A Generation's Work: Reframing Aging Together

James C. Appleby, CEO
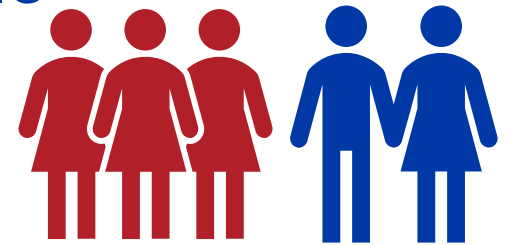**The Gerontological Society of America**

Reframing Aging

Ageism's Impact on Health

- Exposure to unfavorable stereotypes adversely affects the attitudes, cognitions, and behavior of older adults.

- Negative stereotypes combined with discrimination make ageism a chronic stressor in the lives of older adults.

- Age discrimination is associated with lower self-perceptions of aging, impacting behavior & health.

- Negative age beliefs predict worse cognitive performance, predict the development of Alzheimer's disease biomarkers (PLoS One, 2018)

- Impact on mental health of older veterans associated with negative attitudes toward aging

- One in 17 adults over age 50 experience frequent healthcare discrimination, and this is associated with new or worsened disability by 4 years (Journal of General Internal Medicine, 2015)

Ageism & Age Discrimination

- 17.04 million cases of the 8 most expensive health conditions in one year attributable to ageism.
- $63 billion spent on health care for the 8 most expensive conditions during 1 year
  - $1 in every $7 spent (The Gerontologist, 2015)
- About three in five older workers (61%) have either seen or experienced age discrimination in the workplace, despite 1967 Age Discrimination in Employment Act. (AARP, 2018)

- **But the good news is:**
  - Positive self-perception leads to 7.5 years longer, healthier lifespan (The Gerontologist, 2015)

  - Older person with positive age beliefs who carry one of the strongest factors for developing dementia were nearly 50% less likely to develop the disease than their peers who held negative beliefs. (PLOS ONE)

More Good News

Reframing Aging: Effect of a Short-Term Framing Intervention on Implicit Measures of Age Bias *(The Journals of Gerontology: Series B,* 25 June 2018)
- **reframing** messages about aging can decrease implicit bias against older adults
- highlights ways for communicators to promote a positive understanding of the aging process, thereby mitigating sources of implicit prejudice.

Interventions to Reduce Ageism against Older Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (*American Journal of Public Health,* Aug 2019, Vol. 109, No.8)
- interventions are associated with substantial reduction in ageism
- should be part of an international strategy to improve perceptions of older people and the aging process

Reframing Aging

A Social Change Endeavor
designed to improve the
public's understanding of aging

@ReframingAging

*Original research conducted by the
FrameWorks Institute and sponsored by the
Leaders of Aging Organizations*

Why Reframe?

Changes in Communication lead to

Changes in Discourse lead to

Changes in Thinking lead to

Changes in Behavior lead to

Changes in Policy and Practice

Sustaining the Reframing Aging Initiative

- **3-year initiative (2019-2021)**
- **Multiple Funders**
  - The John A. Hartford Foundation, RRF Foundation for Aging, Archstone Foundation, and The SCAN Foundation
- **GSA leads initiative on behalf of the Leaders of Aging Organizations (LAO)**
  - AARP, American Federation for Aging Research, American Geriatrics Society, American Society on Aging, The Gerontological Society of America, Grantmakers in Aging*, National Council on Aging, National Hispanic Council on Aging
- **FrameWorks Institute**
  - nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues

Specific Aims of the Initiative

Build an infrastructure to sustain the momentum of the initial activities.

Engage the practice, education, and research communities in the field to increase awareness of the principles of Reframing Aging and the know-how to use the Reframing Aging tools.

Provide basic technical support services for individuals representing state, local, and national organizations who successfully complete training.

