

# Reframing Aging

## Changing the Conversation

Medicare Outreach Training  
April 2026



**SHIP**

State Health Insurance  
Assistance Program



**GW**aar

Greater Wisconsin  
Agency on Aging Resources, Inc.

# Disclaimer

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**SHIP**

State Health Insurance  
Assistance Program

# Agenda



What is reframing aging and why does it matter



Communication best practices



Reframing strategies



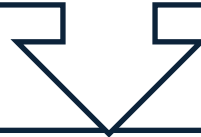
Reframing examples and reframing practice



Review

# What is Ageism?

Ageism is discrimination against older people due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes.



Exists in several forms

**How we think**

**How we feel**

**How we act**

Go to  
**www.menti.com**

Enter the code

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What word(s) come to mind when you hear "Aging"?



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# What is Reframing Aging?

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Changing how we talk about aging

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Moving from decline → opportunity + ability

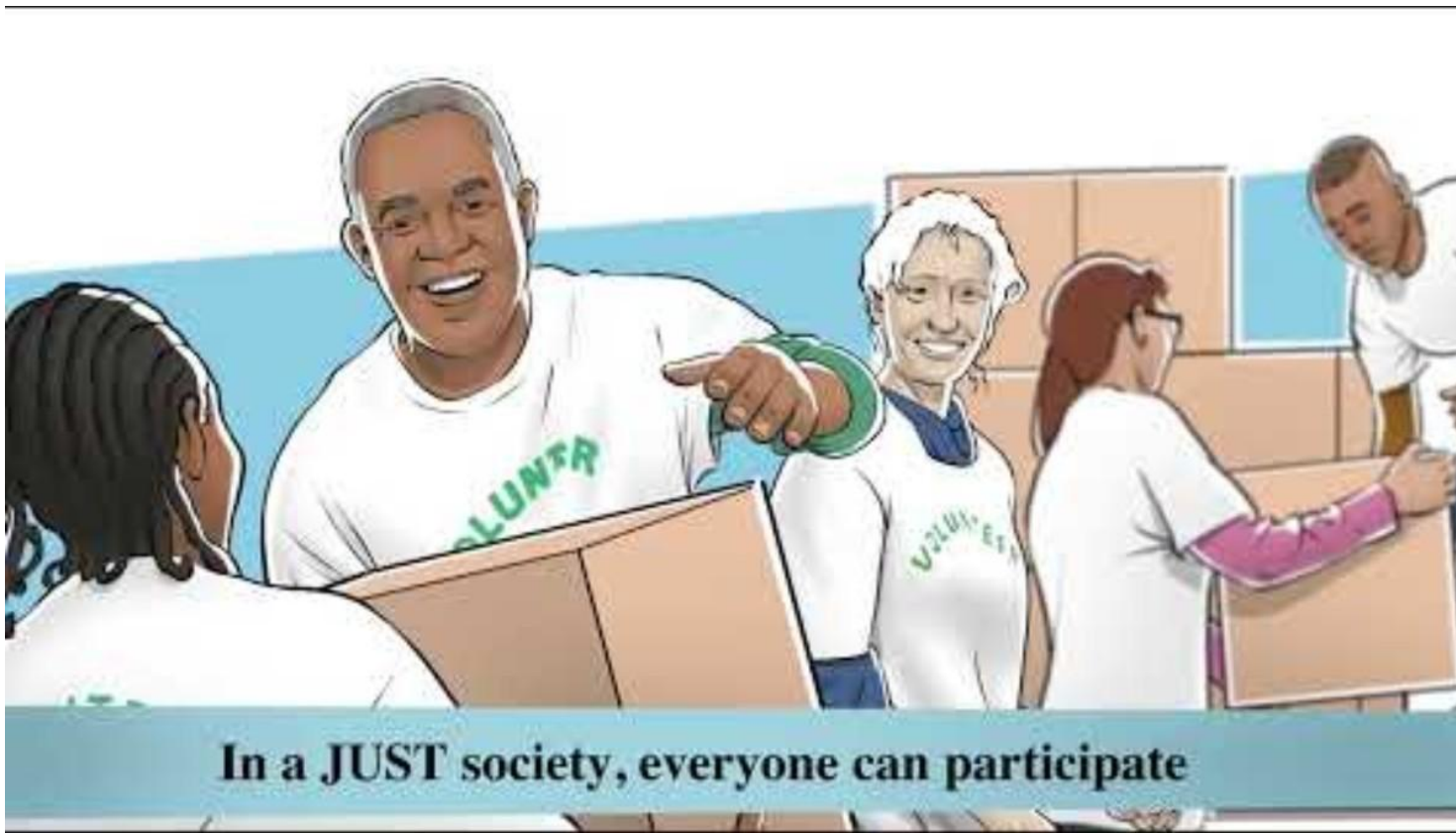
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Promotes dignity and independence

