

ACTION GUIDE







About this Resource

In 2019, the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) and the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) teamed up to create our first joint World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) Action Guide. It centered on unifying the parallel fields of Elder Justice and Violence Against Women by bringing to the forefront the lived experiences of older people around the globe. The content was also built upon the momentum of NCEA's Building Strong Support for Elders theme, which was informed by the Reframing Elder Abuse initiative encouraging us to consciously think and thoughtfully approach conversations about elder abuse.

This current edition of the action guide brings into focus the issue of ageism in the context of elder abuse, a topic that NCALL takes on in their *End Ageism* | *End Abuse* campaign. We've also expanded it to include ideas for ways to commemorate WEAAD, both in-person and virtually, offered considerations for increasing accessibility in your events, and provided more tools for your WEAAD outreach.

Table of Contents

- 2 About this Resource
- 3 About Elder Abuse
- 4 About World Elder Abuse Awareness Day
- 5 Ageism and Elder Abuse
- 8 Steps for Addressing Ageism in the Context of Elder Abuse
- 10 Commemorating WEAAD at Any Distance
- 12 Planning and Hosting Accessible & Inclusive Events
- 17 Sample Social Media Posts
- 19 More Ways to Take Action Throughout the Year

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About Elder Abuse

While there is no singular definition for elder abuse – some are based on age, vulnerability, or determined by state statutes or tribal codes – The Elder Justice Roadmap offers one definition, created by the field for the field. It states that elder abuse is "abuse, neglect, abandonment, or financial exploitation of an older individual by another person or entity who has a trust-based relationship with the older adult or any harm that occurs because an older person is targeted by a stranger based on their age or disability."

Each year, an estimated 5 million older adults experience abuse, neglect, or exploitation.² Older Americans lose an estimated \$2.6 billion to \$36.5 billion annually due to elder financial abuse and exploitation, funds that could be used to pay for basic needs such as housing, food, and medical care. Unfortunately, abuse occurs in every demographic and can happen to anyone – a family member, a neighbor, even you. While cases of elder abuse appear to have been on the rise during the pandemic³, it is commonly understood that many cases never come to light. One study has estimated that only one in 24 cases of abuse are reported.⁴



5 million

older adults experience abuse, neglect, or exploitation



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in estimated loses by older adults to elder financial abuse and exploitation



¹ The Elder Justice Roadmap, A Stakeholder Initiative to Respond to an Emerging Health, Justice, Financial and Social Crisis. Retrieved from https://www.justice.gov/file/852856/download.
2 Ibid.

³ Han, S. D., & Mosqueda, L. (2020). Elder abuse in the COVID-19 era. Journal of the American Geriatrics Society. Retrieved from https://agsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jgs.16496.

⁴ Lachs, M., & Berman, J. (2011). Under the Radar: New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study, Self-reported Relevance and Documented Case Surveys. Retrieved from https://ocfs.ny.gov/reports/aps/Under-the-Radar-2011May12.pdf.

About World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), launched on June 15, 2006, by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and the World Health Organization at the United Nations (UN), aims to create an opportunity for communities around the world to promote a better understanding of the abuse and neglect of older persons by raising awareness of the cultural, social, economic, and demographic circumstances affecting elder abuse and neglect.

In addition, WEAAD is held in support of the <u>UN International Plan of Action on Ageing</u> acknowledging the significance of elder abuse as a public health and human rights issue. This observance is a call-to-action for individuals, organizations, and communities to lift up our voices – and those of older survivors – and raise awareness about elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

The UN recently set forth the <u>UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)</u>, an initiative that brings together governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live. The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing aims to address four areas of action: age-friendly environments, combatting ageism, integrated care, and long-term care.



Ageism and Elder Abuse⁵

Turn on the TV, scroll through Instagram, or flip through a magazine and you're likely to see that the narrative about the physical and mental decline associated with aging is deeply embedded in American culture. How we feel about getting older shapes our views on an individual's relevance, standards of ability, beauty, and health, and concepts of self-worth.

Every day, in subtle and obvious ways, older adults are marginalized and even dismissed in our society. We see it in statements like "over the hill" or "I'm having a senior moment." It's in our actions, when we automatically talk louder or in simplistic terms to an older person or talk about that person in front of them instead of addressing them directly. And it's in our attitudes when we view older people as diminished or incompetent or that aging is something to fear and resist.

