

The Benevolent Society

The drivers of ageism

Foundational research to inform
a national advocacy campaign
tackling ageism and its impacts
in Australia.

Summary Report





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Foreword

As Australia's first charity, The Benevolent Society has been working for over 200 years to provide important services to the community, and also as an active catalyst for social change.

It is with pride that I can say The Benevolent Society has fought for many things we take for granted in Australia today – free legal aid, the elimination of child labour, the establishment of the first 'old age pension' and the first dedicated maternity hospital are just a few examples. Importantly, our campaigning efforts for a just society where all Australians can live their best life continue today as a core element of the work we do.

We are committed to campaigning for the essential conditions for Australians to age well. As part of that commitment, we are building a coalition to support a sustained, multi-platform, evidence-based advocacy campaign to tackle the issue of ageism toward older people.

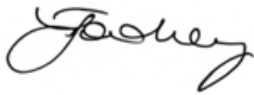
As campaigners for older Australians, we believe we must positively change thinking about ageing and what it means to be an older version of ourselves. If we can do that, we believe we can begin to shift norms, expectations, policies and outcomes for all older people; and mobilise a holistic political response to the 'opportunities' - rather than the 'threats' - presented by our ageing population.

Nobody said shifting the dominant discourse on ageing will be easy, or achieved in the short term, but we believe it is crucial that ageism is tackled head on. And that's where this research plays a key role.

Ultimately we want to see the establishment of a national agenda for older Australians, including a federal Minister for Older Australians, which will actively drive positive change in economic, social, health, civic and participation outcomes. In the shorter term, we want to facilitate passionate coalitions and drive new conversations and strategies that will challenge entrenched negative views and open up our collective thinking, policies and programs to the reality, potential and intrinsic human rights of our ageing population. This is as relevant for our current cohorts of older Australians as it is for the generations coming after us.

This foundational research, undertaken by Urbis and guided by our expert reference panel, will inform our campaign strategy and, we believe, give us the best chance of success.

We aim to launch the campaign, EveryAGE Counts in 2018. I sincerely hope you will join us on this important long-term journey.



Jo Toohy
Chief Executive Officer
The Benevolent Society





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- Anita Tang - Advocacy adviser and campaigner
- Mark Riboldi - Advocacy and Communications Coordinator, Community Legal Centres NSW
- Robert Tickner - former CEO of the Australian Red Cross; former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

We also sincerely thank the more than 1400 participants who took part in the quantitative and qualitative components of the research.

Executive Summary

Most of us in Australia will live longer, healthier lives than any generation before us. This presents enormous opportunities for us as individuals, for our communities and for our nation. Yet as a society we are not taking the opportunity to realise this potential. We need to remove the barriers that prevent full participation of older people. At the heart of these barriers are ageist norms and negative attitudes towards getting older and older people.

The Benevolent Society is building a national advocacy campaign, EveryAGE Counts, to shift the dominant, negative narrative of ageing in Australia and to drive positive change in economic, social, health and civic participation outcomes.

The Benevolent Society commissioned a three-pronged research study to ensure the campaign is underpinned by the latest evidence. The research was guided by an eminent expert reference panel. This Summary Report presents an overview of the emerging findings from the research.

The Full Report format, available to download from www.everyagecounts.org.au, contains this Summary Report as well as full details of each of the three elements of the research, which include:

- **A literature review**

To research the latest Australian and international research on ageism, to identify what is known about

the 'drivers' of ageist attitudes and behaviour, and to review lessons learned from campaigns and strategies that have effectively changed social norms.

- **A national online survey of over 1,400 community members across all age groups**

To explore community attitudes towards ageing and older people and most importantly to identify what influences people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. This included a national sample of 1,083 people of all ages, plus a booster sample of 342 people aged over 55 to enable further analysis within this cohort. The research was designed to address a gap in the existing Australian research on the 'drivers' of ageism. By better understanding these drivers, The Benevolent Society's advocacy campaign can be effectively designed and targeted.

- **Four focus group discussions with community members, including older and younger Australians**

To explore in-depth how focus group participants view older people, how they personally feel about getting older, what they fear and look forward to as they age, and what they think could be done to address any perceived bias or discrimination against older people.

What does the research tell us?

The literature review

The literature review confirms that ageism takes different forms but includes three 'distinct but interrelated' aspects: attitudes and beliefs, behavioural discrimination and formalised policy and practices (Malta & Doyle, 2016 p. 232; Nelson, 2016).

Ageism is discrimination against our future selves. It can affect every one of us. The research shows that ageism can be a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', leading to internalised and reinforced perceptions of our own self worth. Ageism is also growing.

