A GLOBAL CAMPAIGN TO END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST OLDER PERSONS (AGEISM)

Overview

Ageism is a form of discrimination and stereotyping based on age, which predominately affects older persons. According to the Independent Expert (on human rights of older persons), Claudia Mahler, ageism is based on the assumption that older people are somehow lacking as a result of their age. The term ageism was coined by the late Robert N. Butler, founder of the International Longevity Centre, Global Alliance, who described the phenomenon as the systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender.

Definitions and Forms of Ageism

Ageism includes stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. These represent generalized and often negative beliefs about aging and older persons, such as all older adults are care-dependent and unproductive, are undesirable, and are undeserving of fair treatment and practices because of their age.

Ageism manifests in various contexts, including institutional, interpersonal and self-directed. Examples include policies and practices that disadvantage older persons, direct interactions between individuals where ageist beliefs are expressed, and internalized ageism where older people accept and apply negative stereotypes to themselves.

Prevalence and Impact

Ageism is widespread, affecting individuals globally regardless of culture or socioeconomic status. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that one in two people hold moderate to high ageist attitudes. The impact of ageism is amplified by other prejudices such as racism, sexism, mentalism, ableism, homophobia and others.

Lia Daichman, MD., President of ILC, Ar. Said “Discrimination is the worse disease.” This widespread bias has negative impact on the health, wellbeing, social participation and economic status of older persons. It contributes to poorer physical and mental health outcomes, leading to stress, depression and loss of will to live. Older adults subjected to ageism may experience reduced quality of life and life satisfaction, limited opportunities for participation in social, economic, and civic activities, leading to social isolation. In the workplace, it can lead to early retirement, unemployment and underemployment and contribute to economic losses.

Strategies to Combat Ageism

Some strategies recommended by WHO include policy and legal changes, educational interventions, and intergenerational initiatives. With the implementation and enforcement of anti-ageism legislation and inclusive policies, the rights and contributions of older people can be recognized.

Education can increase awareness and understanding about aging. Programs that challenge ageist stereotypes and promote positive attitudes toward aging can be integrated into school curricula and professional training. Encouraging and promoting intergenerational interactions can strengthen relationships and foster mutual respect and understanding between different age groups. Intergenerational programs in communities, workplaces, and schools can break down ageist prejudices.

Role of Partners and Sectors in Ending Ageism

Governments can enact and enforce laws against age discrimination, develop public awareness campaigns, and promote inclusive policies.

Healthcare providers can ensure equitable access to healthcare services, and train professionals to recognize and address ageism in clinical settings.

Employers can promote age diversity in the workplace, implement training programs to combat workplace ageism, and support lifelong learning and career development for older employees.

The media can portray aging and older adults in a positive and realistic manner, challenge ageist narratives, and highlight the contributions of older people to society.

Community partners can promote age friendly and inclusive spaces, services, and intergenerational activities.

Academia can promote research and education to address ageism and support human rights in all sectors.

Individuals of all ages can reflect on personal biases and challenge ageist attitudes, support policies and practices that promote age equality, and engage in activities that bring people of all ages together.

Conclusion

The WHO's 2021 global report on ageism underscores the urgent need to address ageism against older persons. Combatting ageism requires a concerted effort from all sectors of society to create an equitable and inclusive world where individuals of all ages are valued and respected. Through policy change, education, and intergenerational initiatives, it is possible to reduce the prevalence of ageism and its harmful effects on older people.

This concept paper is adapted from **Ageism 101:A Primer on Ageism Against Older Persons** by the **International Longevity Centre (ILC) Canada and the CanadianCoalition Against Ageism (**K. Rabheru, May 28, 2024**)**