiencing at least one form of ageism in their day-to-day lives.<sup>4</sup>

Ageism can impact an older person’s self-worth, independence, safety, mental and physical health, social life and financial well-





being. Many seniors continue to participate and contribute in communities and live active, purposeful lives. However, ageism frames being older as frail, vulnerable and in a state of decline, rather than one that celebrates skills, experience and knowledge.

In daily life, ageism can manifest in many ways including:

- denying a senior autonomy or agency about their life
- being overlooked in favour of younger people for employment
- stereotypes that older people can't use technology or embrace new ideas
- jokes about someone's age or making fun of older people
- possible increased risk of violence and abuse against older people
- being dismissive or "not seeing" older people in everyday interactions
- stereotypes in advertising, entertainment or media that older people are invaluable, feeble or unattractive

- discrimination or self-ageism from a perception that grey hair and wrinkled skin is undesirable

Unlike ageing, ageism is not inevitable. Defining and discussing ageism enables people to be aware of biases and assumptions and more mindful of the language used about ageing. Creating opportunities for positive interaction between older and younger people, as well as updating policies, laws and educational activities, helps address ageist views.



# ENGAGING WITH BRITISH COLUMBIANS ABOUT AGEISM

Learning more about ageism and its prevalence in British Columbia is an evolving area of interest for the BC Seniors Advocate. As a first step, the Office of the Seniors Advocate (OSA) launched an online engagement in Fall 2024<sup>5</sup> inviting British Columbians of all ages to share their perceptions and experiences with ageism and how ageism may be impacting their lives. While the OSA's mandate is focused on seniors, ageism can affect people of all ages and can be observed by anyone.

The survey asked British Columbians:

- Do you think ageism is an issue in B.C.?
- Have you been directly impacted by ageism?
- If yes, briefly describe your experience.

The findings from this engagement will help the ongoing conversation about the degree of ageism in B.C. and its potential implications for seniors and society as a whole.

During the month-long engagement period, 9,200 people responded to our ageism survey. More than 80% of respondents believe ageism is an issue in B.C., and of those people, more than half told us they have been directly impacted by ageism.

This report summarizes the feedback through five themes: social inclusion, employment, health care, the media and safety, and includes the issues related to each of these themes raised by British Columbians. While we did not ask participants to disclose their age, the written feedback from participants may have included details where they self-reported as a senior (65+). We hope amplifying the voices of the participants can be the first of many steps in recognizing the lasting harms of ageism on people and society.



**84%** BELIEVE AGEISM IS AN ISSUE IN B.C.

**54%** HAVE BEEN DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY AGEISM



# AGEISM AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Social inclusion is the extent to which people are welcomed in society and can fully participate in a variety of social interactions while still being respected for their differences. Ageism can lead to older adults not being included in society in a meaningful way, resulting in isolation and loneliness. Negative stereotypes about ageing continue to be pervasive in our society despite seniors living longer, healthier lives. One of the most telling forms of ageism as it relates to social inclusion is “self-ageism” where seniors internalize negative stereotypes and potentially impact their physical, mental and emotional health.<sup>6</sup>

The lack of social inclusion at many levels of society was a major theme in the feedback we received, from the family level where grandchildren might exclude their elders in digital conversations, to the community level where seniors felt their voices were not heard by local politicians and community planners. We heard from many seniors who felt they were ignored in social and employment situations because their grey hair made them somehow invisible to others.

Respondents also shared how the digital divide left them feeling isolated in a technological era, while others who are digitally proficient were spoken to in a patronizing way when they asked for technical support. Finally, ageism and social inclusion is exacerbated by other forms of social prejudice and exclusion, including racism, sexism and homophobia. For example, many older women expressed dismay at the extent to which they felt they were no longer visible to younger people.


The following are a selection of what we heard from our respondents in their own words.



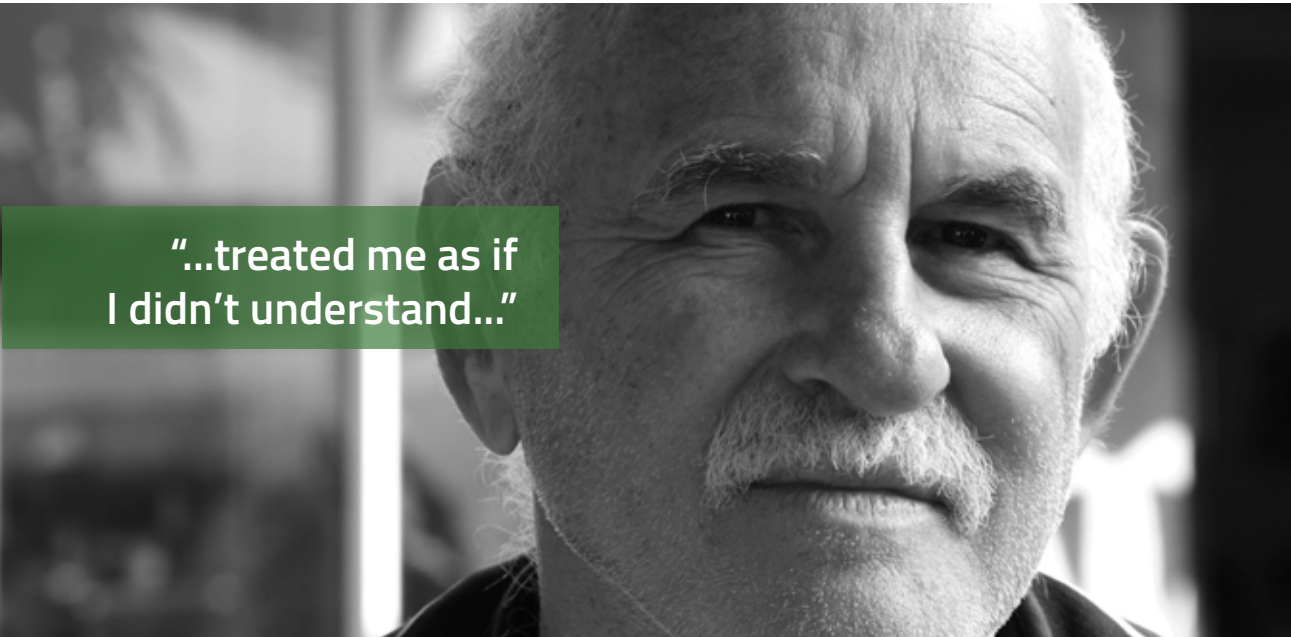
**“Seniors could contribute a lot to society, if ageism were removed.”**