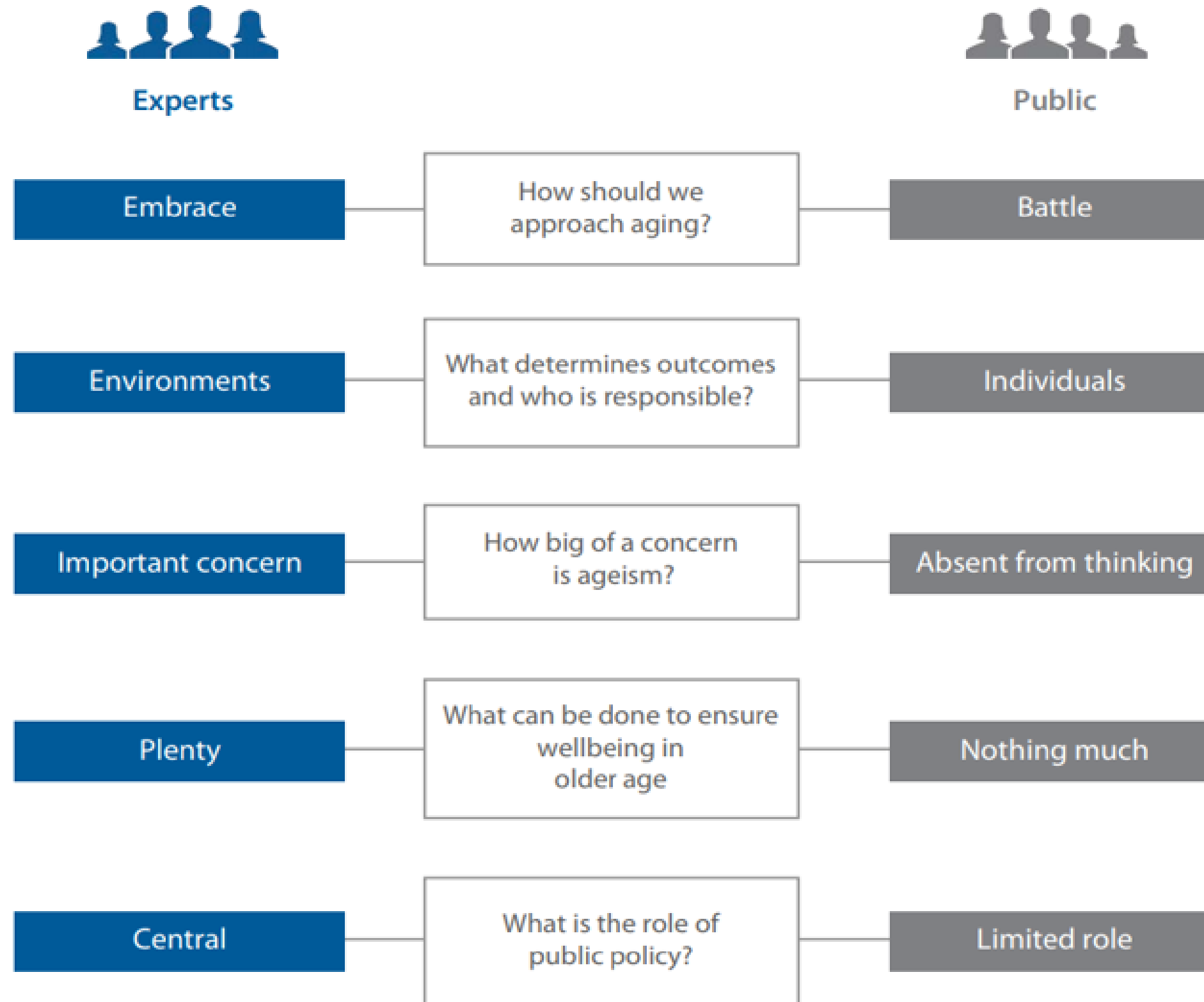Support state and local organizations' efforts to adopt Reframing Aging principles.

Research Identified the Challenge

Public Perceptions about older people that are incomplete and unrealistic: older people are either living a life of leisure or are frail, decrepit, and dependent.

Ageism is not considered a "problem." For ex., the Age Discrimination in Employment Act that prohibits workplace discrimination should take care of this.