Evidence shows the negative impacts of ageism not only limit the potential opportunity for older Australians to participate fully in the community, but also significantly impacts their overall health and wellbeing.

The language and rhetoric of policy discourse - which tend to describe the issue of an ageing population as a problem, a burden and a cost - has also been shown to perpetuate negative stereotypes.

The literature review draws conclusions from investigating behavioural change theory that can guide the advocacy campaign. There are also important learnings from social marketing campaigns (for example on health promotion, anti-smoking, speeding) as well as social inclusion campaigns addressing racism or discrimination against people with disability.

Findings from the quantitative and qualitative research

The research conducted shows that the majority of people care about ageism (79%) and many have experienced it.

The four key settings identified by survey participants as important for ageism to be addressed were - the workplace (54%); healthcare (47%); aged care (33%); and in families and local communities (31%).

People lack awareness of the positive aspects of older people's lives –and tend to overestimate the negative aspects, such as poor health, financial concerns and dependency.

People have mixed attitudes to getting older and towards older Australians. There are concerns about the economic impact of the ageing population but also recognition of the importance of addressing discrimination and achieving positive change.

People are concerned about losing their cognitive capacity, their identity, independence and social connections as they age. The fear of cognitive decline is greater than the fear of physical ill health.

Financial concerns as people age are just as common among younger participants as older participants.

Interestingly, people don't see age as a number but more as a relative concept influenced by factors such as how old you are, the culture you belong to, your health status and how you lead your life.

People's perceptions of, and attitudes towards their own ageing, are primarily shaped by their personal experiences (usually observing close family members or friends) and the level of contact they have with older people. Personal connection with older people – within the workplace, the community and family – was a strong indicator of more positive perceptions and attitudes, suggesting a role for a strong intergenerational focus in the campaign strategy.

A substantial minority of people adopted a neutral position on a number of survey questions, that is, they neither agreed or disagreed with certain attitudes or behaviours towards ageing or older people.

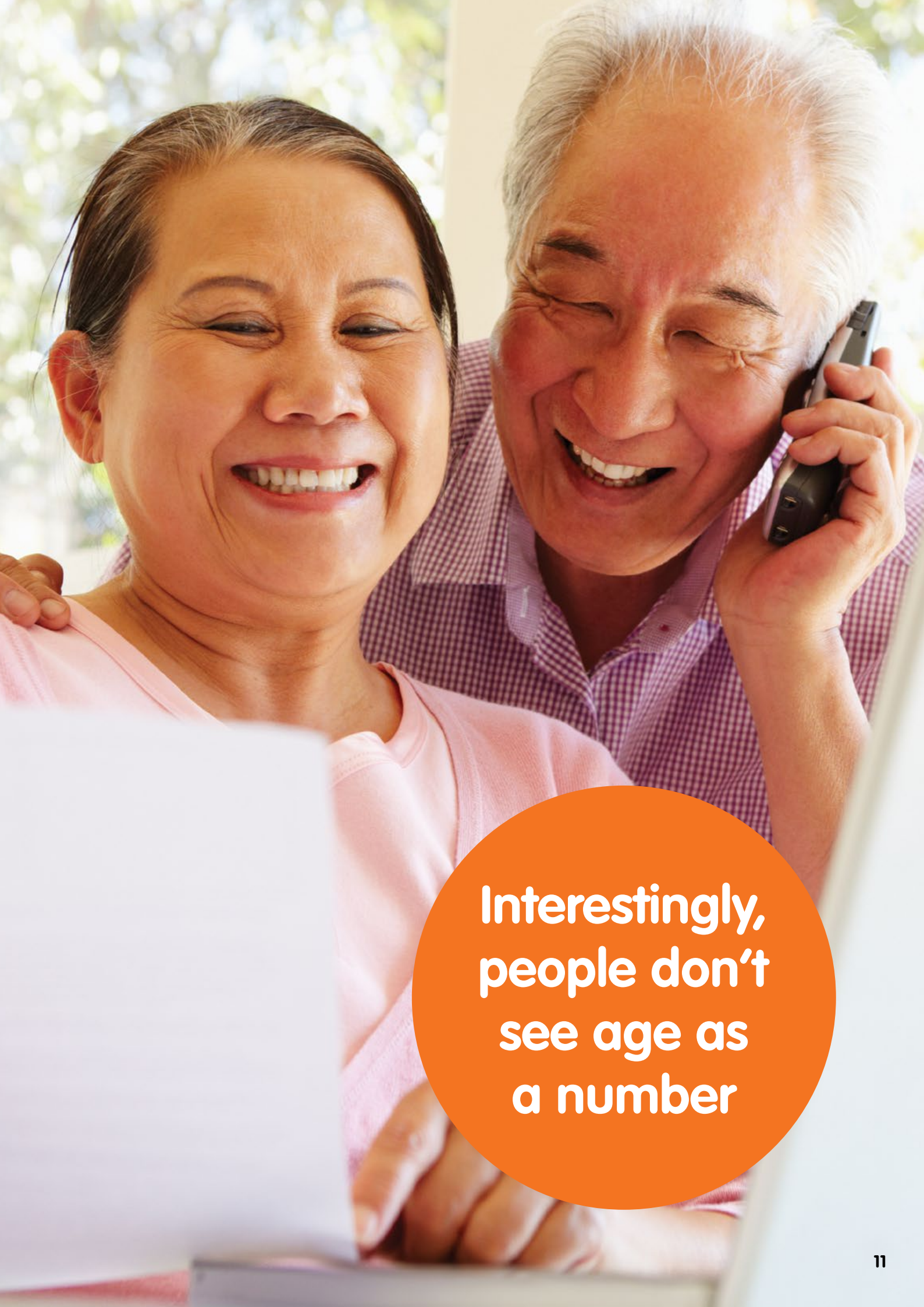
This lack of polarisation of views suggests that there is scope for a campaign to shift social norms and that many people may be open to thinking differently about ageing.

