



Care Watch

AGEISM EXISTS: NAME IT! RESIST IT!

AGEISM

Care Watch sees ageism as discrimination and stereotyping on the basis of age. Like sexism, racism and religious stereotyping, ageism is about power, negative attitudes and the erosion of basic human rights. The result of ageism is the silencing of the voice of senior citizens and the exclusion of senior citizens from full citizenship and participation in society.

Ageism exists across all sectors in Canadian society. For example:

- The media neglects senior citizens or treats them as a “special interest group,” not a normal part of human existence. When it does include senior citizens, the media depicts them as being irrelevant, inept, demented and/or demanding.

The fashion industry ignores senior citizens. This industry expects everyone to try to look as young as possible and to purchase clothes that have been designed for the young.

- The cosmetics industry targets senior citizens with the message that “you don’t have to look your age.” This industry works on the fears and insecurities of women (and increasingly men) and attempts to get them to purchase products that will make them look younger.

Canadian politics largely ignores the real needs of senior citizens, as senior citizens’ issues are not perceived to be of interest to the general public. Demographics and policies affecting senior citizens are often depicted as “costly” or a “drain on society.” Politicians often ignore the impacts of policies on senior citizens in the population.

- The Ontario health care system is often ageist. Access to some programs and medical treatments can be denied on the basis of age. Physicians and other care providers may refuse to treat older patients because they have chronic conditions and are medically complex. Senior citizens are often seen as a “cost” to the health care system.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission defines ageism as “a tendency to structure society based on an assumption that everyone is young, thereby failing to respond appropriately to the real needs of older persons.”



Image source: © artist Mort Gerberg

Seniors are citizens and should have access to full participation in citizenship activities, but ageism prevents full participation in senior citizenship roles.

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