ADDRESSING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF AGEISM IN CANADA

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

August 2022

Ageism in Canada Consultations

The Forum of Federal, Provincial and Territorial (FPT) Ministers Responsible for Seniors (the Forum) has been working to address the social and economic impacts of ageism on older adults in Canada.

As part of this work, the Forum is undertaking consultations on ageism with experts, academics, organizations and members of the public. There are several ways to share your views:

- Complete the online questionnaire about ageism.
- Share your story on ageism.
- Participate in a virtual or in-person discussion on ageism or host your own discussion.

Participants and organizers are encouraged to consult the full Discussion Guide and Consultation Toolkit. These documents provide information that is more detailed on ageism and hosting ageism discussions.

Ageism in Canada

The following summarizes the issue of ageism, as it is being examined through this consultation.

The World Health Organization defines ageism as “the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age.” Stereotypes are beliefs that are generalized towards a whole group of people. Sources of ageism in society include employers, governments, media, health and social care systems, the general public and older adults themselves. When older adults begin to accept stereotypes and negative views about themselves, self-ageism can occur.

As ageism is complex. The topic has been broken down into five themes: Employment; Health and Health Care; Social Inclusion; Safety and Security; and Media and Social Media. The consultation will also examine ageism in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following questions will guide the discussions for each theme:

1) What are the most significant ageism issues related to each of the themes?
2) What impacts has the COVID-19 pandemic had on ageism in each of the themes?
3) What efforts are currently working to address ageism related to each of the themes?

4) What more could be done (e.g. new strategies, initiatives or programs) to best address ageism related to each of the themes, and who should be involved?

Employment: An increasing number of older adults are now working in later life. Ageism may prevent older workers from finding a job or remaining in the workforce, and could lead to older workers being treated unfairly in the workplace. Research has shown that employers often believe stereotypes about older workers, which can lead to age-based discrimination. Including older adults in the workforce is good for individuals, businesses, and society. Researchers estimate that increasing the number of older workers in Canada could increase our economic performance by $56 billion per year.

Health and Health Care: There is strong evidence that ageism impacts the health of older adults. It may contribute to declines in memory function, increased risk of developing dementia, and decreased life expectancy. Ageism within the health care system may also lead to poor quality health care. For example, health care providers may assume an older adult's symptoms are a normal part of aging rather than a sign of a health condition. Researchers in the United States have estimated that ageism costs their health care system $63 billion annually.

Social Inclusion: Ageism also can act as a barrier to the social inclusion of older adults within society. Ageism contributes to the social isolation and feelings of loneliness of older adults. Social isolation and loneliness have been linked to negative health outcomes for older adults. Social isolation and loneliness have also been linked to increased health care costs.

Safety and Security: Freedom from harm and access to shelter are two of the most basic standards for the safety and security of older adults. Ageism and senior abuse (also known as elder abuse) are closely related. Ageism is a risk factor for senior abuse and can lead to reports of senior abuse not being believed or taken seriously. Ageist policies and practices can also interfere with older adults' access to housing. Houses and neighbourhoods are often poorly designed to meet the needs of older adults. Discrimination in the rental market can jeopardize the ability of older adults to access housing.

Media and social media: Media plays an important role in shaping the views of a society. Research suggests that older adults are often underrepresented in media and media spreads both negative and positive age-based stereotypes about older adults. Media is particularly influential in shaping the views of younger people. This is especially true for those who may have limited contact with older adults in their own personal lives.

COVID-19 Pandemic: The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted ageism within Canadian society and has intensified ageism towards older adults in several of the theme areas. Systemic ageism was identified as a factor that has contributed to the neglect of long-term care residents and the high rates of deaths in long-term care during the pandemic. Furthermore, media and government communications have portrayed older adults as victims of the pandemic. In addition, the costs to the health care system of caring for older adults is a common point of discussion in the media.

For information that is more detailed and the complete list of references for this summary, please view the Discussion Guide.