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Re-Framing Aging of Wisconsin

- **Our vision**

- is a Wisconsin where everyone, at every age and ability, is respected, valued, supported, and belongs.

- **Our mission**

- is to advance a fair and complete story about aging and disability: one that values every person, at every stage of life, and every ability. Through reframing our communication and expanding our mindsets, we improve quality of life for all of us.
- We are committed to ending ageism and ableism in Wisconsin.

Re-framing Aging in Healthcare – Prevention Strategies, Caregiver Support, and Community Based Solutions



A communication and systems approach for reducing ageism
and improving care outcomes

Who we are

- Project management team
- Advisory committee
- Champions
- Community of practice



WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
of HEALTH SERVICES





Defining Ageism and Ableism

- Ageism is a form of discrimination where people are mistreated based on their age. It is rooted in a lack of knowledge, prejudice, and stereotypes. Despite being a form of discrimination, ageism is often not taken seriously, and it is even considered one of the last socially acceptable prejudices.
- NIH, 2024
 - Ableism is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the belief that typical abilities are superior. At its heart, ableism is rooted in the assumption that disabled people require 'fixing' and defines people by their disability. Ableism classifies entire groups of people as 'less than,' and includes harmful stereotypes, misconceptions, and generalizations of people with disabilities.
- Access Living, <https://www.accessliving.org/>
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Understanding Ageism

- Ageism is discrimination against older people due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes.
- Age-based assumptions can reduce autonomy and shared decision-making.
- Common phrases normalize bias and diminish dignity.
- Ageism increases avoidable healthcare costs and worsens population health.



How ageism and ableism show up

In multiple forms

- Stereotypes: How we think
- Prejudices: How we feel
- Discrimination: How we act

On multiple levels

- Interpersonal
- Compassionate
- Systemic/ Institutional
- Self-directed

Information credit: World Health Organization

Why Reframing Aging Matters


Ageism negatively affects health outcomes, patient engagement, and quality of care.

Implicit bias toward older adults influences clinical decisions and communication.

Older adults contribute experience, resilience, and wisdom to communities and health systems.

Healthcare professionals can lead culture change through language and practice.

In healthcare

- Until recently, Medicare excluded licensed counselors and licensed marriage and family therapists from participating as independent providers
 - Fewer than half of geriatric psychiatry fellowships filled each year.
 - 9.0% of social workers identified aging as specific field of practice
 - A third of clinical trials funded by the NIH between 1965 to 2015 had arbitrary upper age limits without a clear explanation
 - While emerging frameworks offer direction on how to include people with disabilities in clinical trials, current implementation remains inconsistent and largely voluntary.
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The “Why”

These often subtle “isms” have created long-term unhealthy social influences on policy development, funding and people.

- People with disabilities who internalize ableism are less likely to seek accommodations, preventive care, or employment opportunities.
- When disability is viewed primarily as an individual deficit, rather than a systemic issue, policies and funding often prioritize "fixing" the individuals instead of removing barriers.
- Older adults who associated “normal aging” with cognitive and physical health problems are less likely to report that they’d discuss these health concerns with their doctor.
- Those who attribute their ailments to old age, have significantly HIGHER levels of arthritis, hearing loss and heart disease than those who attribute these disabilities to other causes.

A place to start

- **Implicit bias** refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.

-(The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity)

- Simply being **aware** of our implicit bias reduces the “ism”.

-(Busso et al., 2019)



Words Matter

Instead of these words	Try
“Tidal wave”, “tsunami”, and similarly catastrophic terms for the growing population of older people.	Talking affirmatively about changing demographics: “As Americans live longer and healthier lives...”
“Choice”, “planning”, “control” and other individual determinants of aging outcomes.	Emphasizing how to improve social contexts: “Let’s find creative solutions to ensure we can all thrive as we age.”
“Seniors”, “elderly”, “aging dependents”, and similar “other-ing” terms that stoke stereotypes.	Using more neutral (“older people”, “Americans”) and inclusive (“we”, “us”) terms.