The advocacy campaign

The research findings suggest an advocacy campaign should include:

- partnerships with other committed organisations
- empowering individuals and organisations to take part in a national campaign
- facilitating meaningful intergenerational contact and interactions
- providing information to dispel myths
- a multi-faceted social marketing campaign combining mass media advertising with other initiatives
- strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

The Benevolent Society is now building a coalition to support and build EveryAGE Counts. This research provides a sound basis upon which campaign planning will now proceed.



**Interestingly,
people don't
see age as
a number**

Introduction

It is well known that, similar to many other countries in the world, the Australian population is ageing. Increased longevity and falling birth rates have resulted in steady growth in both the number and the proportion of the population who are older.

In the fifty years from 1964 to 2014, the proportion of the Australian population aged 65 years and over doubled from 8% to 15%. By 2064, it is estimated that close to one in four (23%) Australians will be aged 65 or more (AIHW, 2017).

The ageing of our population creates great opportunities, but also a number of challenges. Our social norms, attitudes, structures, policies and practices have not necessarily kept pace with the fact that there are many more older Australians living in our community and that most will lead longer, healthier lives than ever before.

While improvements in longevity and health during old age present an opportunity for this growing cohort to make meaningful contributions to the communities in which they live, current stereotypes that surround older people often act as a barrier to their full participation.

Despite increased attention and efforts to shift the narrative around ageing in recent years, across the globe, research has found “negative attitudes and stereotypes about older adults as frail, out of touch,

burdensome or dependent are ubiquitous” (Officer et al., 2016 p. 710). These negative attitudes and social norms have come to be reflected in the experience of ageism, in which individuals are discriminated against on the basis of their age (Malta & Doyle, 2016 p. 232). Recent research has found that “ageism is pervasive, widely accepted, and normative in many cultures and societies... and is a form of prejudice that goes unchallenged, and even celebrated in many fields” (Sargent-Cox, 2017 p. 5).

While ageism affects people across different age groups, it is more frequently experienced by younger and older age cohorts. While not diminishing the significance or impact of ageism on younger people, this report and the research supporting it, focuses on the age-based attitudes and discrimination affecting older Australians, and so the use of the term ‘ageism’ in this report should be read in this context.

“The growth in the number of older Australians provides significant benefits and opportunities for Australia... to achieve these benefits we need to remove the barriers that prevent many older Australians from reaching their full potential in workplaces and the community”

(Former Age and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, The Hon. Susan Ryan
AO in AHRC, 2013)

Findings from research to inform a national advocacy campaign

The Benevolent Society is building a national advocacy campaign for older Australians, to redefine the narrative of ageing in Australia and to drive positive change in economic, social, health and civic participation outcomes. The Benevolent Society commissioned a three-pronged research study to ensure the campaign is underpinned by the latest evidence. The three elements of the study include:

- **A literature review**

To examine the latest Australian and international research on ageism, to identify what is known about the “drivers” of ageist attitudes and behaviour, and to review the effectiveness of any campaigns or strategies that could potentially combat ageism. In all, over eighty reports and documents were reviewed resulting in a 40 page Literature Review contained at www.everyagecounts.org.au

