

Healthcare Equity Glossary – Age and Ageism

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Administration on Aging (AoA): Principal agency of the United States Department of Health and Human Services designated to carry out the provisions of the [Older Americans Act of 1965 \(OAA\)](#) which promotes the well-being of older individuals by providing services and programs designed to help them live independently in their homes and communities. OAA empowers the federal government to distribute funds to states for supportive services for individuals over the age of 60.

Adult Day Programs: Provide clients with structured activity and, when needed, assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs). There are 2 types of adult day programs: 1) Adult Day Care (ADC), which offers personal care services, and 2) Adult Day Health (ADH), which offers personal care as well as skilled nursing and rehab services. Some day programs are designed specifically for persons needing memory care and support.

Advance Care Planning: The process of discussing, determining and/or executing treatment directives and appointing a proxy decision maker

Advance Directive for Health Care: (Also called advance directive.) Advance directives are legal documents that allow you to convey your decisions about end-of-life care ahead of time. They provide a way for you to communicate your wishes to family, friends and health care professionals, and to avoid confusion later on.

A **living will** tells how you feel about care intended to sustain life. You can accept or refuse medical care. There are many issues to address, including the use of dialysis and breathing machines; if you want to be resuscitated if breathing or heartbeat stops; tube feeding; organ or tissue donation.

A **durable power of attorney for health care** is a document that names your health care proxy. Your proxy is someone you trust to make health decisions if you are unable to do so.

Age Discrimination: Treating an applicant or employee less favorably because of his or her age.

Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA): Federal law forbidding age discrimination against people who are age 40 or older. It does not protect workers under the age of 40, although some states have laws that protect younger workers from age discrimination. It is not illegal for an employer or other covered entity to favor an older worker over a younger one, even if both workers are age 40 or older.

Ageism: A system of oppression based on the social construction of age superiority and inferiority, which is expressed in individual, institutional, as well as cultural forms and functions for the benefit of some at the expense of others.

Ageist Agent-to-Agent Horizontal Oppression: Agents enforce dominant status with other members of the agent group. Regarding age an example of this type of oppression is a socially dominant adult joking that another is having a “senior moment.”

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Ageist Collusion: The act of perpetuating oppression or preventing others from working to eliminate ageism.

Ageist Internalized Domination: Members of the agent group (i.e. adults ages 21 to 60) accepting their group's socially superior status as normal and deserved

Ageist Internalized Subordination: Members of the target social group (e.g. youth and elders or seniors) adopt the agent group's or society's ideology and accept their subordinate status as deserved, natural, and inevitable.

Ageist Target-to-Target Horizontal Oppression: Target group members (e.g. youth and elders or seniors) who enforce subordinate status within their own age cohort.

Ageist Vertical Oppression: The agent group (ages 21 to 60) enforce subordinate status upon targets (youth and elders or seniors)

Agent Group: A group of people with access to social power and privilege based upon their membership in their social group: regarding age, this includes adults generally yet not exclusively aged 21 to about 60.

Aging: The life-long process of growing older; not just a later life experience

Ally (Age): Member of the agent group (adults ages 21 to 60) who rejects the dominant ideology of ageism by taking action against oppression out of a belief that eliminating oppression will benefit agents and targets.

Anti-Ageist Empowerment: Target group members (i.e. youth and elders or seniors) refuse to accept the dominant ideology (ageism) and their subordinate status, taking action to redistribute social power more equitably.

Assisted Living Communities (ALCs) and Personal Care Homes (PCHs): ALCs and PCHs provide services to residents who need assistance with personal care, medication management, and/or home management but do not require skilled health care. PCHs range in size from 2 beds in a private home to 100+ apartments. ALCs must have at least 25 apartments. Their services are similar, but eligibility requirements and payment options differ somewhat.

Average Life Expectancy: The age at which 50 percent of the members of a population have died, when plotted on a standard survival curve. This statistic is normally calculated from birth, but may be recomputed in terms of expected years remaining at any age.

Capacity: An individual's ability to understand the significant benefits, risks, and alternatives to proposed health care and to make and communicate a health care decision. The term is frequently used interchangeably with competency but is not the same. Competency is a legal status imposed by the court.