Words Matter

Instead of these words	Try
“Struggle”, “battle”, “fight”, and similar conflict-oriented words to describe aging experiences.	The Building Momentum metaphor: “Aging is a dynamic process that leads to new abilities and knowledge we can share with our communities.”
Using the word “ageism” without explanation.	Defining ageism: “Ageism is discrimination against older people due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes.”
Making generic appeals to the need to “do something” about aging.	Using concrete examples like intergenerational community centers to illustrate inventive solutions.

Information credit: [National Center to Reframe Aging](#)



Traps to avoid

- To help your messages be understood as you intend, avoid these communication traps.
 - Individualism
 - Us vs Them
 - Vulnerability
- Information credit: [National Center to Reframe Aging](#)

Individualism Trap

- Lifestyle choices
 - Finances
 - Personal responsibility
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Examples:

- “If you exercise and eat healthy, you will age well.”
- “It’s your responsibility to manage your condition.”
- “You should have saved more for retirement.”





Us V.S Them Trap

- Framing groups as “others”
 - Zero-sum thinking
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Examples:

- “We can’t afford to accommodate everyone.”
- “If we increase support for older adults, others will lose out.”
- Deciding who needs “more.”

Vulnerability Trap

- Paternalistic language
 - Victim-savior narrative
 - Assumptions of fragility or dependence
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Examples:

- “Older adults are frail and need help.”
- Speaking to a caregiver or making decisions without asking the individual.
- Assuming lower quality of life.



Strategies to advance:

Talk about the process of aging as building momentum

The ideas we're communicating:

As we age, we gain new insights and experiences that can power up our communities.

What it does:

- Inspires a different story about aging
- Reduces bias
- Steers people away from othering old people

Building Momentum

“Transporting Boston’s most experienced people.” Information credit: [National Center to Reframe Aging](#)