*“Seniors are invisible in society and treated as irrelevant. The only advertising I see for seniors are for medication, retirement homes and Depends. Seniors have more money than the younger generation and are contributing to the economy by spending on home renovations, travel, and by helping their children and grandchildren financially and with childcare. People’s lifespans are now longer than ever, and a large number of people live to 100 and beyond. People over the age of 65 are contributing to society but are classified as seniors by chronological age and devalued. Seniors could contribute a lot to society, if ageism were removed. They could mitigate the labour shortage, for one thing.”*

*“As a 70-year-old woman, I am sadly aware how invisible I feel and I am often ignored by the general public. We live in a youth-driven culture. Younger generations aren’t interested in talking to us or hearing what we have to say. Including city councilors who believe our voices no longer matter, we are dismissed because we are ‘resistant to change’ or ‘stuck in our ways.’”*



**“... our voices no longer matter, we are dismissed...”**



**"...treated me as if I didn't understand..."**

*"I recently went to the bank and the teller treated me as if I didn't understand how the banking system worked. I asked what the interest rate was on a high-interest account. The person spoke slowly and said it was complicated, and that he could make me an appointment and maybe I should bring someone with me! I may have white hair, but I can still think and look after my finances."*

*"Because I am in my 70's and walk slowly with a limp, I have been treated as if I also have cognitive disabilities (e.g. at my bank)."*

*"I am a 70-years-young woman who feels that people judge me by my age and my grey hair. I feel there are long standing stereotypes around seniors that are alive and well today!"*

*"Organized activities inviting seniors to participate (i.e. at library, senior friendship centre, 'out-and-about' activities) are stereotyped for 'old people', assuming we are all physically limited, that we all want to hear music from 50's, 60's and 70's. They think we are not interested in learning new games or new dances, that we have nothing relevant or worthwhile to contribute to conversations (i.e. about city planning). We experience dismissive salesclerks and face stereotypes in social media that imply we are all tech illiterate and incapable of learning it. And doctors say 'well, at your age...' and dismiss new acute pain symptoms."*

*"I am a 62-year-old retired medical laboratory technologist. I am also female and permanently disabled from multiple sclerosis. Whenever I am in my wheelchair or assistive device in public, I become immediately invisible to those who speak to whoever is pushing my chair. My mind is still active and vital despite my gray hair and facial wrinkles. My voice is not valued nor is my opinion sought. Being old is like being deemed dead while still breathing. Wish I could say that it's different with my family members hearing and seeing me still, but they also have embraced the societal interpretation of age equating to burden and decrepitude."*



**"My voice is not valued..."**

*"Recently, at 85, I am invisible. I am expected to be old and feeble and not able to look after myself. Lots of ageist remarks like 'You're still working?!', 'You're still driving?!', 'You're still living on your own without help?! - Amazing!'. As if I shouldn't be able to still do these things."*

*"Going into stores featuring predominantly younger-age clothing I have been completely ignored whereas younger people were greeted immediately and offered assistance. I was prepared to spend money there on gifts but after ten minutes of being ignored I left the store."*

*"I feel I disappeared when I turned 50. I have had young people get impatient with me when I ask questions, especially about computers and media, and don't do things the way they do (including my grandchildren). I have had younger people ignore what I have to say even though I have decades more experience than they do. I have been overlooked in line for a younger person. Where folks used to ignore if I stumbled or forgot something, they now laugh at me. Folks don't recognize that 'senior' jokes are just as offensive as racial jokes. Young folks are constantly blaming their problems on 'Boomers' who supposedly lived their lives with no challenges or sacrifices, never worked hard and ruined the world on purpose. I would like to say that I have also had the opposite experiences where I have received respect and gratitude for volunteer work and community leadership by people who take the time to get to know me."*

*"Seniors should be aware of self-ageism discrimination within their own ranks. We may ourselves unwittingly stereotype our fellow seniors because of their overt handicap, speech, or demeanor without appreciating the peculiar causations, be it physical, psychological, or social. We need to internalize the ageism issue and overcome our own innate perceptions too."*



**"I am expected to be old and feeble and not able to look after myself."**



**"I feel I disappeared when I turned 50."**

# AGEISM AND EMPLOYMENT



Most people retire at the age of 65, but with better health and the elimination of mandatory retirement (at 65), many older adults continue to remain in the workforce by choice (i.e., to maintain social connections, financial stability) or necessity (i.e., due to economy and inflation). In Canada, about 1 in 5 seniors continue to work past 65.<sup>7</sup> Ageist attitudes and age discrimination can impact older adults' ability to participate in the workforce.

There are many ways ageism has negative outcomes for seniors in the workplace such as age-bias in job recruitment; not being granted promotional or training opportunities; age-related bullying or harassment; repeated questions about retirement; and being subject to negative stereotypes including being resistant to change, slower with technology and inability to learn new things.<sup>8</sup> Ageism also affects younger workers who face stereotypes of unreliability and having their ideas dismissed because they are 'too young and inexperienced'.

We heard from many older workers who felt their younger colleagues believed they were less competent and productive, unable to learn new skills easily, and were concerned they were being pushed out of the workforce against their wishes. For seniors looking for a job, many reported employers assumed their salary expectations would be too high due to their job experience compared to younger workers, and they were not as likely to remain in the job for as long. Seniors also reported they felt targeted by co-workers and bosses repeatedly asking when they would retire, while others told us they were denied training opportunities and promotions.

The following are a selection of what we heard from our respondents in their own words.