- **A national online survey of over 1,400 community members**

To explore community attitudes towards ageing and older people and most importantly to identify what influences people’s attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. This included a national sample of 1,083 people of all ages, plus

a booster sample of 342 people aged over 55 to enable further analysis within this cohort. The research was designed to address a gap in the existing Australian research on the “drivers” of ageism. By better understanding these drivers, The Benevolent Society’s advocacy campaign can be appropriately designed and targeted. Details of the online survey (using a consumer panel) are found at www.everyagecounts.org.au ¹

- **Four focus group discussions with community members, including older and younger Australians**

To explore in-depth how they view older people, how they personally feel about getting older, what they fear and what they are looking forward to as they age, and what they think could be done to address any perceived bias or discrimination against older people. A diverse group of Australians (mixed gender, ethnicity, marital status, household income) took part in four discussion groups in the following age brackets: 18 to 30 years, 31 to 45 years, 55 to 64 years and 65 years and older. The high-level findings of the focus groups can be found at www.everyagecounts.org.au

¹Technical Note: Survey respondents were drawn from a consumer panel. 1,083 people of all ages completed the survey. An additional booster sample of 342 Australians aged 55 years or older was undertaken to conduct a separate analysis of the experience of older Australians. Data was post-weighted by gender and location to be reflective of the Australian population (ABS 2011 Census data). Statistical analysis techniques conducted included ordinal regressions and Analysis of Variance. Unless explicitly stated, the sample comprises the 1,083 respondents (ie. the primary sample).

This Summary Report presents emerging findings from the research. A Full Report is available at www.everyagecounts.org.au which contains this Summary Report, the literature review, and key findings from the online survey and the focus group discussions. The Full Report also contains details of the methodology for each component of the research. It should be noted that the research gave rise to a rich set of data that will be interrogated further as the advocacy campaign develops. Initial data analysis reveals a complex interplay of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours and more work will be required to tease these out further. However, some overarching themes are emerging from the data and form the basis of this report.

What does the literature tell us?

Ageism takes different forms

Ageism has been defined as “discrimination against people based on their age,” and is said to be “manifested through negative stereotypes and perceptions about older adults” (Malta & Doyle, 2016 p. 232). The term is widely believed to have been coined by Robert Butler, the Founding Director of the National Institute of Ageing (NIA) in the United States, who suggested that ageism is “a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old... [including the process whereby] older people are categorised as senile, rigid in

thought and manner, and old-fashioned in morality and skill” (Butler in Mezey et al., 2001 pp. 26-27).

Butler believes ageism includes three ‘distinct but interrelated’ aspects, mainly: attitudes and beliefs; behavioural discrimination; and formalised policy and practices (Malta & Doyle, 2016 p. 232; Nelson, 2016).

In this way, ageism is seen to encompass:

- **prejudicial attitudes** to older people, including attitudes held by older people themselves;
- **discriminatory practices** against older people, particularly in employment, but in other social roles as well; and
- **institutional practices and policies** which, often without malice, perpetuate stereotypic beliefs about older people, reduce their opportunities for a satisfactory life and undermine their personal dignity. (Butler, 1980 cited in: S. R. Levy & Macdonald, 2016 emphasis added)

Behavioural discrimination occurs in a variety of settings – the literature tells us it is particularly evident in the workplace and in health care. There are also increasing concerns about the extent of elder abuse in the Australian community – both in institutional and family settings.

These three aspects of ageing provide insight into the broad areas where ageism presents itself, and are significant when considering the focus for a national advocacy campaign for older Australians.

Ageism has negative impacts

Negative and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours not only limit the potential opportunity for older Australians to participate fully in the community, but also significantly impact their overall health and wellbeing (AHRC, 2013 p. 13).

It has been found that “exposure to negative stereotypes results in poorer subjective health, higher feelings of loneliness, more frequent dependency behaviours, and reduced will-to-live, in older adults” (Sargent-Cox, 2017 p. 1).

The World Health Organisation reported in 2016 that older people who hold negative views about their own ageing, do not recover as well from disability and live on average 7.5 years less than people with positive attitudes. [Officer et al, WHO]

Ageism is growing

There is evidence that ageism is growing. The review of international research tell us that the status and perceived value of older people is in decline, and that this is having negative impacts on attitudes and behaviours.

Ageism can be a self-fulfilling prophecy

Ageist attitudes are not limited to younger people, but may be “internalised and reinforced across the lifespan developing into beliefs about, expectations for, and self-perceptions of, one’s own ageing process” (Sargent-Cox, 2017). Research with older people found that participants: “reflected an internalisation and acceptance of ageist stereotypes and prejudices through their perceptions of what ‘being old’ was... including: not trying, withdrawn, isolated, irritating, self-oriented, living outside the mainstream, unattractive, uninteresting, frail, senile, silly, over the hill, narrow-minded, a burden, lonely, vulnerable, dowdy, and unproductive” (Minichiello et al., 2000 p. 259)

“Historically, older people were valued and respected members of society across cultures for their vast knowledge of the culture... Scholars have noted a contemporary shift toward a general devaluing of older persons in modern societies, especially in Western cultures”

(S. R. Levy & Macdonald,
2016 p. 18)

Ageism is discrimination against your future self

The literature also tells us that 'ageism' is different from other 'isms'.