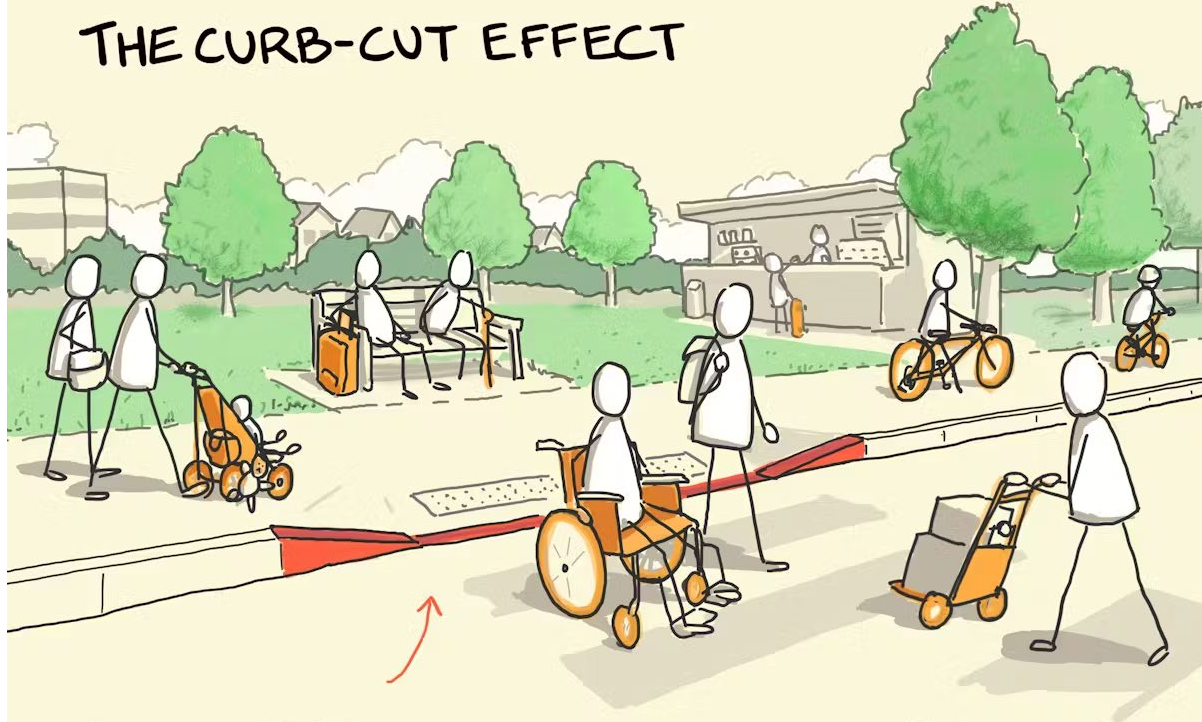
Before



After

Age Strong Shuttle Redesign

THE CURB-CUT EFFECT



WHEN WE DESIGN
FOR DISABILITIES

... WE MAKE THINGS
BETTER FOR EVERYONE

sketchplanations

The Curb-Cut effect

Reframing Aging Principles


- Use inclusive language: 'older adults' or 'older people' instead of 'the elderly' or 'seniors'.
- Focus on strengths, participation, and contribution.
- Describe aging as a dynamic process rather than decline.
- Emphasize supportive systems and environments that help people thrive.

Examples of Ageist Language

- “Senior moment”
- “Too old to try that”
- “Those are just aches and pains from old age”
- “You look good for your age”



Communication Strategies for Clinicians

- Use person-centered and autonomy-supportive language.
 - Avoid infantilizing terms such as 'sweetie' or 'dear'.
 - Encourage shared decision-making regardless of age.
 - Recognize diversity in aging experiences and abilities.
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System-Level Opportunities

- Integrate age-friendly care models.
- Promote interprofessional education on ageism.
- Develop policies that support healthy aging and social inclusion.
- Measure patient experience and equity across age groups.

Practical Reframing Examples

Instead of: 'The elderly are a burden on healthcare.'

Say: 'As people live longer and healthier lives, healthcare systems can adapt to support thriving communities.'

Instead of: 'Older patients struggle with technology.'

Say: 'Accessible design and training can help everyone benefit from digital health tools.'

Prevention Strategies for Older Adults

- Prevention programs for older adults reduce health care costs by helping people stay healthier longer, delaying or avoiding expensive medical treatments, hospitalizations, and long-term care. These programs focus on maintaining physical health, mental health, independence, and social connection before serious problems develop.
- It costs far less to keep older adults healthy, independent, and socially connected than to treat preventable illnesses, injuries, and crises after they occur.



Prevention Programs Help Older Adults Stay Healthy Longer

- Reduce hospital visits and emergency care
 - Prevent falls, injuries, and chronic disease complications
 - Support physical, mental, and social wellbeing
 - Help older adults remain independent
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How Prevention Programs Reduce Health Care Costs

- **Cost Savings Come From:**
 - Fewer hospitalizations and readmissions
 - Better management of chronic diseases
 - Delayed nursing home placement
 - Reduced caregiver burnout
 - Early detection through screenings and education
- **Examples of Prevention Programs:**
 - Fall prevention classes
 - Exercise and wellness programs
 - Chronic disease self-management
 - Caregiver support and respite services

The Overall Impact

- **Benefits for Older Adults and Communities**
 - Improved quality of life
 - Increased independence
 - Better mental and physical health
 - Lower Medicare and Medicaid costs
 - Stronger support for aging in place

What is the Older Americans Act (OAA)?

- Enacted in 1965 to support aging populations.
- Key focus: Independence, dignity, and well-being of older adults.
- Several Titles make up OAA:
 - III- B Supportive Services
 - III-C1 Congregate Nutrition Services
 - III-C2 Home Delivered Meal Services
 - **III-D Health Promotion & Disease Prevention**
 - III-E Caregiver Services
 - Title VI Grants for Native Americans



90%
of adults age
65 and older say
they hope to stay
in their homes
for as long as
possible.²

But to do so, many people will eventually need some level of service or support to live safely and successfully in their home or community.