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Caregiver: Person who provides support and assistance with various activities to a family member, friend, or neighbor. A caregiver may provide emotional or financial support, as well as hands-on help with different tasks. Caregivers can use the formal and informal supports that are available. Caregiving may also be done from long distance.

Centenarian: A person who is 100 years or older.

Dementia: A syndrome characterized by a decline in intellectual functioning. May be caused by more than 70 diseases, the most common being Alzheimer's Disease.

Elder Justice Act of 2010: The first comprehensive legislation to address the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older adults at the federal level. The law authorized a variety of programs and initiatives to better coordinate federal responses to elder abuse, promote elder justice research and innovation, support Adult Protective Services systems, and provide additional protections for residents of long-term care facilities.

Elderspeak: Patronizing speech including the use of basic vocabulary and simpler structure, a slower speech rate, and more pitch variations than typical conversational speech.

Geriatrician: Physician who is certified in the care of older people.

Geriatrics: The branch of medicine specializing in the health care and treatment of older persons. It is defined by the World Health Organization as the branch of medicine that is concerned with the health of older adults in all aspects: preventative, clinical, remedial, rehabilitative, and continuous surveillance.

Gerontology: The multidisciplinary study of all aspects of aging, including health, biological, sociological, economic, behavioral, and environmental

Gerontology: A branch of biology focusing on the common mechanisms of aging across all multicellular species. Gerontologists, for example, are keen to understand species that appear to exhibit very gradual or negligible senescence over a long time interval. In this context, gerontologists may study yeast, worms, fruit flies, mice, rock fish, tortoises, bats, parrots, humans, and other creatures exhibiting exceptional longevity.

Individual Ageism: Single ageist discriminatory beliefs and actions.

Institutional Ageism: Policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that disadvantage other social groups based on age, including religion, government, education, law, the media, and health care system.

Institutional and Social or Cultural Ageism: The manner in which culture and our institutions reinforce messages which shape our behaviors.

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Life History: The combination of age-specific survival probabilities and fertilities characteristic of a species; the time table of individual development and aging for a representative organism (e.g., in humans, from fertilization conception, to embryogenesis, implantation/placentation; organogenesis/fetogenesis, birth, infancy, adolescence, puberty, adulthood, menopause, loss of vitality, frailty/morbidity, and ultimately, death mortality).

Lifespan: The maximum lifespan of a species is the characteristic observed age of death for its very oldest individual(s) (e.g., for humans 122+ years). On the other hand, average lifespan is the age at which 50 percent of the members of a species or group has died. Over the last two centuries, average life expectancy has risen significantly, while maximum lifespan has hardly changed at all.

Life Cycle: (1) The entire course of a person's life, from infancy to old age. Health, social roles and expectations, and socioeconomic status tend to change as an individual develops. (2) The genetically prescribed course followed by all living organisms, including humans, from conception to death through stages of development and change.

Longevity: The condition or quality of being long lived.

Meals-on-Wheels: A program that delivers meals to the homebound.

Menopause: The time of life when a woman ceases to menstruate and can no longer become pregnant, usually about age 45 to 50.

Older Americans Act of 1965 (OAA): A federal law passed in response to concern by policymakers about a lack of community social services for older persons. The original legislation established authority for grants to states for community planning and social services, research and development projects, and personnel training in the field of aging. The law also established the [Administration on Aging \(AoA\)](#) to administer the newly created grant programs and to serve as the federal focal point on matters concerning older persons.

Retirement: Period or life stage following termination of and withdrawal from a regular job and from income from employment. Difficult to delimit because some older persons retire from one job and take another full or part-time job.

Social Security: A national insurance program that provides income to workers when they retire or are disabled and to dependent survivors when a worker dies. Retirement payments are based on workers' earnings during employment.

Societal/Cultural Ageism: Social norms, roles, ritual, language, music, and art that reflects and reinforce the belief that one social group is superior to another based on age.

Target Group: A group whose access to social power is limited or denied, regarding age this group may include youth and elders or seniors.

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Privilege (Age): Unearned access to resources (social power) only readily available to some people as a result of their social group membership.

Social Power: Access to resources that enhances one’s chances of getting what one needs in order to lead a comfortable, productive, and safe life. Regarding age, social power tends to be the strongest between the ages of 21 and 60.

Successful Aging: A concept incorporating freedom from disease and disability with good cognitive and physical functioning, social connections, and productive activities.