

Ageism: Key facts and stats



February 2026

Age Without Limits

Key Facts and Stats

Age Without Limits is the Centre for Ageing Better's campaign to challenge ageism for the benefit of us all as we grow older.

Our vision is of a society where everyone enjoys later life free from the impact of ageism.

We run activities across the year to change how we all think and act about ageism. Together we can create a society where age is celebrated, and where everyone, regardless of their age, can lead a life of dignity, respect, and opportunity.

Ageism is the stereotyping, prejudice and / or discrimination of people based on their age.

It affects people of all ages and can have a profoundly damaging impact on us as we get older.

From conversations we have with friends and family, to the headlines we read in the media and our experiences at work, ageism is widespread and has an impact across many areas of life.

Being treated or spoken to negatively by others because of our age can make us feel not valued, unimportant, or patronised, and can leave us with low self-confidence and feeling isolated and excluded.

Over time we may internalise these negative views of ageing, limiting what we believe we're capable of and the opportunities we pursue.

It doesn't have to be this way. Thinking negatively about ageing and older people has been accepted and ignored for too long. At the Centre for Ageing Better, we believe getting the facts is just one way to create understanding and awareness of the issue.



Public attitudes



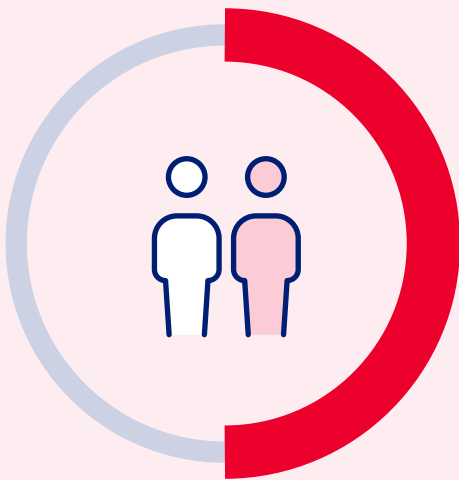
Over 40%

of people have **never really thought about ageism** before¹



1 in 10

people believe that **ageism doesn't exist**²



More than 50%

of the public believes **UK society is ageist**³



Half of people

worry about getting older
- and one in five worry about it often⁴



Over half

of people think older people are
less visible in society⁵



1/3 of people

think **older age is characterised by frailty**, vulnerability and dependency⁶ and yet just...

2.5%
of older people*
live in care homes⁷
yet the public
thinks it's 25%⁸



9%
of people* in
the UK have
dementia⁹



14%
of people* in England
have a **diagnosis
of frailty**¹⁰



* aged 65 and over

Ageism in work and society

Employment



People aged 50 and over are only **1/3 as likely to be back in work 3 months** after redundancy compared to people under 50¹¹



1 in 3 people aged over 50 believe they have **been turned down for a job because of their age**¹²



1 in 5 employers **believe that age discrimination occurs** in their organisation¹³

Community



Older adults are the **most likely to volunteer, vote and provide unpaid care**, alongside their contributions to the economy as workers and consumers¹⁴



1 in 5 **older people live in poverty**, yet the idea of the rich "baby boomer" remains common in the media¹⁵



Older consumers are responsible for **half of all household spending**, yet businesses do not adequately serve this market in terms of products, services or advertising¹⁶



4 in 5 people aged over 55 say their favourite retail brand **no longer understands them or their needs**¹⁷

Ageism and health



Stereotypes, including that depression is normal in older age, lead to older people with common mental health conditions (such as anxiety and depression) being **less likely to be offered talking therapies** than younger people, but **more likely to be on tranquillisers**¹⁸



Older people have been found to be **systematically excluded from health research**, despite many conditions being more common in older age¹⁹



In areas including alcohol treatment, breast and colorectal cancer treatment, and knee surgery, **referral rates for treatment decrease at older ages**²⁰



The use of **remaining life expectancy** as a criterion to determine willingness to pay for drugs and interventions **discriminates against older people**²¹



People with a negative idea about later life might **delay seeking medical help for a health issue** if they consider health issues to be a normal part of ageing²²

Ageism in advertising and the media



UK media is among the most ageist

A study of the use of language related to older age in web-based magazines and newspapers found that of 20 English-speaking countries, **the UK was the most ageist of all**²³



The UK public feels that **older people** are more likely than other groups to be **stereotyped in advertising**²⁶



88% of people aged over 55 say they **feel unhappy** about the way advertising treats them²⁷



Just 1 in 4 TV ads feature characters aged 50 or older and one in 20 feature characters aged 70 or older²⁴



Only 1 in 10 characters

aged 50 or older who featured in a **British film in 2023** had a major role²⁸



Just 8% of UK ad agency employees are **over the age of 51**²⁵

What harm does ageism cause?

Ageism affects how we feel about ourselves and limits our lives and opportunities. It affects our job prospects and our health²⁹.

Impact on mental health

Repeated negative portrayals of older people, or the absence of positive portrayals, can lead to poor body image or increased pessimism and anxiety about getting older.

Impact on physical health

In some cases, older people receive different medical treatment because of their age or don't seek help for medical problems because they assume they are a normal part of ageing.

Ageism can also lead to people limiting the activities that promote better health such as physical activity (due to negative ideas about appearance, suitability or physical capability).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw attempts to limit the lifesaving resources available to older people, with 'do not attempt resuscitation' decisions being made without consultation with individuals or their families.

Impact on finances

Ageism in the workplace means older people not being able to work for as long as they want to. This can lead to people being locked out of employment and potentially facing financial insecurity and poverty in later life.

Impact on the economy and wider society

Ageism has a detrimental impact on the workforce - 460,000 people aged 50-64 are currently out of work but would like to be in work and ageism is one of the key barriers older workers face. Shutting older people out of the workforce has repercussions for the economy through the effect on income tax and national insurance receipts as well as the welfare bill. It also exacerbates the current skills and labour shortages faced by many industries.

Ageism by omission leads to a failure to design and build age-friendly homes and communities (including transport, accessible streets and public spaces and facilities such as toilets) despite the increasing need from an ageing population.



To learn more, visit our website

AgeWithoutLimits.org

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Ageism harms

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