



Background

The World Health Organization's (WHO's) Global Campaign to Combat Ageism began in 2021 and is ongoing. They define ageism as a “multifaceted social phenomenon that categorizes and divides people, based on their age, in ways that lead to harm, disadvantage, and injustice, and erodes solidarity across generations” (WHO, 2021).

In 2016, The World Health Assembly recognized “ageism has serious and far-reaching consequences for people’s health, well-being and human rights and costs society billions of dollars” (WHO, 2021). To create effective strategies for confronting ageism, the Combat Ageism campaign was launched in 2021.

Target Audience

The Combatting Ageism campaign worked to increase the narrative surrounding ageism—including both the young and old—on a global scale.

Formative Research

A conceptual framework for ageism was developed initially by a systematic review of peer-reviewed research on ageism in English, Spanish, and French. The campaign reviewed prior and existing global, national, and local campaigns, and conducted personal interviews. They explored “factors that increase the risk of perpetrating” ageism, and those that increased “the risk of being a target” of ageism. They met with researchers from several universities “to outline the methods for conducting a global set of systematic reviews on ageism” (WHO, 2021).





| | | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|----------|----------|--|---|
| Internal | External | Opportunities | Threats |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global Awareness Potential wide audience & unified awareness about the negative impacts of ageism across different cultures & societies. Diverse Perspectives Gathered insights from peer-reviewed literature in English, Spanish, & French across a variety of cultures and ages for a holistic approach Media Engagement Widespread dissemination of messaging & fostering public engagement. International Collaboration Partnership governments & international organizations. Encourage local, national, and global involvement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural Sensitivity Global campaign to combat ageism requires intimate knowledge of a variety of cultures that can be difficult to genuinely understand. Resource Intensive Messaging on global scale in multiple mediums & on multiple platforms requires enormous resources. Institutional ageism Manifests across different institutions: healthcare, social care, the workplace, media, and legal system making campaign design & impact difficult. Language Barriers A global campaign is hindered if unable to communicate in a multitude of languages. |
| | | Positive | |
| | | Negative | |

Main Campaign Message

The campaign's vision was "a world for all ages," and the campaign goal was to "change the way we think, feel and act towards age and ageing" (Officer, A. & de la Fuente-Nunez, V., 2018). Publications were hash tagged #AWorld4AllAges.

Goals of the campaign included: generating an evidence base, building a global coalition and raising awareness. The call-to-action includes efforts to promote, protect and intervene anywhere ageism occurs.



Project Evaluation

The WHO sought to compare the effectiveness of this campaign on ageism with other ageism campaigns. Because no there was no previous history of evaluating previous ageism studies, the campaign used strategies of similar health campaigns to evaluate its effectiveness using the following criteria:

| Key Characteristic of Effectiveness | Health Campaign Recommendation | Combat Aging Campaign |
|--|---|---|
| Dose (duration and greater the intensity) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-8 months for “awareness” • 12-18 months to establish themes & impact attitudes. • 18-24 months to impact behavior | Yes, campaign began in 2021 and is on-going. |
| Framing: refers to how an issue is communicated | Balanced explanations & message perceptions | Yes, messaging is sensitive to language, culture, and social context |
| Types of Messaging Denormalizing Behavior | Simple messages about achievable actions & images; increase social unacceptability; ageism is neither mainstream nor normal | Yes, uses verbiage “combat” & negative framing |
| Interactive & social media channels | Interactive components; personalized messaging | Yes, users encouraged to engage in videos, access materials, add findings |
| Community Engagement | Include younger & older representatives | Yes, campaign featured both young and old people |
| Funding and Partnerships | Combine mass media campaign efforts with local organizations | Yes, actively invited multi-level local & governmental agencies |
| Cultural Appropriateness | Involve local community, faith-based leaders, traditional elders as entry points for collective dialogue & agents of change | Yes |

Based on the criteria used in other health campaigns, Combat Ageism met its goals and effectively impacted the negative consequences of ageism on a global scale.

Theoretical Application

Despite the challenges, global campaigns are valuable in revealing common health behaviors consistent with human experience. The Social Cognitive Theory states that “learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior” (LaMorte, W., 2022). This campaign gave communities and organizations a framework and methodology for recognizing and confronting social disparities caused by ageism. They identified three key strategies to tackle ageism across the world: making changes in policies and laws and intervening through educational activities and intergenerational contact” (WHO, 2021).



Resources:

LaMorte., W. (2022, November 3). Behavior Change Models. *Boston University School of Public Health*. <https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/mph-modules/sb/behavioralchangetheories/>

World Health Organization. (2024). Combating Ageism.
<https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combatting-ageism>

World Health Organization. (2021, March 18). *Global report on ageism*.
<https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combatting-ageism/global-report-on-ageism>

World Health Organization. (2021, March 18). *Global Campaign to Combat Ageism—Toolkit*.
<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/global-campaign-to-combat-ageism-toolkit>

Officer, A., & de la Fuente-Nunez, V. (2018). *A global campaign to combat ageism*. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 96(4), 295-296. <https://doi.org/10.2471/BLT.17.202424>

UN Decade of Healthy Ageing. (2021, March 18). *Global Campaign to Combat Ageism—#AWorld4AllAges* [Video]. <https://youtu.be/7tThSqTWsCs?si=CW4qPW5RmQUrpKB>