Ageism refers to how we think, feel, and act towards ourselves or others based on age. Ageist ideas are often ingrained and systemic, inhibiting people's objectivity and influencing decisions at the micro (individual/family), meso (organization/community), and macro (government/ societal) levels of human interaction.⁶

Like other -isms, ageism segregates and reinforces inequalities between groups. In contrast to other -isms, ageism affects everyone at different stages in their lives. "Ageism is associated with a shorter lifespan, poorer physical and mental health, slower recovery from disability and cognitive decline. Ageism reduces older people's quality of life, increases their social isolation and loneliness (both of which are associated with serious health problems), restricts their ability to express their sexuality and may increase the risk of violence and abuse against older people. Ageism can also reduce younger people's commitment to the organization they work for. For individuals, ageism contributes to poverty and financial insecurity in older age, and one recent estimate shows that ageism costs society billions of dollars."⁷

⁵ Excerpted from Ageism: Across the Lifespan and Everywhere and Combating Ageism is Combating Abuse written by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life.

⁶ Law Commission of Ontario. (2012). Framework for the Law as it Affects Older Adults. Retrieved from https://www.lco-cdo.org/en/older-adults-final-report.

⁷ World Health Organization. (2021). Global report on ageism: executive summary. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2021/03/9789240020504-eng.pdf.

We invite you to check out the NCEA's <u>research brief</u> for a deeper dive into the scholarship and research exploring the concept of ageism, its multifaceted forms, impacts, and redresses.

The Consequences of Ageism

Age-prejudice is associated with consequential and compounding harms for older adults. Among other impacts, ageism is correlated with:



Poorer medical and mental health outcomes



Employment discrimination



Significant monetary losses



Increased social isolation and loneliness



Environmental stressors



Elder abuse

Ageism blinds us to the benefits and strengths of aging and increases our fears of growing older. Worse yet, ageism also creates a culture that ignores and tolerates elder abuse and allows the abuse of older adults to continue unabated. "The adoption, endorsement, and activation of ageist stereotypes can lead to discriminatory behaviors, including neglect, abandonment, and emotional, financial, and physical harms."

Individuals who commit abuse often rely on ageist assumptions and beliefs to justify their behavior. They rationalize abusing, neglecting, or exploiting an older adult because "they're going to die soon anyway." They assume older adults have dementia and don't understand – or can't report – what is happening to them. They may view older adults as less worthy of respect or dignity if they have physical limitations or rely on others for care. Instead of seeing older adults as fully human, they are viewed as disposable, inconvenient, and irrelevant.

Ageism also impacts society's ability to detect and respond appropriately to abuse. Age-based ideals regarding how an abuse victim should look and behave can shape the response to a victim disclosing abuse. Too often older adults are not believed when they report abuse because of ageist assumptions about dementia, and/or misconceptions about the dynamics of interpersonal violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

⁸ Shepherd, B. F., & Brochu, P. M. (2021). How do stereotypes harm older adults? A theoretical explanation for the perpetration of elder abuse and its rise. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 57*, 101435. Retrieved from https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1359178920301397.

Steps for Addressing Ageism in the Context of Elder Abuse

1. Confront your own attitudes about aging.

We can't challenge bias until we can identify it. Be mindful of the language you use when you talk about older adults and be willing to confront others who perpetuate ageist tropes or make ageist assumptions.

2. Believe older survivors and trust their decisions.

A commitment to anti-ageism requires us to understand the complexity involved with elder abuse and support a survivor's right to make decisions about their relationship based on what they think is best for their life.

Leaving a relationship that is many decades old may have ripple effects that impact every facet of one's life, including loss of a home, caregiver, access to other family members, and a lifetime of personal effects. Some older survivors have cultural, generational, or spiritual beliefs that are incompatible with ending a marriage. When someone is being abused by a child or grandchild, there can be shame or embarrassment associated with bringing attention to their behavior.

3. Stop the erasure of older adults.

When describing services and supports for survivors, it's essential to include images of older adults and ensure that the images and messages portray older adults in a way that respects their diversity, resilience, and life experience. A couple of age-positive collections to check out include AARP x Getty Images' The Disrupt Aging® Collection and a free image library curated by Centre for Ageing Better.

It is also important to center the voices of older survivors and amplify their perspectives and experiences. Some older survivors may want to share their stories publicly to help others and prevent the pain they experienced from happening again. If you invite an older survivor to speak, be prepared to provide emotional support before, during, and after they speak.

