

Ageism is a Real Thing – and it is here with us!

The true extent of the hidden and accepted ageism in Saskatchewan, Canada and many other parts of the world has been revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is ugly and dangerous! Ageism is the foundational stereotype from which policies that ignore and belittle the importance and value of older people arise. The stereotype is that all people 65+ are becoming physically and cognitively weaker as they sit around “enjoying their golden years”. People over 80 are usually referred to as “the elderly” which implies even more weakness and an inability to care for themselves – a drain on society, especially our health care system. Government policies to support older adults often focus on residential care facilities. ***Do you know people aged between 65 and 100+? Are they all the same?***

An opinion piece by Elizabeth Renzetti published in the Saturday, April 18, 2020 *Globe & Mail* was entitled, “**The Aged: lovely in theory, disposable in fact.**” Most of us were shocked as the news stories about the conditions in several Long Term Care facilities in Canada came to light. We also felt angry and helpless as an immediate solution to the problems was impossible to find. Examination of the policies related to Long Term Care must not be forgotten when this pandemic is over. And, we all must be vigilant in the coming days and weeks, considering the implications of any actions that will be taken during this pandemic locally, provincially and nationally.

However, ageism showed its ugly face earlier than that moment when we became aware of conditions for many residents in Long Term Care facilities. Casual references in late March about how COVID-19 really only affected old people with underlying health issues led to suggestions that concerns did not need to force everyone to stay home and affect the economy. ***How are you doing maintaining physical distancing and only socializing with those with whom you share a home?***

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick of Texas expressed the ageism most clearly, “I would rather die than see public health measures damage the US economy, and I know that ‘lots of grandparents’ across the country would agree with me.” **Comments circulating on social media in Canada and in Saskatchewan also reflected this view.** Patrick doubled down on his remarks on Monday April 20th on Fox TV, saying, “We are crushing the economy... and what I said when I was with you that night, there are more important things than living. And that's saving this country for my children and my grandchildren and saving this country for all of us.” Would Dan Patrick have expressed this forceful opinion if the people most vulnerable to COVID-19 under the age of 30?

A sample of older adults – not all the same...