**“...second-class citizens,  
without any real value.”**

*“I see it everywhere in my community; there is an underlying attitude that elderly individuals are not respected as other citizens are, and we have to address this as Canadians. Why do other cultures in the world revere their elderly, while we treat them as second-class citizens, without any real value. There is a huge ‘talent bank’ of people who may not have gainful employment, but who have much to contribute to the health of our society if only they were asked. It is time to address this as these members of society continue to become one of the fastest growing age groups in our country.”*

*“It is as if, overnight, I was no longer ‘wanted’. I would apply for even low-paying jobs and wasn’t even given the respect of an interview. My years of knowledge/experience are not valued. I am expected to stay quiet and out of the way. Our society values youth, but not seniors who can still contribute. We need money, as everyone does, so rather than complaining that positions can’t be filled, perhaps changing the job slightly (less heavy lifting as an example) would mean someone who can be trusted would fill the position. I resent the fact that I am now invisible because I’m no longer ‘cute’. I have worked since I was 15 years-old and I am now 62. It’s ridiculous that I have to convince myself that I’m still of value because society chooses to ignore me.”*

*“My partner has been struggling to find work due to his age being an issue. He has been looking for almost a year and has been told that people don’t want to hire him because with all of his experience they would have to pay him too much. He would just like a job and to be part of a team and hasn’t had the opportunity to even have that conversation.”*



**“I am expected to stay quiet  
and out of the way.”**

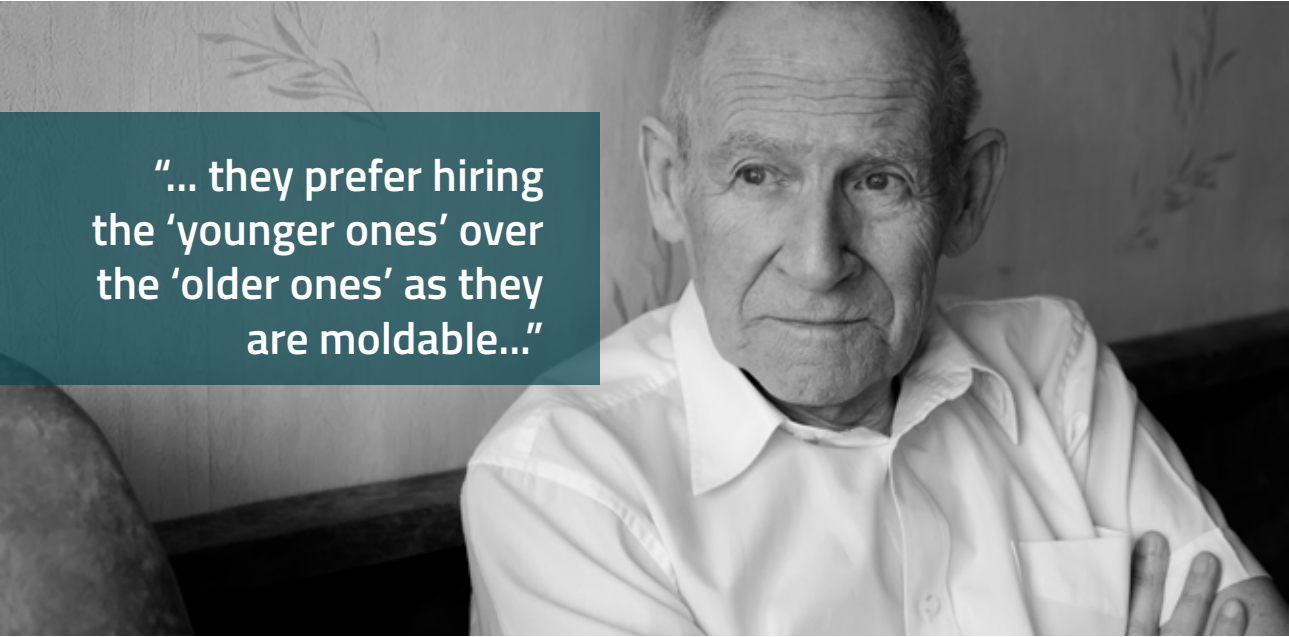


**“The company is very proactive about identifying other forms of discrimination ...”**

*“When I did find a job, it got out that I am over 65 and I know there was talk in the office about me. One person, I did not know who, even said that I may have early onset dementia, but I have an excellent memory and am fully functioning in my job. The company is very proactive about identifying other forms of discrimination such as LGBTQIA2S+ and Indigenous people, but slow to understand that many people in their 50s/60s/70s may still want to work - not just for financial reasons but because it is healthy and good to be productive.”*

*“After retirement I have been looking to return to the workforce. There is no question that my age is impacting that process. It’s been a whole new experience, and not a pleasant one.”*





**"... they prefer hiring the 'younger ones' over the 'older ones' as they are moldable..."**


*"My previous employer told me that they prefer hiring the 'younger ones' over the 'older ones' as they are moldable, and the 'old ones' are not. I was fired from my job with no cause and replaced by a 17-year-old. My understanding was that they hired her at \$17.00 per hour. I was making \$25.00 per hour."*

*"I was told in a job interview that although I'm very qualified, I was not a good candidate as I am in my 60's and would not have a long career with the prospective employer."*

*"I am a 70-year-old female who is still working full-time. I rent an apartment and even though I receive both CPP and Old Age Pension, I have to continue working to pay my bills, buy food and pay the rent that rises every year. I am one of the oldest at my workplace and feel that I don't get the respect I am due because of my age."*

*"At work I keep getting asked when I am going to retire. Even though there are very few, if any, younger colleagues who are qualified to do my job, it is as if I'm getting the message that it's time for me to step aside so younger people can get full time work."*

*"My wife decided to continue working for the provincial government after the age of 71 to help with our finances. After age 71, she could no longer contribute to the government pension plan. This meant that the government no longer had to pay their portion of the pension contribution. This resulted in a reduction of her annual compensation of approximately \$5,000 per year. I wrote to my MLA, the Minister of Finance, and the President of the BCGEU none of whom were interested in this issue."*



**"... I'm getting the message that it's time for me to step aside..."**



# AGEISM AND HEALTH CARE

Ageism in the healthcare sector is observed in a number of ways including not being able to access the same treatments as younger people (institutional ageism); patronizing or negative attitudes by health care staff (interpersonal ageism); and seniors' own health care decisions based on negative beliefs about their age (self-ageism).<sup>9</sup> The negative impacts of ageism on the psychological and physical health of seniors was confirmed in a recent systemic review which found that in 95.5% of studies, ageism led to significantly worse health outcomes for older patients.<sup>10</sup>


Like social isolation, ageism in health care can result in self-ageism causing older people to think they are not worthy of receiving services or care because aches, pains, fatigue, depression and other issues are inevitable as they age.<sup>11</sup> Self-ageism in turn has a direct effect on health as it can lead to unhealthy behaviours including lack of exercise, reduced likelihood of seeking treatment for symptoms, unhealthy eating, consuming alcohol and smoking.