Older Americans Act Provisions and Priorities

Serve anyone 60 and older.



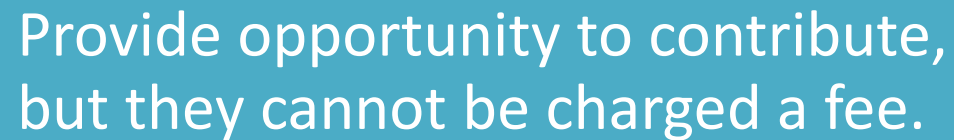
Pay attention to low income, minority older people, rural areas.



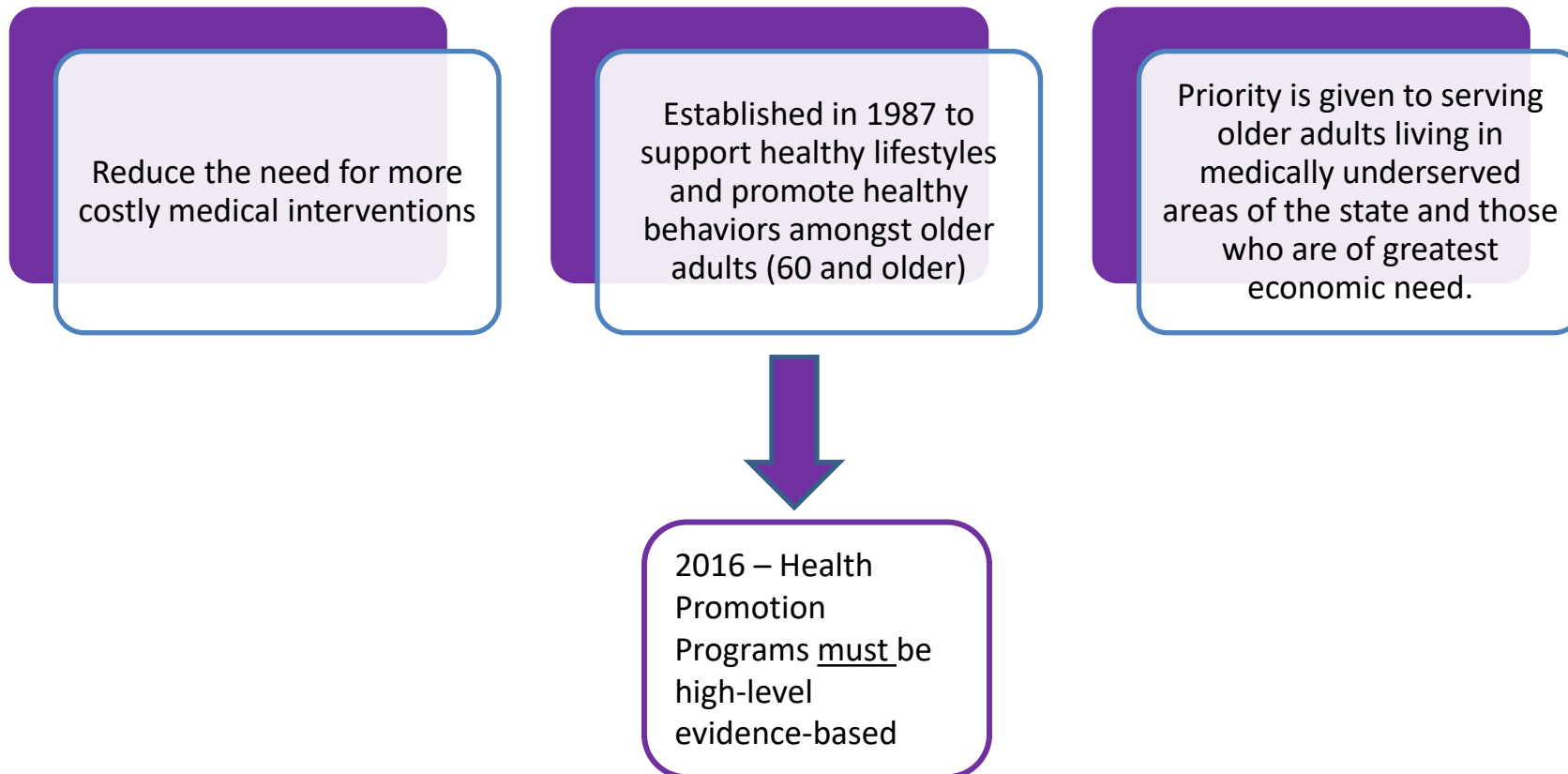
No income or asset test.