Important Considerations in Engaging Survivor Voices



- Not all older survivors should share their story publicly.
 - Always consider safety and confidentiality concerns first.
 - How is the survivor doing emotionally?
 - How comfortable is the survivor with public speaking?
- Consider helping the survivor write/update their emotional and physical safety plan before sharing their story.
- Ask the survivor about transportation needs and help make arrangements if needed.
- Consider these strategies to prepare the survivor on what to expect at the event.
 - Ask the survivor what they need to be comfortable at the event.
 - Discuss how long the event will be and take into consideration the timing of mealtimes and medications.
 - Discuss seating options, length of time standing, and the setup of the room.
- Be explicit with the survivor about the audience they will be sharing their story with.
- Arrange for an advocate to accompany the survivor at the event, to serve as their support person from start to finish.

An excellent resource that provides guidance on this subject is <u>From the Front of the Room: A Survivor's Guide to Public Speaking</u> created by the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRCDV).

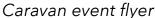


Commemorating WEAAD at Any Distance

The NCEA and NCALL have resources and tools to help you commemorate WEAAD and generate awareness about elder abuse. We also invite you to get ideas and find inspiration from other <u>WEAAD events around the globe</u>. Be sure to register your own WEAAD events, too!

- Access <u>WEAAD Campaign Tools & Tips</u> for activities that can take
 place online or be adapted to maintain safe physical distancing. You'll
 find a selection of outreach and engagement tools in Chinese, English,
 and Spanish.
- Spark a movement within your community by planning a <u>WEAAD</u>
 <u>Caravan event</u> where each car displays messages or images to raise awareness of WEAAD.
- Play a game of WEAAD Bingo to heighten awareness about WEAAD, signs of elder abuse, and prevention resources. Print out or save this <u>WEAAD</u>
 <u>Bingo game board</u>. When you have bingo, share it with the NCEA on Facebook (<u>@NationalCenteronElderAbuse</u>) or Twitter (<u>@NCEAatUSC</u>).

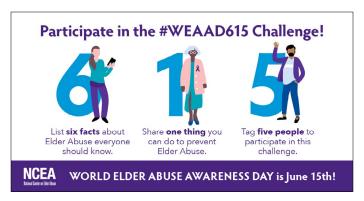






WEAAD BINGO game board

- Participate in the #WEAAD615
 Challenge online or offline by using the shareable graphic and /or fillable PDF to:
 - List 6 facts about elder abuse everyone should know
 - Share 1 thing you can do to prevent elder abuse
 - Reach out to 5 people to participate in the challenge



615 Challenge shareable graphic

- Use NCEA's social media tools to promote <u>#WEAAD</u> with your online networks.
- Provide a training or host an event to educate others about the forms and dynamics of elder abuse and to share information on resources, services, and supports for older survivors.
 - NCALL's Trainers' Toolkit provides some building blocks PowerPoint slides, interactive training exercises, and training modules to help you customize your own training or educational program on elder abuse.
 - Check out <u>NCALL's YouTube channel</u> to find video clips featuring survivors and subject matter experts discussing topics related to elder abuse and abuse in later life. These clips may be used in conjunction with your events.
 - NCEA's <u>Supports and Tools for Elder Abuse Prevention (STEAP)</u>
 <u>Initiative</u> features brochures and fact sheets, an outreach guide, and presentation materials. You can also search an <u>elder abuse training</u> <u>resources database</u> to find materials designed for professionals, caregivers, and the community.

Planning and Hosting Accessible & Inclusive Events



Creating an accessible event, whether in-person or virtual, makes it easier for all people to participate fully.

In the following section we offer some tips for increasing accessibility and inclusivity, starting with general best practices, then moving to key considerations for in-person events, and finally recommended steps for virtual events. For a comprehensive list of recommendations and resources for all your event planning, please visit Designing Accessible Resources for People with Disabilities and Deaf Individuals | Vera Institute

General Best Practices for Increasing Accessibility

Regardless of modality, it is important to follow some key steps for making your event more accessible.

Before your event

- · Ask about accessibility needs during event registration.
 - Include questions such as whether participants will need closed captioning, copies of materials in advance, or ASL or language interpretation.
 - Build in sufficient time between the registration and event to fulfill accommodations requests and make resource materials accessible for all.
 - Ensure all video or audio clips used in the presentation contain captions.
- Always conduct practice sessions to address any sound and video issues (if applicable).
- Presenters/facilitators should send materials in advance of the event to the host to check for accessibility, accuracy, and content.
- · Hosts should send materials in advance of the event to the participants.