Many seniors reported health care providers advised their symptoms were attributed to "just being a part of ageing" and not something worthy of further testing or treatment. Seniors

who shared this sentiment also reported they lived very healthy, active lifestyles and felt as though the physician or nurse characterized them as being in a state of overall decline due to their age instead of addressing a specific medical condition. We also heard examples of seniors feeling the communication with healthcare providers was ageist, including cases when physicians and nurses preferred to speak to their adult children and not them directly, as if they were not able to understand their own health issue.

Addressing ageism in the healthcare sector will need a combination of several factors including ongoing education for healthcare providers, appropriate treatment and health promotion programs for seniors and the inclusion of seniors in research programs.<sup>12</sup> Another solution is to increase the number of medically trained professionals in geriatric medicine to better serve the health care needs of the aging population. In Canada, there is a shortage of geriatricians relative to the seniors' population with estimates of over 300 trained geriatricians compared to nearly 3,000 pediatricians.<sup>13</sup>


The following are a selection of what we heard from our respondents in their own words.



**"... Why take on a senior when you will die in a few years anyway..."**

*"I am a bright, fit, active woman in her late 70's who, like many elders of similar type in her community, still works full time, carries a hefty volunteer load, and helps support her family. Yet despite all of that, I have difficulty accessing health care after years of waiting for a doctor; I am often told, 'Why take on a senior when you will die in a few years anyway,' or pushed past in lineups because the imperative of some person in their 20's or 30's is deemed more important than that of the quiet person with a grey head."*

*"I am a senior and I am having increasing difficulty getting medical care. I have chronic conditions and health issues that are not being addressed, and I have been dismissed by my current doctor as 'old' and told to 'stop ruminating on my symptoms'. I've had four primary doctors since Covid which doesn't help continuity of care. I live in a small suite in a house but if I lose this housing I don't know where I'd go as housing is scarce and costly."*



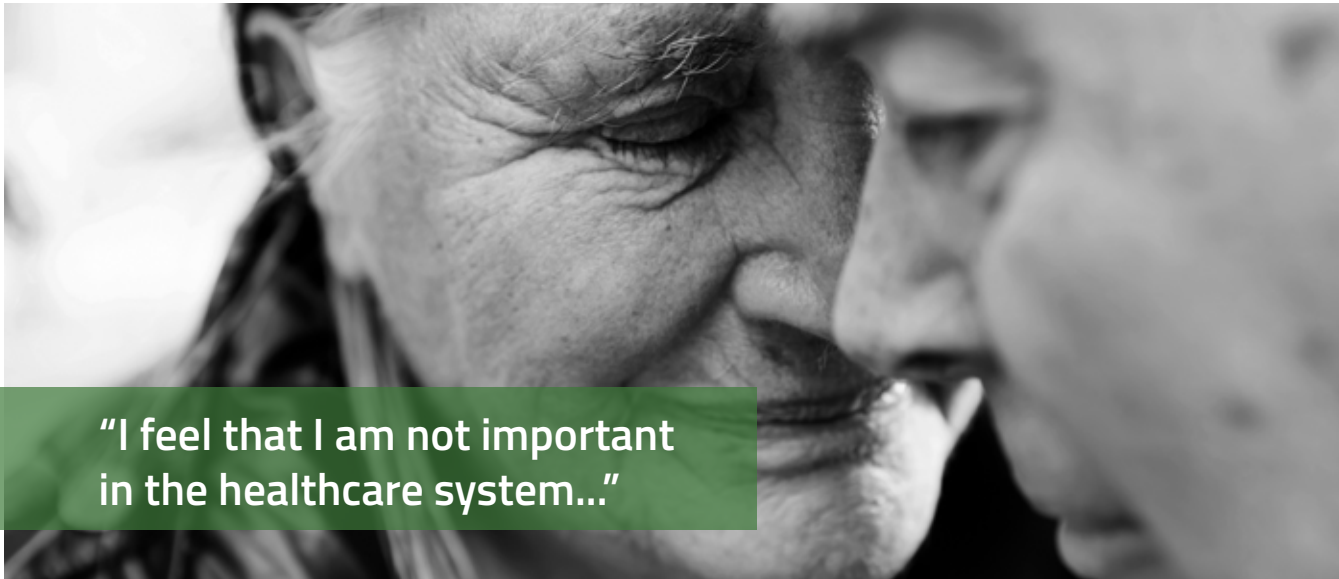
**"I have been dismissed by my current doctor as 'old!'"**



**“...the elderly need to be heard  
and advocated for.”**

*“As a nurse who works in long term care and home support, I see ageism regularly. It’s sad and the elderly need to be heard and advocated for.”*

*“My ageism experience was in health care. I was having heart issues that were not revealing anything positive in tests. After a number of emergency room visits, I was made to feel that I was wasting their time and received comments like ‘as we get older, stress affects us differently ...’ or ‘I think you’re just sensitive...’ Turns out I had severe sleep apnea which was diagnosed only after I insisted on a test. Since using therapy, I have had no heart issues. My test results did not fit in the ‘box’ and I was not taken seriously, I strongly believe, because of my age. I’ve also been asked on many occasions, nurses mostly, if I’m on any medications. When I say no, they ask ‘Are you SURE?’ Insulting!”*