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Based on research by frameworks institute and reframing aging initiative

# Frame of Mind: The Why and How of Reframing Aging



Frame of Mind Series  
YouTube Playlist

[Click Here](#)

# Why does it matter?



- Aging impacts all of us
- Public perceptions influence:
  - Policy
  - Program Participation
  - Individual decision-making

# Why Reframing Aging and Disability Matters for Outreach

Builds trust and connection

Reduces stigma and fear

Improves understanding

Motivates action

Promotes equity and inclusion

# Common Aging Frames: Old vs. New

<b>Old Frame</b>	<b>Reframed Approach</b>
“Elderly,” “Seniors,” “Aging Dependents”	“Older people/Americans”
“Seniors need help”	“People benefit from support and access”
“Aging is decline”	“Aging is a natural, lifelong process” We are all aging
“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”
“Choice,” “Planning,” “Control,” and other individual determinants of older people	Emphasizing how to improve social contexts: “Let’s find creative solutions to ensure we can all thrive as we age”



## QUICK START GUIDE - STARTING WITH

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

# Why?

Try:	Instead of these words and cues:	This matters because:
Talking affirmatively about changing demographics: "As Americans live longer and healthier lives..."	"Tidal wave," "tsunami," and similarly catastrophic terms for the growing population of older people	Catastrophic language generates fears of irreparable doom and stifles motivation to work toward solutions. Focusing on realistic steps we can take to address the opportunities and challenges that comes from a growing population generates the momentum we seek.
Emphasizing how to improve social contexts: "Let's find creative solutions to ensure we can all thrive as we age."	"Choice," "planning," "control," and other individual determinants of aging outcomes	Individual language suggests that everyone has the same options and that making those choices leads to good outcomes. Recognizing that context, environment, socioeconomic and racial/ethnic identities influence outcomes differently allows us to talk about systemic options that will help us all.
Using neutral ("older people/Americans") and inclusive ("we" and "us") terms	"Seniors," "elderly," "aging dependents," and similar "other-ing" terms that stoke stereotypes	Inclusive language reflects the reality that we are all aging – there is no "them" and "they."
The Building Momentum metaphor: "Aging is a dynamic process that leads to new abilities and knowledge we can share with our communities."	"Struggle," "battle," "fight," and similar conflict-oriented words to describe aging experiences	Conflict-laden language generates fear and dread about aging, as though battling aging is the only path forward. Acknowledging that we continue to grow and change throughout the life course allows for engaging all of us in solutions as we all age.
Defining ageism: "Ageism is discrimination against older people due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes."	Using the word "ageism" without explanation	Clarity allows for discussion on an even foundation of understanding of the systemic societal bias against older adults.
Using concrete examples like intergenerational community centers to illustrate inventive solutions	Making generic appeals to the need to "do something" about aging	Offering specific solutions to specific challenges generates creativity and empowers action to benefit us all, along with recognizing that systemic solutions are possible and benefit us all.

This document was created in partnership with the Frameworks Institute and E4 Center 2023 for educational purposes only. The National Center to Reframe Aging is dedicated to ending ageism by advancing an equitable and complete story about aging in America. The center is the trusted source for proven communication strategies and tools to effectively frame aging issues. It is the nation's leading organization, cultivating an active community of individuals and organizations to spread awareness of implicit bias toward older people and influence policies and programs that benefit us all of us as we age. For more information, visit [www.reframingaging.org](http://www.reframingaging.org) and <https://e4center.org/>

## Quick Start Guide-Starting with Why?



## 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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[www.reframingaging.org](http://www.reframingaging.org)  
[@ReframingAging](https://twitter.com/ReframingAging)

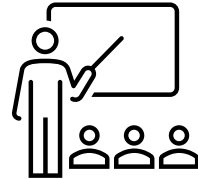
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## Quick Start Guide

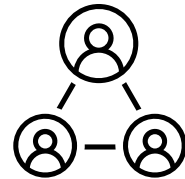
# How Language Shows Up in Outreach



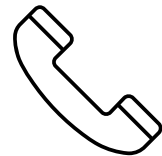
Flyers



Presentations



One-on-one counseling



Phone calls



## 1) Use language that is inclusive and free of age bias

- **Avoid:** Terms such as Seniors, elderly, aging dependents and the aged.
- **Advance** more neutral and inclusive terms by finding ways to replace “they” and “them” with “We” and “Us”.
  - Advance: “Older people” and “older adults” – Use “We,” “Us” and “Our” statements.
  - **Example:** *We* all benefit when help is available when we have questions about Medicare coverage, bills or appeals.

