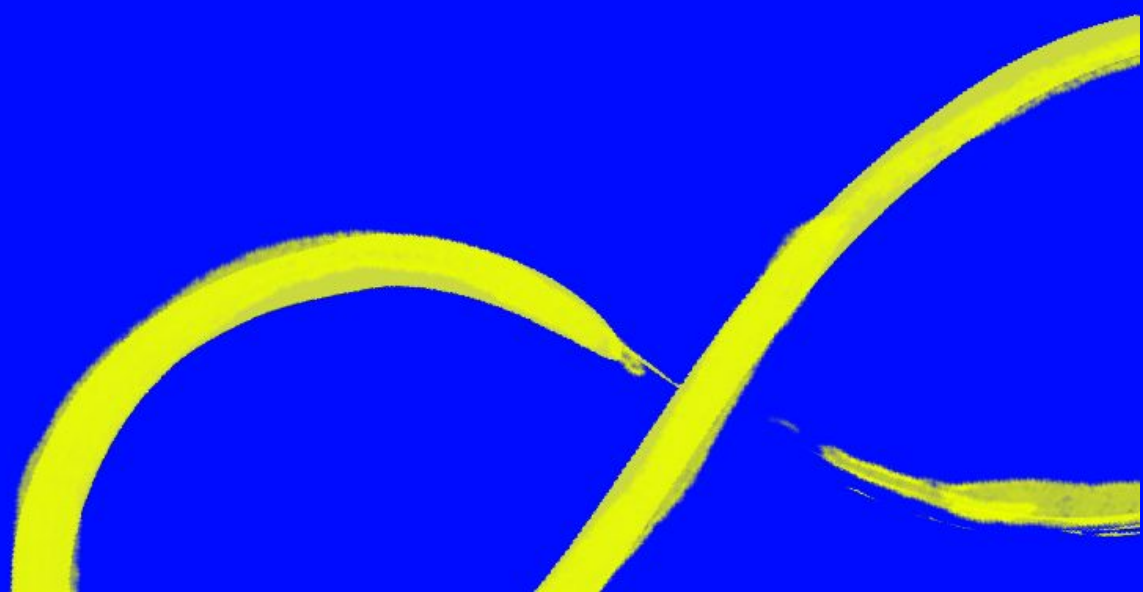# QUICK GUIDE TO AVOID AGEISM IN COMMUNICATION

QUICK GUIDE TO AVOID AGEISM IN COMMUNICATION

Language and images convey meaning, which feed assumptions and judgments that can lead to ageism. The way we frame communications also affects how people think, feel and act towards different age groups. This short guide aims to help you improve your communication efforts by avoiding ageism in the messages and images you use.

Avoid overgeneralizations

Having the same age doesn't mean you're the same. Indeed, we become increasingly diverse as we age. Despite this reality, younger and older people tend to be portrayed in a homogeneous way as uniformly frail, vulnerable and dependent or invincible and active. Our life experiences and intrinsic capacity are only partially correlated with our age so assuming that every person of a given age is the same fails to accurately reflect the world around us. It is important that communication efforts reflect this heterogeneity in intrinsic capacity, life stories and realities within and across age groups.

Avoid the "problem" frame

How we frame an issue matters. Warnings about the "silver tsunami", and the "graying population" evoke pictures of uncontrollable numbers of older adults who will pose a problem to society by requiring extensive support.

Avoid	Try
Fear-based frames that present population ageing as a disaster or crisis "demographic cliff", "silver tsunami", "agequake", "the gray wave", etc.	*Positioning information about population ageing in a way that is neutral, thus allowing for a balanced presentation of the opportunities and challenges associated with the demographic transition.*

Avoid euphemisms

Language should show a sensitive understanding for the person's situation without being pitying, stereotyping or patronizing. It is best to use language

that is objective and not only focus on age, disability or other stereotypes associated with different age groups.

Avoid saying	Try
Poor young man, a senile old woman..., or using euphemisms such as *physically challenged, grandmotherly.*	*A younger man who is poor, an older woman with a disability, a person experiencing cognitive decline, etc.*

Use neutral language

Avoid terms that may be seen as stigmatizing, as well as those that have been used in a pejorative sense or are associated with lower competency.

| Avoid saying	Try
The old man, granny, old person, the elderly, senior, as well as *juvenile* as these terms are frequently used in a pejorative sense or are associated with lower competency.	*The older man/woman, older person, older people or older adults, younger people, younger person.* *When it is relevant to be age specific, people who are 20 years and older, 60 years and older, etc.*

Avoid 'othering'

"Othering" a group in society is not helpful or productive. It introduces an imaginary boundary between our present and future selves and reduces the public's sense that younger and older people deserve full inclusion in society.

Avoid saying	Try
Pronouns like they and them portray younger and older people as if they were a separate group and not part of our society.	*Where possible try to use inclusive language (e.g. find ways to replace 'they' or 'them' with 'we' or 'us', and instead of saying 'what younger people need' try saying 'what we need when we're younger').*

Choose your images wisely

Communication efforts often use images that portray older people as sad, lonely, and frail. Whilst this may reflect some of the realities of older people, it does not represent all the realities that we see in older age. Similarly, images that portray younger people as tech-driven and only focused on social media do not reflect the diversity that is seen in younger age. Priority should be given to more positive and diverse images that can better illustrate the different realities of older and younger populations.

If you want to get inspired, please access a free library of positive, intergenerational and realistic images here.

This guide is adapted from FrameWorks Institute. 2017. Quick Start Guide. Washington, DC.
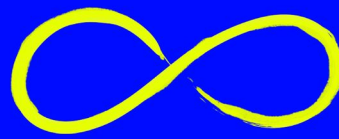
GLOBAL CAMPAIGN TO COMBAT AGEISM