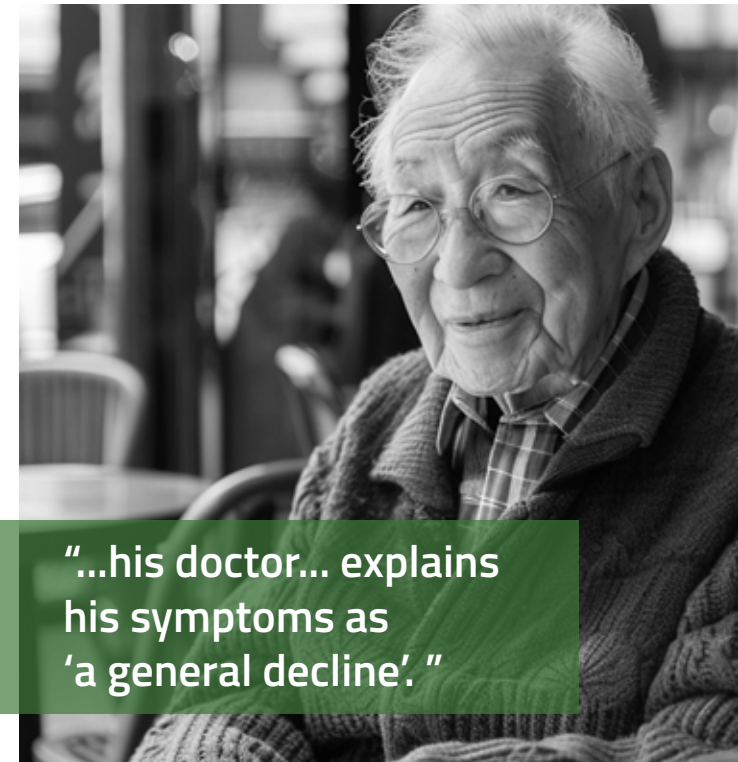


**"I feel that I am not important in the healthcare system..."**

*"I feel that I am not important in the healthcare system because I am retired and 68 years old. I have been without a family doctor for a year now and I am not a priority to have a family doctor. This means that any kind of health care which includes preventative care is passing me by. As a result, by the time I have to be admitted to hospital, I will likely be much sicker than I would be if I had a family doctor, and it will cost the system much more as well."*

*"My family is currently struggling with ageism in the health care system. My father is 86 years old and is immunocompromised. He currently has an infection, and his doctor is refusing to run tests or provide treatment and instead explains his symptoms as 'a general decline'. This also happened last year when he dealt with an infection for two months that his doctor did not investigate and explained as him 'declining'. He didn't receive proper treatment until the infection worsened to the point that he needed to stay in hospital for a month, during which time he nearly died. We are unable to get him a different doctor due to the difficulties of finding one. I'm at my wits end and terrified I will lose my father with him being under-treated due to ageism from his doctor."*

*"Recently I was hospitalized for nearly two months. Some of the doctors only wanted to speak to me if my husband was present and would only answer questions from my daughter. I believe this was ageism because the illness did not affect my brain or understanding of the illness. I also noticed that the nursing staff spent much less time communicating with the older patients."*



**"...his doctor... explains his symptoms as 'a general decline'."**

*"Health care professionals are not prioritizing my health needs because of the assumption that old equals frail and returning to an active lifestyle is not something I can or would want to do."*

*"A friend (age 75) was just told by a doctor that he was too old for cancer surgery. My 99-year-old mother-in-law was told after surgery that she was dying and had had a good long life, so they took away all antibiotics and IVs. When her original surgeon came back, he started them again and she is going strong at 100 - a year later."*



**"... the assumption that old equals frail..."**

*"In the area of health care, I felt brushed off by my doctor who would not allow me to have an advocate with me when I saw him. I am hard of hearing and almost blind and I will be 80 in January. This scenario happened at both appointments I had with him. I was sure that anyone should be allowed an advocate in the room with them, especially when they are a senior. "*

*"I was asked by my doctor when at appointment for prescription renewal if I had a will, and I was surprised as that was not the reason for the appointment; at a later appointment, I was asked if I knew what MAID was? I was gob smacked as, although I am in my mid-70s, I volunteer at a local food bank and museum and am very physically active. I don't look my age and my current health is good! I was also an RN but have BSc and MSc in agriculture! The doctor didn't look at me while asking these questions. Is this what our health care has come to?"*



**"... I felt brushed off by my doctor..."**

# AGEISM AND MEDIA

Ageism in the media - including entertainment, advertising, news and social media – are among the most obvious and noticeable forms of negative stereotypes of older people. Ageism in marketing and advertising fuels older peoples' feelings of being unattractive, worthless and invisible when people their age are not shown at all or depicted as frail and incapable. The media reflects the ageist attitudes of society and then reinforces these beliefs by emphasizing stories and images of young, healthy people.<sup>14</sup> A recent major review of international media databases revealed that descriptions of older people were six times more likely to be negative than positive.<sup>15</sup>

Even positive stereotypes of older people in the media can be problematic if not presented well, as seniors who are represented as ageing successfully are usually shown to look younger and be fit and healthy. The results of our survey confirmed that women feel particularly susceptible to messages of 'anti-ageing' and needing to consume products that help retain a youthful appearance because looking older is less attractive.

Another trend we heard was news and social media stories pitting generations against each other by referencing that older people are increasing in number while also being wealthy and simultaneously drawing down significant public resources at the expense of younger people. Respondents cited "boomer" jokes and comments which were divisive and made them feel devalued by younger generations.

The following are a selection of what we heard from our respondents in their own words.






**“Older people are not the issue, but the way we talk about them is.”**

*“Aging is often portrayed in our society and in the media in a prejudicial and dismissive manner. The negative stereotypes of older adults often include wording such as senile, vulnerable, sad, lonely and incompetent. Older people are not the issue, but the way we talk about them is. The language in our society that describes older adults needs to change.”*

*“It’s everywhere and people don’t even realize it. It’s internalized and pervasive. E.g., ‘Anti-aging’ products, Not your grandma’s [fill in blank], ‘I’m dating myself’. Since cresting 50, I feel invisible, dismissed and ignored by medical providers, service providers and strangers. The other day, a man in the grocery store lineup started a friendly conversation with me and it was so odd to me that while I enjoyed the exchange, I was completely braced for a scam, a pickpocket or a mental health imbalance... why else would he talk to me?”*





**"... elderly implies frail, feeble and without wherewithal... "**


*"In the media, I shake my head when a 'victim' is described as an elderly person and then the age is revealed as 60-years-old. To me, using the word elderly implies frail, feeble and without wherewithal of the situation."*