Cultural Models are cognitive short cuts that we rely on to interpret and understand all sorts of experiences, thoughts and feelings. They are taken-for-granted and largely automatic assumptions.
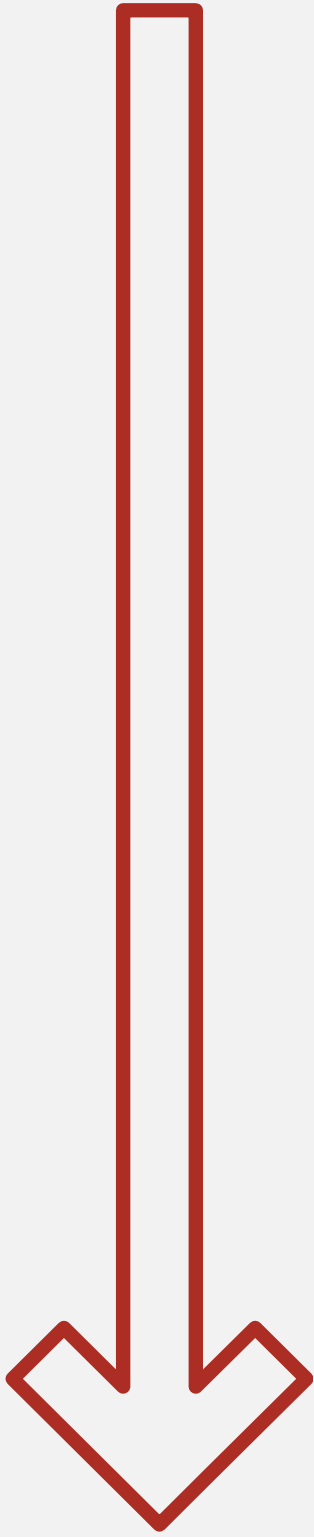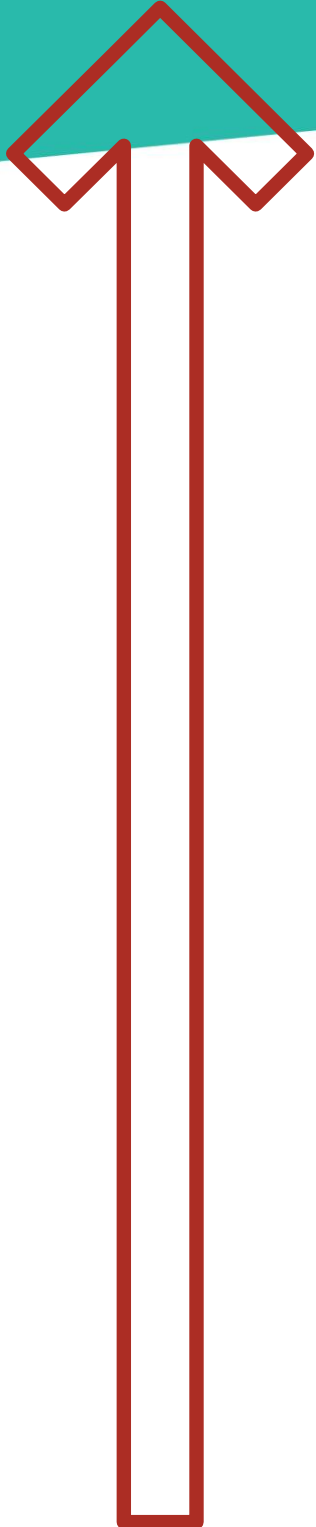
Telling a New Story About Aging

- Interviewed more than 12,000 members of the public
- The tested narratives cued more positive perceptions of aging
- Narratives use values, metaphors, and solutions
    "Confronting Injustice"
    "Embracing the Dynamic"
- Explain our implicit bias and how we build momentum

Avoid

- Individual actions drive aging outcomes
- Aging is the process of decline
- Older people as other
- Aging (population) is a crisis
- Fixed, finite resources
- Just another -ism

Advance

- Context shapes decisions and outcomes
- Future is a time for improvement
- We are all better off by being inclusive
- Interventions can change outcomes
- Solutions stories: systems, supports
- How ageism works