"As with other 'isms,' such as racism and sexism, ageism leads to bigotry and discrimination, though it is a very distinct beast in that, for the most part, other 'isms' refer to those different from ourselves: distinct, mutually exclusive and impervious groups. Conversely, age is a fluid social construct in which we are all intimately bound as we move through the lifespan, transitioning in and out of different age groups."

Formalised policies and practices can perpetuate stereotypes

An international literature review found that "growing awareness of structural ageing and the accompanying alarmist rhetoric, [regarding] the 'burden' of care... saw a shift in public sentiment from positive to negative towards older people across many countries" (Malta & Doyle, 2016 p. 232). This view has continued to underpin many aspects of the policy landscape in

Australia, with the observation that, "[in] Australia, older people can be depicted as a 'social problem' as a consequence of public concern about the costs to government of demographic change and an ageing population" (O'Loughlin & Kendig, 2017 p. 29).

A number of researchers have pointed to the language applied in Australia's Intergenerational Reports, which is believed to drive and perpetuate a view that older people are a growing burden on Australia's economy and society at large. For example, the 2015 Intergenerational Report stated: "In the coming decades, all levels of government will face growing fiscal pressures as the population ages and expectations for greater government support of ageing-related programs increase" (Commonwealth Treasury, 2015 p. 57).

Nevertheless, certain aspects of Australian policy have adopted a rights-based approach which according to some have demonstrated "value in taking a rights approach to challenge ageist attitudes, enhance productive ageing and strengthen retirement income systems" (Kendig et al., 2013 p.32).

"While older persons are often said to enjoy particular respect, the reality is that too many societies limit them... The marginalization and devaluing of older persons takes a heavy toll."

(Ban Ki-moon, 2016)

What our research tells us about ageism

Ageism is becoming a more familiar term but is still foreign to some

“Ageism” is a term that is being used more frequently in public discourse than in the past. Reflecting this, the majority of the 1,400 community members surveyed had a relatively good understanding of the term.

When asked what ageism meant to them, most people surveyed defined ageism in terms of discrimination based on age. While some see ageism as bias or

discrimination against any age group, more commonly ageism is seen specifically as bias or discrimination against older people. Nevertheless, some of those surveyed think ageism refers to being or getting old. Others think it has something to do with an ageing population. A few people said they had not heard the term “ageism” before or were unclear what it meant. This suggests there is room for increasing community awareness of ageism, both as a term and a concept.

It's about having low expectations about what you're like and what you can do as you get older.

It's putting everyone in the one box.

It's being defined by your age – like racism.



Combating ageism is important to the Australian community

The majority of community members surveyed (79%) told us that ageism is important to them. Fewer than 10% think ageism is unimportant.

People who said ageism was an important issue said this was because of their own (older) age or because they were becoming older. Others said ageism was important because discrimination of any form is wrong and all people deserve respect. Yet others referred to personal reflections on how other people view or treat them, and how this has changed for the worse as they have grown older.

Four key settings were identified by survey participants as important for ageism to be addressed:

- the workplace (54%)
- healthcare (47%)
- aged care (33%)
- families and local communities (31%).

Survey respondents aged 65 years and over reported various personal experiences of ageism, including being told a joke about older people (57%), being talked down to (38%) and being ignored (37%). Over a quarter (29%) told us they had been turned down for a job because of their age, while 14% said they had been denied a promotion at work due to their age. These results echo those of previous studies undertaken in Australia and elsewhere (for example, Willing to Work National Inquiry, Australian Human Rights Commission, 2016)

The minority of people who said ageism was not important to them said this is because they have not had any personal experience of ageism or they have experienced ageism but refuse to let it affect them.

Some older people said they had only ever experienced respect as they aged, while others said that other issues are more important to them than ageism.

While people think combatting ageism is important, opinions regarding the role of older people in society are mixed

Community members were asked about situations in which older people might be treated differently to other people. Results were mixed, with some wanting to see change which benefited younger people, and some wanting to see change that benefited older people.

Ageist attitudes were most evident in the workplace setting. Almost a third (30%) of those surveyed think employers should be able to make older employees take on a reduced role, and one in four (25%) thought that employers would get better value out of training younger rather than older people. Almost one in five (19%) think younger people should be given priority over older people when it comes to work promotions or that people who do not retire at 65 are taking jobs away from younger people (18%). Many of those surveyed did not express a strong view either way on these issues – which suggests a level of ambivalence.

