

Who Are Older Adults

Older adults — like anyone — are more than just their age. Older adults often **self-identify by stage rather than age**. In the continuum of aging, older adults embody unique characteristics such as:

- Employment milestones (e.g., professional tenure, retirement, encore careers, working for generations)
- Health or mobility conditions
- Marital and parental status (e.g., grandparent, widower, married for decades, head of family)
- Hobbies and interests
- Lived experiences (e.g., veteran)

Portrayals Are Often Limited

Because older adults are often defined solely by age onscreen, portrayals tend to fall into three stereotypes:

- The **super senior** who single-handedly defeats aging by running a marathon, engaging in extreme travel/adventures around the world, or looking “ageless.”
- The **sympathetic senior** whose defining characteristic is being frail in both mind and body, and therefore in need of constant and extensive care.
- The **inflexible, grumpy senior** who is set in their ways. However, research shows that 55% of older adults say they are actively learning new things. About seven out of 10 adults say that learning and trying new things keeps them vibrant and their lives less stagnant.

The Dangers of Misrepresentation

With Age Comes Ageism

- 80% of adults ages 60 and older report experiencing ageism. The most frequent type of ageism was being told a joke that pokes fun at older people.

Discrimination at Work

- Ageism is rampant in the workplace. It takes job hunters over the age of 55 three months longer to find a job than a younger person. And there are few HR policies that are created with the older worker in mind. Meanwhile, older adults contribute an estimated 40% of the national economic output despite making up just 35% of the population.

The Influence of Media

- Research shows that the images and portrayals we see of ourselves in the media have a powerful influence on how we age. Seeing negative portrayals of older people creates negative health effects. A recent study finds older adults with a more positive perception of aging have a 43% lower risk of death compared to those with a more negative perception, reiterating the importance of the kind of stories we tell.

Did You Know?

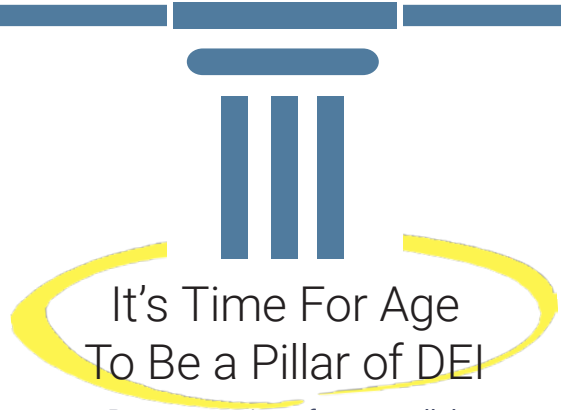
One in three working Americans are 50+, with older adults generating

\$8.3 trillion

in economic activity each year — a number expected to rise to \$12.5 trillion by 2030.

We'd Like To See Older Adults Who Are

- Competent, independent, capable
- Socially and physically connected
- Using technology successfully
- Engaged in meaningful intergenerational relationships
- Diverse (reflecting every person, every experience)
- Working longer
- Active consumers
- Redefining retirement and employment
- Portrayed in a multi-dimensional way, as any other character would be



Representation of age parallels background, race, and disability. If we're working to change the narrative *about* older adults, we need them *in* the conversation to achieve this.



✓
Terms We
Love

50-plus
Experienced
Mature
Knowledgeable
Retiree
Engaged
Active Energetic

Your words matter

A glossary of do's and don'ts when talking about older adults

✗
Terms We
Avoid

Old
Senior
Boomer
Elderly
Over the hill
Geezer
Aging

We are all aging!

Contact us at info@annenberggenspace.org



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