*"The advertising online 'created just for seniors' is an insult to my intelligence but a great illustration of how others see us... I am 87."*

*"Comments in the media recently concern me. There is a feeling that younger people think we are a waste of space and air, consumers of what should be theirs (i.e. pensions, medical help) and definite prejudice (referring to boomers as inept and stupid, needing to get off the road because we're dangerous or slow, becoming a weight for the next generation when we need care). Respect for the elderly seems to have disappeared. It's concerning!"*



**"... younger people think we are a waste of space..."**



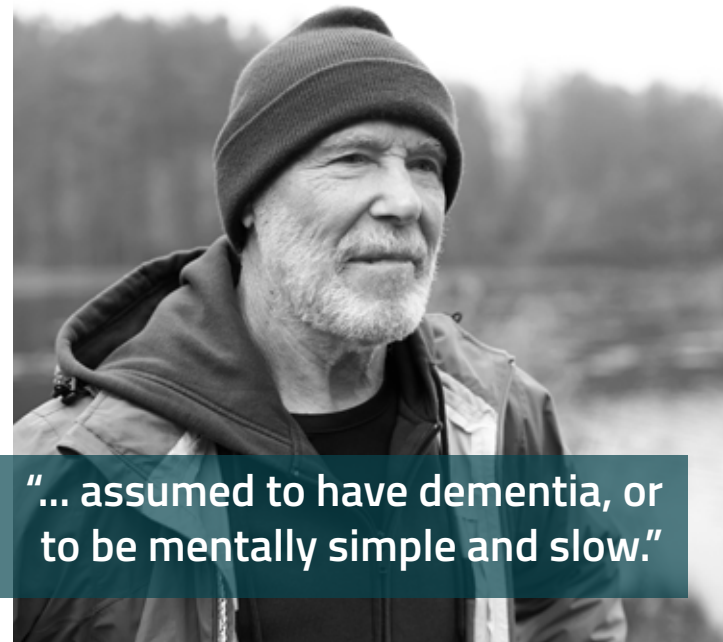
**"... devalued by negative media portrayals, scornful stereotypes..."**

*"I feel I have been rendered invisible and/or devalued by negative media portrayals, scornful stereotypes and social perspectives of older women, especially of single, child-free older women. I have never felt more vital, confident and wise in my life of 74 years, yet that feedback is non-existent!"*

*"In social media, I have seen negative stereotypes associated with people that are perceived as older, particularly 'boomers'. Assumptions made. It isn't exactly direct, but it does have something of an impact."*

*"The media refers to older people in demeaning, derogatory terms. Older people are assumed to have dementia, or to be mentally simple and slow. They worship 'youth', the Hollywood image, and insult seniors - ignoring, ridiculing and dismissing seniors. Promoting unscientific misinformation leading to unnecessary suffering, such as with the misuse of painkillers which, when used properly, can help."*

*"The impact of ageism is everywhere in our society: over-the-hill birthday cards, jokes about seniors (including from professional journalists), advertisements about 'staying young' and expressions of sympathy about being older all contribute to the devaluing of older people. Continuing to work, even when I'm more than able to do the job, is getting harder. Dying grey hair and hiding any kind of infirmity (even if mild) is a must."*



**"... assumed to have dementia, or to be mentally simple and slow."**

# AGEISM AND SAFETY

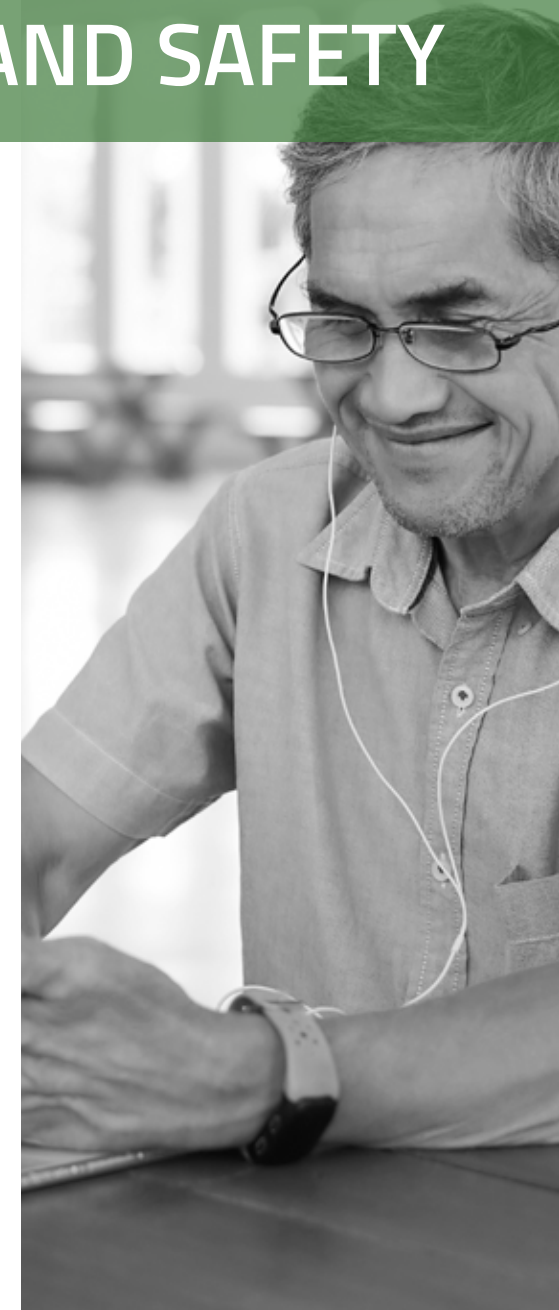
Ageism in our society also relates to how safe older people feel in their communities and how susceptible they are to various forms of abuse and neglect. The abuse or neglect of seniors is defined as “a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship in which there is expectation of trust that causes harm or distress to an older person.”<sup>16</sup> Ageism is not the abuse itself, but it is part of the attitude and beliefs of individuals and societies which allow the abuse to happen. When seniors are undervalued by people around them, they are in a position where abuse and neglect can occur without fear of repercussions for the perpetrators.