Some of those surveyed also reported concerns about the amount of money spent on healthcare for very old people, with 19% feeling it should be “rationed”.

However, the majority of those surveyed did want to see positive changes in society relating to:

- Healthy people aged over 80 being able to access travel insurance (72% of respondents agree)
- Big businesses improving customer service to older people (64%)

- More funds being spent upgrading public and private places to make them more accessible (61%).

The seeming contradiction between overall attitudes towards ageism (‘it is important’) and prevalence of ageist attitudes (‘reduction in role at 65 years’) highlights the complexity of the issue, and suggests that a well-developed, nuanced approach will be required in the advocacy campaign to shift attitudes and behaviours.



I think you're old when you're really frail and sick which means you can be 72 and be great, you can be 60 and be really weak and frail and to me they're old. I don't think it's a number.

People lack awareness of positive aspects of older people's lives

The survey tested people's knowledge of certain aspects of older people's lives. While many of those surveyed correctly identified the proportion of Australians aged 55 to 64 years who have experienced age discrimination (around 30% of the cohort), they underestimated the number of people aged 65 or more who:

- Rate their health as good or excellent
- Engage in paid or voluntary work.

Meanwhile, they overestimated the proportion of older Australians who:

- Live in an aged care facility
- Experience high levels of psychological distress relative to younger people
- Receive the Age Pension.

These findings suggest there is a need to raise the level of community awareness of certain aspects of older people's lives to address certain negative misconceptions relating to their health, financial status and contribution to the community.

Age is not a number

There is little agreement in the community about the chronological age when people become "older". For some, old age doesn't begin until you reach 100. For half of those surveyed, older people are aged 70 to 100 years or more. This is interesting in light of the 'retirement' age of 65, and the age at which people can access the Age Pension. In focus groups, people agreed that age is not a number. Age is seen as a relative concept – relative to how old you are, what culture you belong to, your health status, your attitude and how you lead your life.

People have mixed views about ageing

Many survey respondents and focus group participants expressed a degree of fear and negativity about getting older. Focus group participants listed many negative words they associated with ageing, which most often related to physical and mental deterioration, social isolation, negative attitudes and behaviours, and finances. Substantial proportions of surveyed community members think:

- As you get older, mental and physical deterioration are inevitable (59%)
- Old age makes them think of death (43%)
- As you get older, you lose your independence (39%)

The greatest fear is 'the known' rather than 'the unknown'

Community members are most concerned about losing their cognitive capacity, their identity, independence and social connections as they age. The fear of cognitive decline is greater than the fear of physical ill health. These fears were most commonly driven by personal experiences with older people, including exposure to residential aged care facilities.

Focus group participants also expressed worry about:

- being a burden in old age
- having regrets about life achievements.

For some, poverty and a lack of financial resources is a major source of anxiety.

This view is particularly common amongst participants reliant on income support, who were unemployed, and/or single. Financial concerns are just as common among young participants as older participants, with several young people reporting that they feel very insecure about their long term financial prospects due to difficulties in obtaining a job and purchasing a home. These younger participants also expressed concern about whether they will accrue sufficient superannuation to live comfortably through retirement.

The fear of being alive and not knowing anybody



People are often ambivalent about older people

Survey respondents and focus group participants also displayed mixed feelings about older people. The majority of those surveyed think that older people have many strengths, including that:

- Older people have a lot to offer younger people (73%)
- Older people have a strong work ethic (65%)
- Older people are responsible (65%)
- Wisdom comes with age (62%)

However, despite these positive attitudes towards older people, around half of those surveyed think:

- Older people are set in their ways (52%)
- Older people need more time to do things (49%)
- Older people struggle with technology (46%)

When asked to list the top three words they associated with older people, focus group participants chose either predominantly negative or positive words, while some selected a mixture of positive and negative.

Negative words related to:

- **Physical and mental deterioration** (frail, dependent, depressed, senile)
- **Social isolation** (lonely, vulnerable)
- **Negative attitudes or behaviour** (opinionated, interfering, stubborn)
- **Political beliefs** (socially conservative, intolerant)
- **Financial** (a financial burden)

Positive words related to:

- **Thinking of others** (unselfishness, generous, kind, caring)
- **Relaxed** (calm, carefree, stable)
- **Valuable** (wise, knowledgeable, family and cultural custodians, role models)
- **Resilient** (positive despite setbacks, taking things in their stride, good emotional coping skills)

The key influences on attitudes towards ageing and older people are personal experiences

The focus group research strongly suggests that people's perceptions of, and attitudes towards, their own ageing are primarily shaped by their personal experiences (usually observing close family members or friends) and the level of contact they have with older people.

