Greater Manchester

GM=EqAl

Equality Alliance

Inclusive Language Subgroup
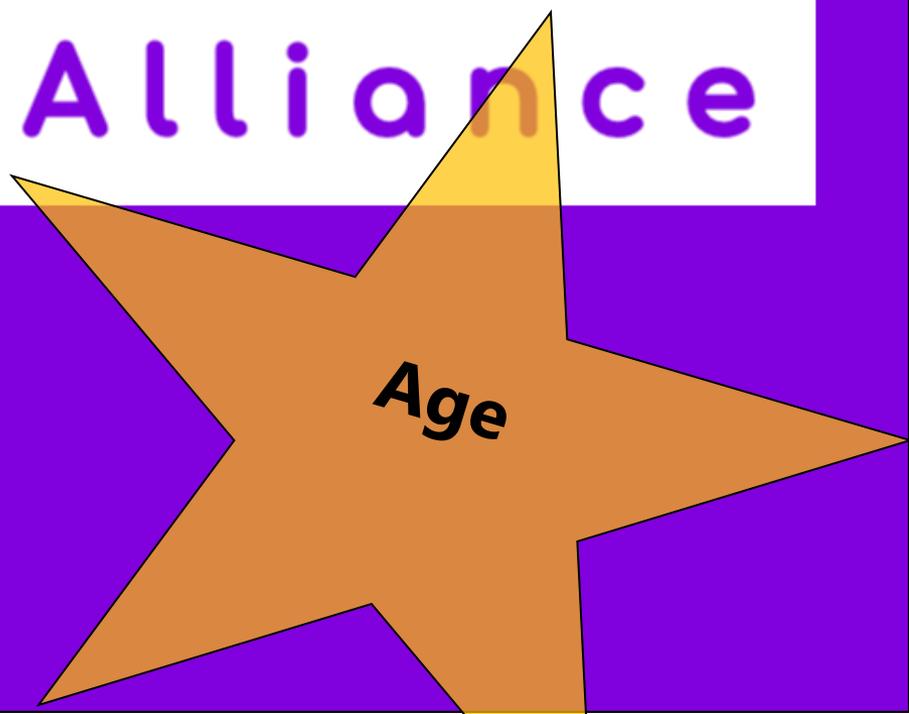
Age

Preamble

- This guidance is the product of discussion and research by members of the GM=EqAl Inclusive Language Subgroup.

- It is part of a series created to help GM=EqAl members and staff be respectful and consistent in how we talk and write about the issues we work on.

- It sets out our agreed definitions and terminology around **AGE** and explains key concepts in line with the values of GM=EqAl.

- GM=EqAl is keen for others to share and adopt our language guidance, and welcomes dialogue with partners in order to keep evolving the documents along with our understanding.

- This guidance has been generated through a robust process but does not claim absolute authority on any topic.

Short version

DO

- Use 'older person', 'older people', or 'people over X'
- Use 'elderly' only where extreme age and physical frailty need to be conveyed
- Use 'we' / 'us' instead of 'they' / 'them' when talking about older people and ageing (whenever possible)
- Use 'children and young people'

DON'T

- Use 'old person', 'elderly person' or 'the elderly'
- Use 'youth' or 'youths' to refer directly to young people
- Default to stereotypical language when referring to either older or younger people, or a particular 'generation'

Age-related language guidance: older people

- Don't tell anyone aged over 50 that they are 'old' (very few people self-identify as 'old').

- Use 'older' / 'over X' rather than 'elderly', unless referring to someone who is very old and physically frail.

- Since everyone is ageing, it often works to use 'we' / 'us' instead of 'they' / 'them' when talking about older people.

- Avoid speaking of older people as a homogenous group who are vulnerable, frail or a problem to be managed, rather than citizens of equal value.

- Try to counteract negative views and assumptions about later life. E.g. avoid talking in terms of decline and dependency, or using stereotypical adjectives such as 'sprightly', 'gloomy' or 'grumpy'.

- Be aware of tone of voice when speaking to an older person. E.g. don't automatically speak more loudly or slowly unless you know that's what the individual requires.

Age-related language guidance: younger people

- Avoid the term 'youth' (or 'youths') for an individual or group of young people. It is fine in contexts such as 'youth worker', 'youth centre', or 'global youth'.

- Use 'children', 'young people' or 'children and young people', as relevant for the age-group concerned.

- Avoid language that reinforces negative assumptions about young people. For example, don't invoke 'loitering' and 'gang' when 'gathering' and 'group' would do just as well.

- Be aware of tone when talking to children and young people – try to avoid sounding patronising or talking 'at' them.

Generational difference

- When developing guidance on inclusive language, we need to be conscious that what is considered 'best practice' within the normative culture may not accord with everyone's preferred usage.

- Such differences are sometimes evident across generations, due to older and younger people having different historical contexts for their vocabulary.

- For example, older trans people are more likely to self-identify as 'transsexual', which has otherwise been widely superseded by 'trans'.

- Another example: older LGBT+ people are more likely to dislike the word 'queer'; whereas young LGBT+ people are as likely to use 'queer' or 'pan-sexual' as 'gay', 'lesbian' or 'bisexual' when describing their identity.

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Generational difference

- Form of address is another area where preferences may differ according to age. For example, some older people are uncomfortable with being called by their first name in formal environments, such as primary care settings, and would prefer to be addressed by their title and / or surname.

- In many (e.g. South Asian) communities, a particular form of address (such as 'auntie or 'uncle') is considered respectful within the community, while in other contexts they would expect their name to be used.

- Research has revealed that certain words and phrases in job adverts, e.g. 'innovative' and 'adaptable', can negatively affect some older peoples' confidence, whereas those which appeal to older people do not seem to deter younger applicants. This could be useful for avoiding ageism in recruitment. More information here: ageing-better.org.uk/news/inclusive-language-job-adverts-win-win-employers-and-jobseekers

Generational difference

- The division of society into generations, such as 'baby boomers', 'Gen X' and 'millennials', while a useful and often lighthearted shorthand in some contexts, can also be fertile territory for unhelpful generalisations and stereotypes.

- The 'boomer vs millennial' narrative plays up competition for resources and positions older people in affluent societies as hoarders of wealth - a sweeping generalisation that hides every kind of inequality within the generations.

- The term 'boomer' or 'millennial' are also sometimes used as a proxy for political beliefs or attitude, which again perpetuates ageism. Stereotypes about any group, even if founded in statistical probability, should clearly not be used as the basis of an assumption about an individual.

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