

# Ageless New York, an Anti-Ageism Campaign, Launches in the City

Two years ago, when I became Commissioner for the NYC Department for the Aging, one of my top goals for the Department was to combat ageism.

Ageism is one of the last discriminations that society must stand up and denounce. It is similar many ways to racism and sexism in that it takes many forms, including prejudicial attitudes, discrimination, marginalization and practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs.

Ageism is so insidious and pervasive in our culture and in the media. Think of all the jokes that poke fun at older people being slow and forgetful, or the portrayals in film of older people being strange, silly and frightening. It is so common that it is often considered harmless. But it is far from harmless.

Prejudice and discrimination based on someone's age has many negative impacts. In the workplace, older adults face age discrimination and are often bypassed for promotions, taken off major projects, or are usually the first to go when layoffs occur. Ageism also affects an individual's health. Doctors and older patients will sometimes overlook or attribute symptoms as a "natural part of aging" where there may be a serious illness or disorder. Ageism not only harms individuals, it harms families and our communities, and it must be stopped.

Starting this month, the Department for the Aging is launching an anti-ageism media campaign called "Ageless New York," that will challenge New Yorkers to rethink their views on aging and raise awareness about ageism. The Ageless New York media campaign consists of a video and PSAs and a website where New Yorkers can learn more about ageism and how to combat ageism.

It features real older New Yorkers who are active and defy the stereotypes that some have about older adults. They include a marathon runner, a business owner, a social worker, a musician, and a nonprofit CEO who started his organization after retirement. These men and women are our neighbors, our coworkers and are very much part of our community. They contribute to our City and help it make it better.

Lamentably, the contributions of older adults are not taken seriously. In film and television shows, older adults are usually not shown. When they are portrayed, it is likely to be done unfavorably with older adults shown as dependent and isolated. These images are powerful and affect our attitudes and expectations at a young age. Studies have shown that children as young as six begin to develop stereotypes about older people from the images they see in the media, and these stereotypes and beliefs are reinforced throughout their lifetime.

Most recently, ageism has surfaced in discussions concerning who within society should be able to take advantage of the limited COVID treatment resources. This thinking has led to



## NEW YORK IS AGELESS

New York City residents are like their City – amazing, diverse and unique – regardless of age. We invite you to rethink your views on aging and older New Yorkers

#AgelessNewYork #CombatAgeism

Ageless New York is a first-of-its-kind media campaign to combat ageism in New York City. The campaign's PSAs will run and air in different venues across the five boroughs and includes a website, [nyc.gov/AgelessNewYork](http://nyc.gov/AgelessNewYork), where New Yorkers can learn how to limit ageism.

undervaluing the lives of older people and neglecting the range of long-term services and supports that shape their lives.

One of the New Yorkers featured in the campaign is Donna Sue Johnson, a 64-year-old social worker who works with LGBTQ older adults. Like many older adults in our city, Donna Sue lives a full life. A former Air Force veteran, she now helps LGBTQ older adults limit their social isolation during the pandemic and offers group sessions virtually over Zoom and over the phone. For fun, she plays the West African Djembe drum with a group in Prospect Park.

And while common ageist attitudes would say that Donna Sue has passed her peak, she thinks the contrary. "The best is yet to come," she says. She has aspirations and dreams for the future, one of which includes opening an assisted living facility for LGBTQ elders.

It's time to hit the reset button when it comes to our views on aging and older New Yorkers. There is so much we can accomplish in this City when we leverage and value the input and assets of all our residents, especially older New Yorkers.

We hope you join us in this campaign and get involved in combating ageism. You can start by visiting [nyc.gov/AgelessNewYork](http://nyc.gov/AgelessNewYork)



NYC Department for the Aging Commissioner Lorraine Cortés-Vázquez.