Participants indicated that connection with older people mainly occurs within the family or with older friends. To a lesser extent, the workplace was also identified as an environment where connection with older people occurs.

The environments in which people connect with older people was found to influence some participants' perceptions of ageing. Specifically, exposure to people living in residential aged care facilities was found to negatively impact on attitudes towards ageing.

Other drivers that influence people's attitudes towards ageing and older people include:

- the extent to which people could see a connection between themselves and older people: 'I will be old one day'
- the level of empathy people have for other people, more generally

- cultural traditions and norms which respect and revere older people
- the extent to which people value 'community' and aspire towards strong communities.

These drivers were also found to underpin participants' views on whether or not Australian society values older people.

At a service level: Most focus group participants are of the view that older people are relatively well catered for in terms of the service availability. When expressing this view, participants typically compared Australia to other countries, with Australia cited as being much more focussed on supporting older people than the US, South Africa, the UK, or Asia.

At an individual level: Many focus group participants are of the view that older people are less respected than in the past, and less respected than they should be. This was viewed as being especially true in Anglo-Saxon families and communities, with participants commonly suggesting that older people are more valued and socially included in Mediterranean and Asian cultures.

A person's age influences their attitudes

The online survey found community members' attitudes towards older people and ageing become more positive the older their age. Older respondents are less likely to agree with negative statements about age and older people, and more likely to agree with positive statements. They are less likely to agree with examples of discrimination based on age, such as the proposition that employers should give priority to promoting younger people. Older respondents are more likely to want to see changes, such as available travel insurance to healthy people over 80.

As their age increased, survey respondents were **less likely** to think:

- Governments give older people a better deal than younger people
- Employers will get better value out of training younger than older people
- Older people are not interested in the outside world
- Older people are a drain on the economy.

As their age increased, survey respondents were more likely to agree:

- Older people have a lot to offer younger people
- Healthy people aged 80 or over should be able to access travel insurance
- Older people are productive workers
- Older people have a strong work ethic.

Carers of older people were more likely to feel that positive changes were needed, such as an improvement in business customer service for older people, as well as being more likely to have positive attitudes about older people. Healthcare workers displayed mixed attitudes towards older people.



The level and type of contact with older people influences attitudes

A strong finding of the online survey was that the more contact people have with older people, the more positive their attitudes towards older people and ageing. The survey found people who had more contact with older people are more likely to be relaxed about ageing, and think that older people have a lot to offer younger people. They are also more likely to agree with positive statements about older people, and less likely to be negative about their own ageing process.

Significantly however, the research found that many survey respondents do not have regular contact with older people. Half (50%) said they had social contact with an older person once a month or less frequently. Meanwhile, over a third (35%) said they contact with an older family member once each month or less frequently. Respondents were most likely to have contact with older people at work, with 48% interacting with an older person once a week or more often in the workplace.

The focus group research strongly echoed this finding. People's attitudes towards ageing was mostly shaped by their own personal experiences, and by their observations of close family members and friends. People with positive "role models" of older people in their family network are generally positive and less worried about ageing. Meanwhile, people who lack positive role models in their personal life tend to be more negative about ageing.

This finding is significant – as it suggests, it is your own personal network and experience, rather than the media or other factors which has the greatest influence on attitudes towards ageing and older people.

Other influences

There were also significant differences in attitudes and behaviour towards ageing and older people according to the community members' education status, gender, ethnicity and whether or not they are a carer. For instance, women often displayed more positive attitudes than men: they were more likely to think it is a privilege to grow old, that older people have a lot to offer younger people, are interested in the outside world and are not a drain on the economy.

Attitudes to ageism and older people are not always 'black and white'

Our research found that a substantial minority of people adopted a neutral position on a number of survey questions ie. they neither agreed or disagreed with certain attitudes or behaviours towards ageing or older people. This implies that many people do not see ageing as a 'black or white' issue.



I think it will make our communities a lot happier because you'd see older people around more. They'd be more confident. They'd be busier. They'd have more independence . . . and I think it would make our community more connected.

This may be because they have not thought about the issue before, or do not have fixed or strong views. The lack of polarisation of views suggests that there is scope for the ageism advocacy campaign to shift cultural or social norms: many people with a neutral stance may be open to considering or thinking differently about older people and ageing given the right engagement, information and approach.

What would a less ageist australia look like?