During your event

- Accessibility strategies for hosts:
 - Welcome participants and connect them with a contact to address any technology or event support needs.
 - Provide participants with a way to communicate with you throughout the event, either through the use of a chat box, text, or e-mail.
- Accessibility strategies for presenters/facilitators:
 - Use language everyone understands and avoid acronyms or jargon.
 - Verbally ask all questions and describe the content.
 - Be aware of pace when speaking.



Key Considerations for Planning and Hosting an In-Person Event

- Offer on-site registration to welcome participants and connect them with any accommodations they requested during registration.
- Use event signage to provide directions to event spaces and communicate location of accessible restrooms, elevators, etc.
- Create a flexible room set up that allows people to determine where and with whom to sit to optimize their learning and networking.
- Allow for a minimum of 36" between all obstacles to ensure adequate space for mobility devices like wheelchairs or walkers.
- Offer an event agenda and take care to follow the schedule and timing.
- Ensure speakers, including participants asking questions, always use a microphone.
- Provide breaks (15-30 min.) to offer adequate time to all participants.
- Plan for and address accessibility if your event includes any type of interactive activity that uses audio or visual cues, dexterity, or mobility.



Key Considerations for Planning and Hosting a Virtual Event

- Accessibility of a virtual event starts with the platform you choose to host your event.
 - Choose a user-friendly platform with live, integrated closed captioning and screen reader compatibility.
 - Make sure to have flexible modes of interaction available including chat box, hand raising/non-verbal cues, polling, etc.
- Designate a technical support person that understands the accessibility (and limitation) of your platform.
 - This person should introduce the presenters and explain all relevant aspects of the platform (chat box, non-verbal reactions, polling, etc.).

Creating Accessible Webinars / Virtual Presentations

Increase the accessibility of virtual presentations using the following tips:

- Use plain language in a readable font type and size.
 - The most accessible fonts are in the Sans-Serif font family including Arial, Verdana, Tahoma, and Helvetica.
 - For presentations such as webinars, aim for a minimum of 20-point font.
- Choose high contrast colors for text and design. WebAIM: Contrast
 Checker is a great tool to ensure colors have sufficient contrast.
- Ensure that video and audio clips are captioned.
- Do not use transitions or animations, which may be distracting.
- Use high contrast pictures to illustrate concepts and ensure that pictures have <u>alt-text</u>, which will be read by a screen reader to describe the picture or object used. This text should be brief and have relevant descriptions.

- Use unique, descriptive slide titles and include numbered slides.
- Go for simple, clean, and readable!
- If available, use the software's built-in Accessibility Checker (available in many Microsoft and Adobe applications) to analyze your presentation's accessibility.

Creating Accessible Print Materials

If your event includes resource materials, we recommend the following steps to improve the accessibility of print materials:

- Use plain language in a readable Sans-Serif font.
- Font sizes between 14 to 18-point, will be easier to read.
- Left-align main text.
- Use headings to help the reader navigate the materials.
- Break your content into short, concise paragraphs for quicker reading.
- · Choose high contrast colors for text and design.
- Allow for 1.5x or 2x spacing or leading between lines of text, for readers to move their eyes from line to line with ease.
- Use white space (areas without text or images, including margins) as a design element to improve readability.
- Use graphics and images to break up blocks of text and support your messages.
- If available, use the software's built in Accessibility Checker (available in many Microsoft and Adobe applications) to analyze your document's accessibility.

Equity and Inclusion

Being inclusive of race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, and language is critical when planning and holding events, whether they are inperson or virtual. When planning an event for survivors to share their stories, having representation of the whole community ensures that the stories and experiences of those who often are excluded do not go missing.

As you prepare, think about those in your community who often go unserved or underserved, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, People with disabilities, the LGBTQIA+ community, and Immigrant communities. Fostering representative events helps dismantle oppression and opens-up access to healing services and justice supports for all victims.

Following are some key steps to promote equity and inclusion in your events:

- Consider how you are reaching out and welcoming all members of your community to your event.
- Commit to providing meaningful language access if needed, such as interpreters or materials in languages other than English.
- Center the voices of marginalized community members during training, webinars, conferences, etc.
- Uplift the work of existing culturally specific organizations by highlighting their work with marginalized communities and directing participants to their resources, websites, and outreach efforts.
- Ask presenters and participants to <u>share their pronouns</u> in their introductions.



Sample Social Media Posts



We have created some sample social media posts to help guide your awareness and outreach efforts for WEAAD and beyond.

Shareable Graphics

Download all graphics at once.