Provide opportunity to contribute, but they cannot be charged a fee.



Purpose of the Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III-D Program “Health Promotion”



Advantages of Evidence-Based Programming



Positively impact the health of the program participants



Funding



Use limited resources on proven programs



Concentrate efforts on program delivery



Older adults want to invest their time in something proven to work



Development of partnerships and sustainability

Purpose of OAA Title III-D Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

To promote programs and services that improve the health and well-being of individuals aged 60 and older:

- Encourage Healthy Aging
- Support Evidence-Based Interventions
- Promote Cost-Effective Solutions
- Increase Access to Community-Based Resources



Aging & Disability Resource Center Role in Delivering OAA Programs

Identifying	Identifying community health needs.
Implementing	Implementing evidence-based programs.
Monitoring and reporting	Monitoring and reporting program outcomes.
Collaborating	Collaborating with community partners.

- **WIHA Programs & Other Evidence Based Programs**
 - Healthy Living with Chronic Pain
 - Healthy Living with Diabetes
 - Vivir Saludable con Diabetes
 - Living Well with Chronic Conditions
 - Tomando Control de su Salud
 - Mind Over Matter: Healthy Bowels, Healthy Bladder (MOM)
 - Physical Activity for Lifelong Success (PALS)
 - Stand Up for Your Health
 - Stepping On
 - Bingocize
 - Pisando Fuerte
 - Walk with Ease (WWE)



Brown County Coalitions



BROWN COUNTY FALLS PREVENTION COALITION

Supported by: ADRC of Brown County, Aurora Bay Care Medical Center, Bellin College, De Pere Health Department, Green Bay Metro Fire Department, Greenfield Rehabilitation Center, HSHS St. Vincent Hospital, Fall Prevention Alliance of Northeast Wisconsin, Prevea Health, Kroc Community Center, Greater Green Bay YMCA, Brain Center of Green Bay, TMG Wisconsin, De Pere Police Department, Emplify by Bellin Health



BROWN COUNTY DIABETES COALITION

Supported by: ADRC of Brown County, Advocate Aurora Health, Brown County Public Health, Emplify Health by Bellin/Gundersen, Streu's Pharmacy, WI Department of Health Services, Oneida Comprehensive Health Department, Anthem Inc., Hy-Vee.



Higher Education Partnerships

Aging and Disability Resource Center takes bachelor, master, and doctorate student placements



Working collaboratively with our healthcare partners to educate, inform, make system process improvement, and serve our communities.

Call to Action

Reflect on	Reflect on personal and institutional bias.
Model	Model respectful and empowering communication.
Educate	Educate colleagues and trainees about ageism.
Partner	Partner with older adults in care planning and policy development.
Refer	Refer patients to community resources that support aging in place with supportive independence.

Resources

- Reframing Aging Initiative — www.reframingaging.org
- Brown County Aging and Disability Resource Center [Aging & Disability Resource Center \(ADRC\) of Brown County](#)
- Administration for Community Living [Home Page | ACL Administration for Community Living](#)
- Implicit Association Test (Harvard Project Implicit) [Take a Test](#)
- Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Programs [Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program | HRSA](#)
- Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging [Home - Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging \(WIHA\)](#)
- Falls Free Wisconsin [Home - fallsfreewi.org](http://fallsfreewi.org)