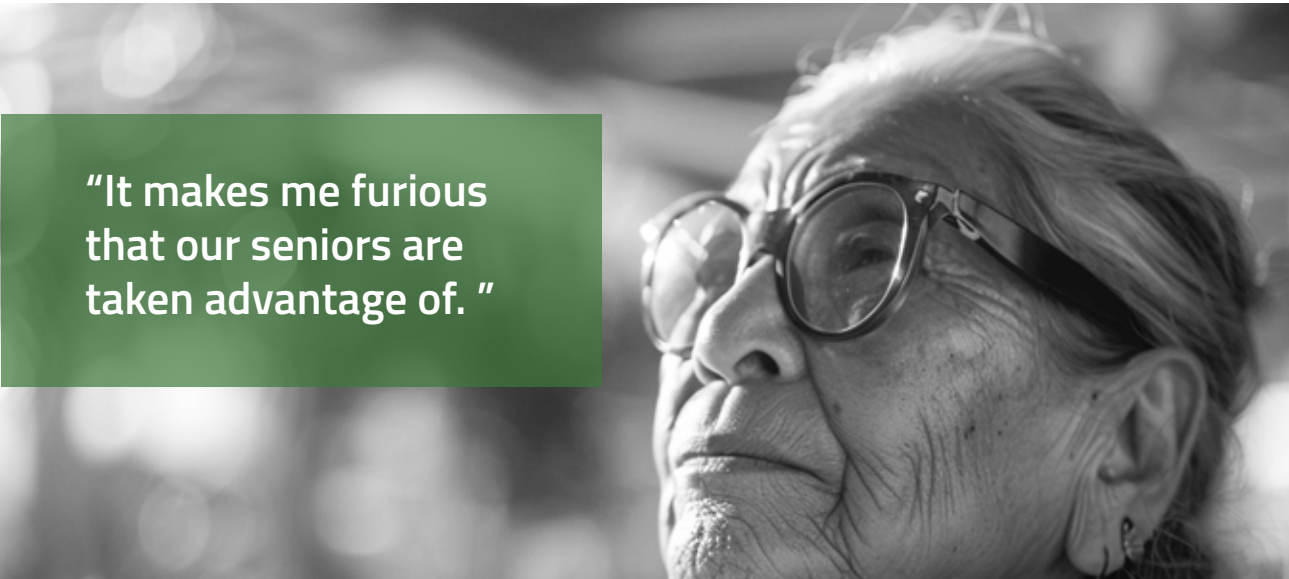
While ageism can be a significant factor in incidents of abuse and neglect, there is a need for more research to understand the specific behavioural links between ageist beliefs and how these lead to acts of violence and abuse.<sup>17</sup> Some populations within the seniors’ cohort are more susceptible to issues of ageism and safety: for example, older adults with physical or mental health issues, low income, who live

in rural areas, Indigenous seniors, members of ethnic minorities, or LGBTQI2S, are all more vulnerable to elder abuse.<sup>18</sup>

Respondents to our survey talked about not feeling safe in their neighborhoods due to unsafe sidewalks and an increasing number of people experiencing homelessness and dealing with substance use issues. We also heard from seniors who had experienced ageism in the form of financial abuse. For example, they felt taken advantage of due to their age when dealing with salespeople and service providers. Older people are often the victims of “upselling” tactics, feeling pressured to purchase items or add on additional features they don’t need.

The following are a selection of what we heard from our respondents in their own words.






**“It makes me furious that our seniors are taken advantage of.”**

*“My senior mother went into a phone store to get a new contract and was taken advantage of by the staff. They had her sign a contract for a hub she didn't need or want. When I went in to resolve this with her, I discovered the bait-and-switch tactic and reported it to customer service. It was a contractor who worked for the phone store and was about making money and sales any way possible. It makes me furious that our seniors are taken advantage of.”*

*“People take advantage of me, especially trades people hired to do small jobs. My daughter who pressures me for money and belittles me in front of others.”*

*“As a single senior, I am constantly being taken advantage of financially by professionals. If I have to call for service in my home or if I buy items like appliances, cars, etc. they assume it is okay to take advantage of me. I also feel that health issues that arise are downplayed because of my age.”*

*“My father passed away in August 2023 and helping him navigate the world for his last few years was eye opening. He was sold a vacuum when he could no longer walk without aid, was upsold when renewing car and tenant's insurance, and fell victim to online scams. Even when our family thought he would be safer living in a seniors' residence, he was taken advantage of at the care home. Power of Attorney, joint bank accounts, and bill management are incomplete without a strategy and tools to manage your parent's online identity. Few front counters exist in the modern world and high valued identity credentials such as the BC Services Card are only suitable for the individual. The Governments of Canada and British Columbia should do more to adapt their online services to be suitable for children that are managing their aging parents.”*



**“... pressures me for money and belittles me...”**

*"I work with a lot of seniors who are impacted by ageism. One of the common issues we see are seniors who are taken advantage of by landlords or denied housing because of their age. I also see older adults who deal with coercion and controlling behaviour from family members, specifically adult children. This is usually related to end-of-life planning, finances, or living situations."*

*"The bank teller looked at my white hair and age and condescendingly asserted that I had probably forgotten about making a transaction. The unauthorized withdrawal from my account was, in fact, a bank error."*

*"On several occasions over the past couple of months, I've had younger people accosting me, shouting and calling me boomer because of perceived slights. In one case, a person on a bicycle hit my car window in rage and verbally assaulted me, calling me a boomer because I wouldn't let them pass, even though I was clearly and legally in the right. Absolutely no respect."*