Reframing Aging

The Reframing Movement is Underway

New Hampshire Alliance for Healthy Aging

Changing the Narrative in Colorado

Massachusetts Tufts Health Plan Foundation
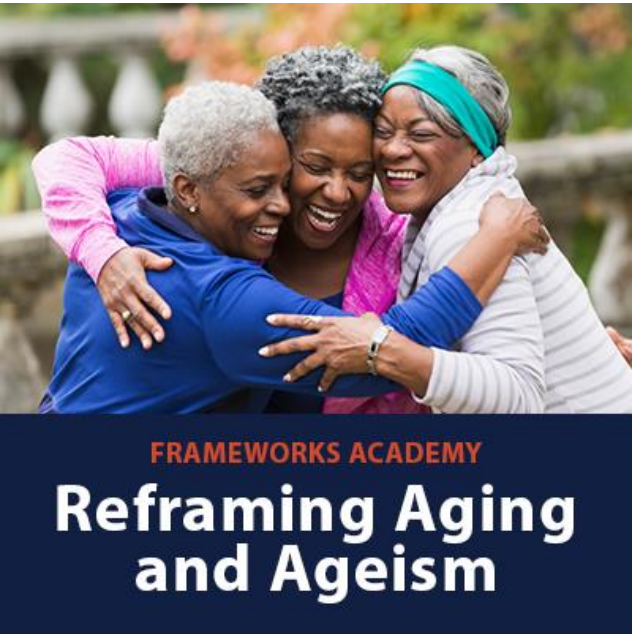
Maine Community Foundation
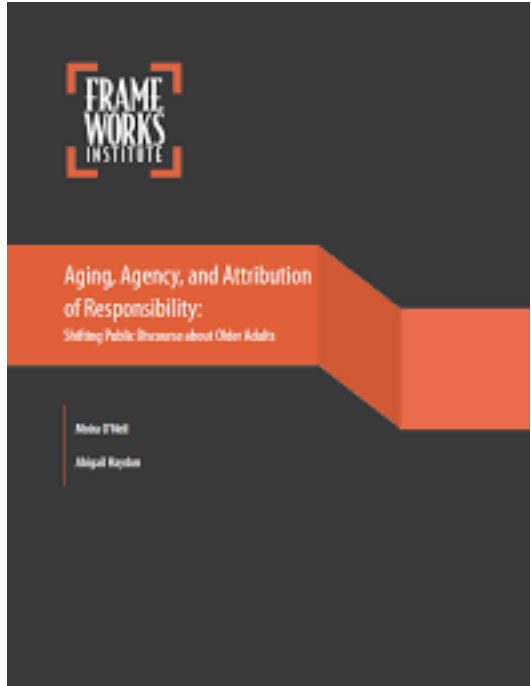
Miami-Dade United Way

California

Research and Resources

Compares the public's perception of aging with that of aging experts and explains how the disconnect presents challenges for building support

FRAMEWORKS ACADEMY
Reframing Aging and Ageism

Access this free Video Series to hear the research findings and learn how to apply the reframing aging tools

Identifies 6 narratives dominating conversation in the media and in advocacy organizations

Brief, lively guide to the evidence-based approach to reframing aging

Finding the Frame:
An Empirical Approach to Reframing Aging and Ageism

What can I do?

Practice using the tips on the Quick Start Guide

Learn about the Swamp of Public Opinion on Aging and other research on the Reframing Aging Initiative webpage (www.reframingaging.org)

Take the Implicit Association Test to measure your implicit bias (https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html)

Call out ageism when you see it or hear it

Request a workshop or presentation for your organization

www.reframingaging.org

Reframing Aging

Quick Start Guide

Framing is the process of making choices about what to emphasize and what to leave unsaid. Here's a quick tour of themes to avoid and alternatives to advance.

Instead of these words and cues:	Try:
"Tidal wave," "tsunami," and similarly catastrophic terms for the growing population of older people	Talking affirmatively about changing demographics: "As Americans live longer and healthier lives . . ."
"Choice," "planning," "control," and other individual determinants of aging outcomes	Emphasizing how to improve social contexts: "Let's find creative solutions to ensure we can all thrive as we age."
"Seniors," "elderly," "aging dependents," and similar "other-ing" terms that stoke stereotypes	Using more neutral ("older people/Americans") and inclusive ("we" and "us") terms
"Struggle," "battle," "fight," and similar conflict-oriented words to describe aging experiences	The Building Momentum metaphor: "Aging is a dynamic process that leads to new abilities and knowledge we can share with our communities."
Using the word "ageism" without explanation	Defining ageism: "Ageism is discrimination against older people due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes."
Making generic appeals to the need to "do something" about aging	Using concrete examples like intergenerational community centers to illustrate inventive solutions

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