## 2) Highlight the diversity that exists in the older population

- **Avoid** categorizing people into large age ranges
  - *Example: “Older adults often need help understanding Medicare options.”*
- **Advance** being as specific as possible when age is relevant and using age groups that more accurately reflect the diversity of older people.
  - Advance: “People approaching age 65”
  - *Example: “This Q&A sheet describes common enrollment questions among adults ages 64-66 preparing to enroll in Medicare for the first time”*

### 3) Talk affirmatively about changing demographics

- **Avoid** using catastrophic terms for the growing population of older people.
  - Avoid: Phrases such as “age wave” “silver tsunami” and “graying of the population”
- **Advance** using language that speaks affirmatively about changing demographics.
  - Advance: Phrases such as “While Americans live longer and healthier lives...”
  - **Examples:**
    - *With the changing demographics come more opportunities for older people to contribute to our communities*
    - *The increasing number of older people mean more possibilities for intergenerational exchanges.*

#### 4) Emphasize Collective Responsibility and Social Context

- **Avoid** implying that individuals are wholly responsible for aging outcomes by their individual actions.
  - Avoid: Terms such as “choice” “planning” and “control”
- **Advance** ideas about the interconnectedness of people and collective responsibility to ensure health and well-being.
  - Advance: Let’s find creative solutions to ensure we can all thrive as we age.
  - ***Example:** Any time a particular group is isolated or marginalized, it’s a problem for all of us. If we want to live up to our ideal of a just society, then that means taking steps to make sure all individuals, no matter their age, are treated as equal members of our communities.*



**For more information, please see the [Communication Best Practices](#) resource.**

[Communication Best Practices](#)

# Key Reframing Strategies

1

Use person-centered language

2

Emphasize strengths

3

Focus on systems, not blame

# Avoiding the “Decline Narrative”



Avoid: frail, burden, vulnerable  
(unless necessary context)

Replace with:

- Navigating changes
- Accessing support
- Staying Independent



# Connecting Reframing to Medicare Topics

<b>Medicare Topic</b>	<b>Reframed Message</b>
Plan comparison	“Find coverage that fits your needs”
Costs	“Manage your healthcare expenses and save money”
Enrollment	“Make informed choices”

# Barriers & Reframing

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Reframed Outreach Strategy</b>
Winter isolation	“We can connect by phone or come to you”
Transportation	“Flexible options to meet your needs”
Hesitation/trust	“Free, unbiased help”

# Example of Reframing



*Before*



*After*

**“Transporting Boston’s Most Experienced People”**

**Age Strong Shuttle Redesign**

<https://www.reframingaging.org/about-us/impact/whats-in-a-name>

# “Before and After” Outreach Messaging

## Before:

- Seniors, don’t get confused by Medicare.....”

## After:

- We help you understand your Medicare options so you can make confident and informed decisions.”

# Original Message

## **Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources**

The Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources (BADR) is responsible for the development of policy and the management of programs that serve persons who are elderly, person with physical disabilities, persons who are blind or visually impaired, persons who are deaf, hard-of-hearing or Deaf-Blind, persons in need of adult protective services and persons who need or receive information about access to community-based long-term support through an Aging and Disability Resource Center. BADR carries out its responsibilities under contracts with multiple federal agencies in a way that actively promotes individual choice, dignity, relationships, overall health, community participation, self – sufficiency and respect. BADR works closely with other units of the Department of Health Services to implement the long-term care reform proposals that utilize the aging and disability resource centers (ADRCs) as single points of entry.

## Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources

## New Message

The Bureau of Aging and Disability Resources (BADR) moves our state forward in safeguarding our right to participate fully in our community as we age or experience disability. BADR partners with an extensive network of experts and advocates to identify the policies, structures, and systems that can unintentionally work against us as we age or experience disability. Together, we chart a healthier path forward for everyone.

BADR administers programs and services in support of the mission including:

- Assistive technology to help us be successful at our job and to live safely in our homes if we are blind, Deaf, Deafblind, Hard of Hearing, or experiencing a different disability.
- Information, assistance, and counseling about our options to secure support through community-based long-term services, when needed.
- Adult protective services that reinforce our right to self-determination.
- Support for family members and friends when caring for a loved one at home.

BADR works closely with all our partners and other units in the Department of Health Services to develop policies that are responsive to our needs as we age and/or experience disability and effectively promote continued participation and contribution in the community.

# Reframing Aging Rewrite Challenge #1

“Our program helps seniors stay independent and continue living in their homes as they age.”

Goal: Make language empowering and neutral

# Reframing Aging rewrite challenge #1

Your independence and housing choices are our top priorities.

empowering senior to live in their own terms

We are creating opportunities for successful independent living as we age, the way we want it.