Creating Accessible Social Media Posts

We recommend providing alt text and image descriptions for all images you upload to social media and following guidelines to ensure your posts are accessible to everyone. In addition, it is important to capitalize each word in your hashtags (e.g., #EndAbuseEndAgeism rather than #endabuseendageism) otherwise people using screen readers cannot read them.

For more information about ways to make your social media accessible to all, visit <u>Tips for Using Accessible Social Media</u>.

Sample Captions

- World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (#WEAAD) is June 15. Promote
 positive perceptions of #aging and challenge ageist norms that sanction
 #ElderAbuse. #EndAgeismEndAbuse
- This World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (#WEAAD), June 15, commit to creating awareness of the diversity and complexity of experiences across the lifespan and challenge harmful ageist stereotypes that validate elder abuse. #EndAgeismEndAbuse
- #Ageism discredits, diminishes, and devalues older adults. Lift up the voices of older adults and celebrate their stories and resilience.
 #WEAAD #EndAgeismEndAbuse

- Ageist attitudes and stereotypes contribute to negative health outcomes and place older adults at a greater risk for #ElderAbuse. Amplify accurate information about #aging and expose #ageism. #WEAAD #EndAgeismEndAbuse
- Expose #ageism and challenge stereotypes that portray older adults as frail, vulnerable, and disposable. These harmful beliefs perpetuate discrimination and increase the risk for #ElderAbuse. #WEAAD #EndAgeismEndAbuse #ExposeAgeism
- #Ageism is harmful for people of all ages. Not only is it proven to lead to declines in physical health, mental health, and social well-being, but it also creates a culture that ignores and tolerates #ElderAbuse. #WEAAD #EndAgeismEndAbuse
- World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (#WEAAD) is a time to: educate yourself and others about the challenges faced by older survivors; heighten community awareness of elder abuse; expose ageist ideas and norms; and promote resources and services for older survivors of abuse. #EndAgeismEndAbuse
- Ageist stereotypes aren't just harmful for older adults of today. They
 are internalized by younger generations and have been shown to lead
 to poorer health and intergenerational conflicts across the life course.
 #WEAAD #EndAgeismEndAbuse
- Everyone ages, yet older adults are often seen as "other" and dehumanized. These biases normalize and sanction #ElderAbuse. Do your part to raise awareness and promote positive perceptions of aging in your communities and networks. #WEAAD #EndAgeismEndAbuse
- Combating ageist stereotypes starts with you. Be mindful of your own implicit biases and educate others about #ageism when you hear them make ageist assumptions. #WEAAD #EndAgeismEndAbuse

More Ways to Take Action Throughout the Year



Elder abuse has a profound effect on millions of older adults as well the people who love and care for them. Older victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking are being harmed every day. As 10,000 baby boomers turn 65 every day, cases of elder abuse are increasing.

Here are a few ways you can raise awareness of elder abuse, challenge ageism, and support older survivors throughout the year:

- Educate older adults, family members, and professionals by providing training or organizing conferences and other events.
- Commit to raising awareness of elder abuse through social and print media and awareness campaigns throughout the year.
- Include images of older adults and examples of abuse in later life in general education materials and presentations.
- Confront ageist messages in the media by writing editorials or engaging in social media to encourage positive portrayals of older adults and visibility of persons of all ages.
- Involve older adults from diverse backgrounds in a meaningful way in creating, reviewing, and implementing programs and policies.
- Volunteer for a program or organization that provides support and connection to older adults in your community.
- Work with adult foster care homes, continuing care retirement communities, or long-term care residential facilities to establish emergency housing options for older victims.
- Invite older survivors to write blogs or record vlogs about their experiences.
- Lift up older survivors' stories throughout the year by inviting them to share their lived experiences during Stalking Awareness Month (January), Sexual Assault Awareness Month (April), and Domestic Violence Awareness Month (October).

- Engage the voices of older survivors when working on legislation to enhance protections for victims of elder abuse, stalking, sexual assault, and domestic violence.
- Invite older survivors to join vigils and memorial events for victims.
- Create opportunities for older survivors to speak at support groups.
- Include older survivors in your local Coordinated Community Response team.
- Invite older survivors to join your board of directors.
- Incorporate feedback from older survivors on your agency's resources, programs, and policies.
- The NCEA offers many ways for people to <u>connect with us</u> and stay abreast of the latest resources and activities in the elder justice field.
- Join the national community of advocates and others committed to promoting respect and dignity across the lifespan by joining NCALL's advocates' listsery or subscribing to NCALL's e-newsletter.

More Information



National Center on Elder Abuse

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National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life

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