

Be Bold: Resist Ageism

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) happens each year on June 15 but has a different theme every year. The theme for WEAAD in Ontario in 2025 is “be bold: age with attitude.” One way to have a bold attitude towards aging is to be proud of aging.

There are negative ideas about getting older in our society that make it hard to be proud of aging. For example, have you heard someone say, “I’m having a senior moment” when they forget something? That line links forgetfulness with getting older but younger people forget things too. This incorrect idea that if someone is forgetting something, then they must be old, is an example of ageism.

“Ageism” means stereotypes (how people think), prejudice (how people feel), and discrimination (how people act) towards others based on their age. Thinking that forgetfulness is always part of aging is a stereotype. That stereotype leads to negative actions towards older people (discrimination), such as refusing to hire seniors for jobs.

Ontario has a *Human Rights Code* that says discrimination based on age is not allowed. However, other laws in Ontario say that the *Human Rights Code* does not apply to certain situations and allow actions just based on age. For example, the *Highway Traffic Act* says that people can be forced to complete tests at age 80 to keep a “G” driver’s licence. A “G” licence is the most common kind of driver’s licence in Ontario.

People should not drive if they have health problems that make them unsafe drivers. For this reason, the *Highway Traffic Act* says that doctors must report to the Ontario Ministry of Transportation if their patients have a driver’s licence and have certain health problems. However, the *Highway Traffic Act* does not just affect drivers who are too sick to drive. The law assumes that people lose ability to drive at age 80 by forcing people to prove they can still drive just because they are age 80 regardless of their health.

Laws and policies that make assumptions about people based on their age might start to change if all of us as individuals stop ageism in our own lives. Research has found that ageism decreases when people learn about ageism and spend time with people of other ages because we realize that there are ways society teaches us to think about ourselves and others that are not true. For example, we realize both old and young people are forgetful. When we realize stereotypes about age are not true, we can stop being ashamed of our age and hiding signs of our age. For example, we will not feel so much social pressure to use hair dye to hide our gray hair.

Ageism can contribute to elder abuse. Take action to stop elder abuse for WEAAD this year by aging boldly and resisting ageism in how you think about yourself and others.