Our program assists community member stay active and engaged in their community and assists with being able to live independently.

Our program remains focused on supporting your independence while living optimally

Our programs empower you with choices and services to help you meet your needs as they change.



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New presentation



Select which slide to add



Suggested Reframed Version

*“As we age, we all benefit from communities and services that support us in living where we choose.”*

*“Our program helps seniors stay independent and continue living in their homes as they age.”*

## What changed?

- “Seniors” → “We” – Builds shared identity
- “Helps.....stay independent” → “benefit from communities and services” – Systems-level framing
- **Removed decline framing** – no implication that independence is being lost
- **Added choice + agency** – “living where we choose”

## Reframing Aging Rewrite Challenge #2

“We provide assistance to seniors who may be struggling to understand their Medicare options.”

# Reframing Aging rewrite challenge #2

aging with purpose

We help Medicare eligible individuals review their options

We assist those on Medicare navigate the complex maze of Medicare options.

We are happy to work with people who have questions on their Medicare and supplement plans.

We assist individuals with understanding their healthcare options and choices

We provide assistance to Medicare Beneficiaries that may find it difficult to understand.

We provide Medicare information to people age 60 or older

We present your Medicare options in a way that is easy to understand.

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Select which slide to add

- 
- What word(s) come to mind when you hear "Aging"?
- Reframing Aging rewrite challenge #1
- Reframing Aging rewrite challenge #2

## Suggested Reframed Version

***“We offer free, unbiased support to help people understand their Medicare options and make informed decisions.”***

*“We provide assistance to seniors who may be struggling to understand their Medicare options.”*

## **What changed?**

- **Shifted from “seniors” → “people/we”** – Shared identity
- **Removed deficit language** – “Struggling”
- **Placed the challenge on the system** – Medicare can be complex
- **Centered empowerment** – understanding + informed decisions
- **Reframed support as normal and beneficial for everyone**

# Common aging-related phrases

## **On Birthday Cards & Gifts**

- “Over the hill”
- “You’re not old...just well-seasoned”
- “Vintage” / “Aged to perfection”
- “You make old look good”
- “Officially old”
- “Lordy, lordy, look who’s 40/50/60!”
- “50 is the new 30!”

## **Everyday Comments People Say**

- “I feel so old”
- “I’m having a senior moment”
- “I can’t keep up with technology anymore”
- “You’re still working?”
- “You look good for your age”

## **“Compliments”**

- “Wow, you’re so active for your age”
- “You don’t seem old”
- “You’re still sharp!”
- “I hope I age like you”

## **Jokes About Memory, Body or Ability**

- “My memory is gone!”
- “Everything hurts when you get older”
- “Getting old isn’t for the weak”
- “I need a nap-I must be getting old”

# Key Takeaways

- **Language matters:** How we talk about aging shapes trust, engagement, and access to programs
- **Aging is a shared, lifelong process:** We are all aging-avoid framing it as decline, dependency, or deficit
- **Ageism shows up in common words and phrases:** Even casual language can reinforce stereotypes and discourage participation.
- **Use inclusive, person-centered language:** Avoid “othering” terms; emphasize “we,” “us,” and shared experiences.
- **Highlight diversity and ability:** Older adults are not all alike-be specific and avoid broad assumptions.
- **Shift focus from individuals to systems:** Medicare is complex; support and access benefit all of us as we age.
- **Apply reframing in all outreach:** Flyers, presentations, phone calls, and one-on-one conversations

# What to Remember - What to Do

## What to Remember

- Aging is **natural, lifelong, and shared** – we are all aging.
- Language shapes **trust, dignity, and willingness to engage**
- Common phrases can **unintentionally reinforce ageism and decline narratives**
- Older adults are **diverse in experience, ability, and needs.**
- Challenges often lie in **systems**, not individuals.

## What to do

- Use **inclusive, person-centered language** –We, Us, People
- Avoid “othering” labels and deficit-based terms
- Highlight **ability, choice, and agency.**
- Frame Medicare support as **normal, helpful, and for everyone.**
- Apply reframing consistently –in **flyers, calls, counseling and presentations.**

The image features a vibrant blue background filled with numerous speech bubbles of various colors, including red, yellow, pink, and white. Each bubble contains a large, dark blue question mark. In the center of the image, there is a prominent, light blue rectangular box with a white border. Inside this box, the word "Questions?" is written in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

**Questions?**

# Resources



- Reframing Aging Initiative  
<https://www.reframingaging.org/>

Sign up for Reframe Aging and Disability communications, events, and opportunities:

[Click Here](#)

# Resources



- Frame Works Institute

<https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/>

Fast Frames

Mindsets & Movements

YouTube Playlist

[Click Here](#)

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**Thank you!**