We asked people to describe how Australia would be different if ageism was tackled. People told us Australia would have:

- Greater empathy and compassion
- More knowledge transferred through the generations
- More tolerance, respect and acceptance
- Happier, stronger and more connected communities.

In addition, older people would be more visible, active, productive and confident.

What needs to change?

Government

Most community members (67%) think government has a major responsibility for addressing age discrimination. Specific actions for governments suggested by focus group participants included:

- funding re-training schemes for older people
- funding computer training/skills programs for older people (as these skills are seen as fundamental to current and future work)
- paying employers incentives to recruit and retain older workers (however, a small number of participants acknowledged that schemes of this nature already exist)
- setting 'quotas' for the number of older people employed in government and/or the private sector
- establishing an advisory committee to advise government on all areas of policy – not just health or aged care – through an 'ageism' lens (e.g. transport, housing, education, and so on).

Businesses and employers

Employers are also seen to have a key role to play in addressing ageism. People feel that employers can show leadership in recognising the value that older people can bring to different sectors and workplaces and that efforts should be made to encourage and showcase such efforts. It was suggested that 'showcasing' employers who challenge stereotypical views about older workers can help to create positive role models and encourage other employers.

However, there is a degree of scepticism amongst some with regard to the likelihood of changes within large corporations and 'big business'. Several research participants are of the view that people are categorised as past their 'use-by-date' early in these work settings. In contrast, there was thought to be greater potential in the small business sector, as well as in family businesses, which are typically viewed as being more 'age friendly' than large employers.

You can't give older people a voice. Older people have to use their own voice.


It doesn't matter how old you are, everything changes. You've got to keep up with everything and that's what I think keeps you young and connected to the new world.

Older people themselves have a critical role to play in combatting ageism

Finally, the literature review and the focus group discussions highlight that older people themselves have a critical role to play in combatting ageism. A campaign to address ageism can facilitate this by:

- Providing counter-information and opportunities for people to reflect on their internalised ageism, to address the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' whereby older people internalise negative views of ageing.
- Participating in the development and promotion of a better understanding of the historical 'retirement age' and the experience of being aged 65 and older in today's society and economy.
- Promoting conversations and developing mechanisms to assist people in their own planning for this emerging new period of their lifespan.
- Provide opportunities for older Australians to use their voice to challenge stereotypes and assumptions about what older people can and cannot do.

This is not only important for their own health and wellbeing, but for how younger people feel about ageing and older people.



You're responsible for your future. You want to be active. If you plan for retirement hopefully you can do things and it's good, you can do anything.

In summary - what have we learned from the research to influence The Benevolent Society's campaign?

From the research undertaken for this report The Benevolent Society should consider:

- increasing public awareness and understanding of ageism as a term and a concept.
- addressing the lack of awareness and misconceptions relating to older Australian's health, financial status and contribution to the community.
- a campaign strategy that moves the broad-based concern about ageism to higher level empathy and motivation for change, including among younger people.
- targeting change in people's personal beliefs and experiences, in order to achieve change in the policies and practices of government and businesses.

Further, The Benevolent Society should consider:

- **opportunities to partner** with other organisations committed to changing the negative social norms around ageing, including building on existing efforts in this area

- **initiatives to empower** individuals and organisations to take part in a national campaign – scaling the reach and impact of The Benevolent Society's efforts
- **strategies that facilitate meaningful interactions** and contact with older Australians
- **utilising information materials to 'dispel' myths** around ageing as part of a broader range of strategies
- **adopting a holistic** approach to the development of the campaign, but considering approaches to both improve society's perceptions and treatment of older people, as well as older peoples' own perceptions of ageing.

From theories of behaviour change, social marketing and other successful campaigns it was concluded that The Benevolent Society should consider:

- **learning from behavioural change theory** (eg first raising awareness about a behaviour and then using the EAST Framework - Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely - to encourage behaviour change) to guide the advocacy campaign

- **a multi-faceted social marketing** campaign combining mass media advertising with other initiatives, drawing on the successes of other social marketing campaigns (eg on health promotion, anti-smoking) as well as social inclusion campaigns addressing racism or discrimination against people with disability
- **investing in the development, testing and evaluation of any mass media advertising** to ensure it continues to reach the target audience, that messages are able to be recalled, and that it elicits the desired response in the context of competing messaging in the media and other communication channels around ageing and older people.

Next steps

This foundational research provides significant direction and practical advice for developing a sustained, evidence based advocacy campaign.

The Benevolent Society is now building a coalition to support and build the campaign to tackle ageism, EveryAGE Counts, which will be launched in 2018. This research provides a sound basis upon which campaign planning will now proceed.



benevolent SOCIETY

Connect with us at



1800 BENSOC, **1800 236 762**

benevolent.org.au

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