**"... deal with coercion and controlling behaviour..."**



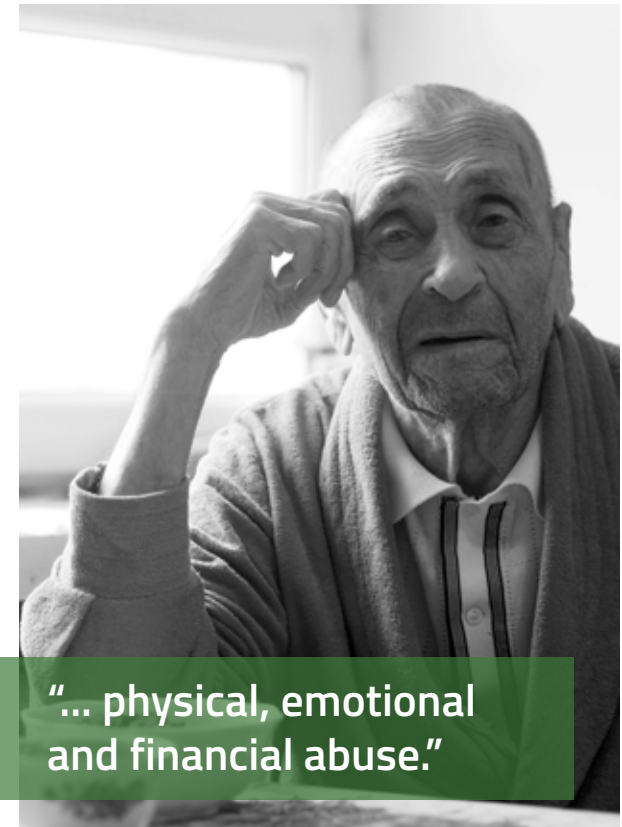


**“We have been bullied as we are seen as vulnerable.”**

*“We have been bullied as we are seen as vulnerable. This includes verbal abuse, stalking, intimidation and abuse of our property and public spaces. There seems to be no avenue to address this unless you are physically fit.”*

*“They were dismissed and treated in a condescending manner by the staff and management working in the seniors home. I have witnessed physical, emotional and financial abuse. They pretended to have taken ‘adult guardianship’ until the family died and it was revealed to be untrue, only an excuse for emptying their bank account. They were treated like they were old and too stupid to understand - that they ‘knew best’. (I believe) both family members died of neglect.”*

*“As a healthy senior, I like to walk. Our sidewalks are increasingly unsafe due to vehicles (largely two-wheeled) using them.”*



**“... physical, emotional and financial abuse.”**

# WHAT'S NEXT?

Whether you are a senior yourself, are supporting an older person, or are expecting to live to old age, society must do more to recognize ageism and take steps to make B.C. a more supportive and inclusive place to grow older. The stories we heard about seniors feeling invisible and devalued in society generally, and in the workplace and healthcare settings specifically, were tragic. These scenarios underpin an unfortunate dismissiveness many older people feel in their everyday lives, both on an individual and systemic level. Very few people feel they discriminate against others based on age, however, it's clear from our survey that seniors feel ageist beliefs prevent them from meaningful employment, accessing certain medical tests and treatments, or being perceived as attractive and vibrant as they grow older.

While raising awareness and beginning to address ageism in B.C. can seem like a daunting undertaking, there are several steps people, government and organizations can take to reduce ageism in our interpersonal relationships and society at large.

## INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

To reduce ageism, we must work to dispel negative stereotypes and misconceptions about ageing. Raising awareness can include developing information campaigns to recognize unconscious bias, identifying and no longer tolerating ageist attitudes and behaviours, and highlighting the positive aspects of ageing and immense contributions of older people both today and in the past. The OSA takes part in campaigns that aim to change the way people think, act and feel about ageism and ageing such as supporting the International Day of Older Persons, Ageism Awareness Day, which was proclaimed by our office and the Province in 2024, and Seniors' Week each year.

## RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS

There are United Nations Conventions to protect the rights of children, women and people with disabilities; however, the rights of older people are not adequately addressed or protected through existing human rights systems.<sup>19</sup> Ageism and age discrimination can result in violations of older peoples' rights:





right to freedom from discrimination, right to freedom from violence, right to social security, right to health, right to work, right to property and inheritance rights. In 2024, the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) recommended to the General Assembly the development of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, an international, legally-binding agreement safeguarding the rights of older people.<sup>20</sup> This recommendation will be brought before the General Assembly in September 2025. The OSA continues to monitor these efforts at a national and international level. The OSA encourages federal, provincial and municipal governments to take leadership roles in enacting legislation and policies that protect and enable older people to live in dignity and security.

#### OVERCOMING AGEISM IN HEALTH CARE

Ageism in health care was identified as a major concern by survey respondents. Ageist attitudes and behaviours can lead to seniors' health care concerns being ignored or dismissed, or treatable conditions like chronic pain being disregarded as 'just a part of old age.' These experiences, as well as being condescended to or patronized, can lead to older patients being less likely to seek healthcare, resulting in poorer health outcomes. Health care providers can implement education and training to better understand the impact of ageism, how to recognize implicit bias, the importance of patient-centered care and communication, and promote age-inclusive practices and policies. In addition, the federal and provincial governments can invest in more geriatric health care services and geriatric residency positions to better provide specialized care needed by older people.





### OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS

Breaking down the barriers of ageism requires different generations to understand the issues and challenges faced by each other. One of the most effective ways to increase understanding is to create opportunities for positive intergenerational interaction through meaningful and engaging activities. Intergenerational programs improve youth attitudes towards seniors, and decrease depressive symptoms and improve quality of life and physical health in older adults.<sup>21</sup>

### REVIEW AGE-BASED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION

Laws, policies and legislation that may be discriminatory and/or implemented in an ageist manner is harmful to older adults. However, policies and laws can be used to reduce discrimination towards any group, including age discrimination.<sup>22</sup> B.C. eliminated mandatory retirement at 65 by amending legislation to protect the important principle that age discrimination is prohibited under the B.C. Human Rights Code. The OSA is interested in defining what work may need to be done to evaluate other laws

and policies in B.C. to ensure they respect 'dignity for all persons regardless of age and human rights law'.<sup>23</sup>

### IN SUMMARY

Our office's purpose of undertaking a broad survey and engagement process was to better understand the extent to which older people and others felt B.C. seniors were experiencing ageism in everyday life. While we were pleased with the level of engagement with the survey, we were struck by the large number of people who felt they had been directly affected by ageism. Their stories were disheartening and incongruent with what most people want the ageing experience of seniors in our province to be. Our office will work with partners and government to identify and address instances of systemic ageism in B.C. However, it's also up to each of us to recognize ageism in our own belief systems and identify our personal biases in order to start to address them.

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