

Press Release

COVID-19 Exposing a Wider Ageism Pandemic

22 March 2021 – The response to control the COVID-19 pandemic has unveiled just how widespread ageism is – older and younger people have been stereotyped in public discourse and on social media. In some contexts, age has been used as the sole criterion for access to medical care, lifesaving therapies and for physical isolation. “COVID-19 has exposed gaping holes in how older people are treated and how services are developed, putting the lives of older Canadians at risk,” says Dr Jane Barratt, Secretary General of the International Federation on Ageing (IFA).

Despite the many contributions of older people to society and their wide diversity, negative attitudes about older people are common across all societies and are seldom challenged.

Recognising the need to act now, the World Health Organization (WHO), on the 18th of March 2021 released [The Global Report on Ageism](#) in which the report highlights that every second person in the world is believed to hold ageist attitudes – leading to poorer physical and mental health and reduced quality of life for older persons, costing societies billions of dollars each year. The release of this report follows the December 2020 announcement of the United Nations General Assembly declaring 2021-2030 to be known as the [Decade of Healthy Ageing](#) that will foster healthy ageing and improve the lives of older people, their families and communities. However, fundamental shifts will be required not only in the actions we take but in how we think about age and ageing.

The Decade focuses on four areas for action: ageism, age-friendly cities and communities, primary health care, and long-term care. These are four of the five structural pillars of the [IFA 15th Global Conference on Ageing](#), entitled “Rights Matter” that will take place virtually and in-person in Niagara Falls, Canada from the 9th to 12th of November 2021. The fifth theme for the conference will be Older people and pandemics in recognition of the urgent need to transform how older people are cared for in later life. “Canada lacks a national building and quality of care framework regarding long-term care homes, and the historic argument about jurisdictional responsibilities has just become a barrier to saving lives”, says Dr Jane Barratt. This conference seeks to have important conversations that lead to action in improving long term care systems.

As part of the IFA Pre-Conference on 9th November 2021, the IFA will be hosting two [Master Classes](#) (Campaigning to Combat Ageism; and Frailty and Long-term Care) as well as three high-level Summits: [Age-friendly Cities and Communities Summit](#), [Vaccines4Life Summit](#) and [Hearing in Later Life Summit](#) where delegates will be able to learn, be inspired and discuss insights with other attendees.

Before, during, and while the world recovers from the pandemic, what’s important to individuals of all ages — including older people and those with chronic conditions — is their function, their ability to live independently, and their ability to contribute to their family, community, and society. As we enter the second year of this global pandemic, is it hope what we can see on the horizon?

With the world-wide roll out of vaccination programs for Covid-19 we can be more optimistic that in the fall, we can look forward to things being more normalized. Just as families and friends what the opportunity to see and hug those they love, people involved in designing and delivering services to older people miss those interactions with colleagues and friends. The IFA 15th Global Conference on Ageing will be one of the first international events focusing on the challenges we face over the next decade.



About the International Federation on Ageing

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is an international, non-governmental organization (NGO) with a unique membership base comprising government, NGOs, academics, industry, and individuals in over 80 countries. Now over 48 years old, the IFA has become known as a leading and innovative organization that works across disciplines and sectors toward common goals that improve the lives of older people. Through the IFA's formal relations with the World Health Organization (WHO) and general consultative status at the United Nations and its agencies, the IFA is in the position to advocate directly with member states and contribute to and inform intergovernmental dialogue.

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