



Policy Position Paper

Tackling Ageism

United Kingdom

August 2026

Ageism is not an inevitable feature of society; it is a set of attitudes and structures that can be changed. Re-engage is committed to challenging ageism wherever it appears.

What is Ageism?

Ageism, or age discrimination, is the stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination against people based on their age.

Ageism in the UK affects people of all ages but particularly older adults, manifesting as prejudice, negative stereotypes and discrimination in workplaces, healthcare, media, and services - leading to reduced opportunities and poorer outcomes. Ageism is deeply rooted in society, often leading to negative internalised beliefs about ageing and reduced psychological well-being.¹

Our statement

Re-engage's experience shows that when older people are included, respected, and connected, loneliness can be significantly reduced.

Ageism remains one of the most pervasive yet least challenged forms of discrimination in the UK. It shapes attitudes, behaviours, and systems in ways that marginalise older people and limit their participation in society.

Re-engage views ageism as a barrier to equality, wellbeing, and social participation. We believe that challenging ageism is essential to building a society where everyone can age with dignity and connection. Our position is grounded in three core principles:

- **Respect** – recognising older people as individuals with diverse experiences, strengths, and aspirations.
- **Inclusion** – ensuring communities, services, and policies are designed to welcome and involve older people.
- **Equity** – advocating for fair access to resources, support, and opportunities.

Background

Ageism affects older people in various settings, including: the workplace, such as losing or being refused a job; refusal of services, such as car or travel insurance or interest-free credit; lower quality service, in a shop or restaurant; healthcare, such as doctors dismissing symptoms; the media, including the portrayal of older adults as frail or incompetent, reinforcing stereotypes.²

Ageism interacts with other protected characteristics, leading to intersectional discrimination where simultaneous disadvantages create heightened experiences of inequality. For example, older women often face greater barriers and poorer outcomes due to the intersection between age and gender, which affects economic security, health, access to services and social inclusion.³

The rapidly ageing population in the UK means the issue of ageism is a growing concern.⁴ Taking action on ageism must be a priority to ensure all ages are able to participate fully and equally in society, and we are able to benefit from their contributions.

Legislation has been introduced to tackle ageism across England, Scotland and Wales through the 2010 Equality Act, which positioned age as one of nine protected characteristics. The Equality Act bans direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation based on age.⁵



Live 7.5 years longer

Older people who are positive about their own ageing can live 7.5 years longer than those with less positive self-perceptions of ageing.⁶

37%

of older adults aged 65+ in the UK reported age discrimination.⁷

Ageism and loneliness

Loneliness is not an inevitable part of ageing. It is often the result of ageist systems and environments that marginalise older people. Ageism contributes to loneliness by:

- Reducing opportunities for social participation through inaccessible or exclusionary community spaces.
- Weakening intergenerational relationships by reinforcing stereotypes that separate age groups.
- Creating digital exclusion that cuts older people off from essential services and social networks.
- Discouraging help-seeking due to stigma or fear of being seen as a burden.

Implications and recommendations

Ageism has consequences for older people that impact independence, wellbeing, and access to essential services. Action is needed to dismantle ageism and promote age-inclusive communities. To achieve this, we recommend the following:

- Establish a commissioner for older people and ageing in England and Scotland.
- Consult older people in policy and service design.
- Challenge ageism in public discourse.
- Collect data - improve Government statistics on age and ageism.
- Ensure digital inclusion.

A large red speech bubble containing a quote.

"We become invisible and forgotten, not to be bothered about. They would rather see us disappear, so that's all Gov. want, so they don't have to be bothered with us."

– Re-engage older person

Want to find out more?

Re-engage has policy statements on a wide range of public issues. You can read our policy papers here:

www.reengage.org.uk/policypositions

References

- ¹ 'Ageing: Ageism' (World Health Organization, [2025](#))
- ² 'Ageism'. *Discrimination and rights*. (Age UK, [2025](#))
- ³ 'Older Women in the UK Building a picture of older women's lives' (Age UK, [2025](#))
- ⁴ 'The UK's changing population' (*House of Commons Library*. Barton, C. *et al.*, [2024](#))
- ⁵ 'Age Discrimination' (Unison, [2025](#))
- ⁶ Longevity increased by positive self-perceptions of aging (Levy et al., [2002](#))
- ⁷ Perceived age discrimination in older adults (Rippon et al., [2014](#))

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