

Reframing Aging



A Social Change Endeavor
designed to improve the
public's understanding of aging

ReframingAging.org



@ReframingAging

*Original research conducted by the
FrameWorks Institute and sponsored by the
Leaders of Aging Organizations*





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o4a Annual Conference 2021



Leaders of Aging Organizations (LAO)



advocacy | action | answers on aging

**National Association of Area
Agencies on Aging**





FRAME WORKS

Nonprofit think tank with the mission to advance the nonprofit sector's capacity to reframe social issues

Conducts original, scholarly research on the communications aspects of social and scientific issues

Recognized in 2015 with the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions

Concepts presented today w/ permission, courtesy of the Reframing Aging Initiative and the FrameWorks Institute

Ageism is not publicly recognized as a problem

Ageism leads to social injustice and unequal treatment or exclusion. Ageism begins with biases that are implicit and unseen.

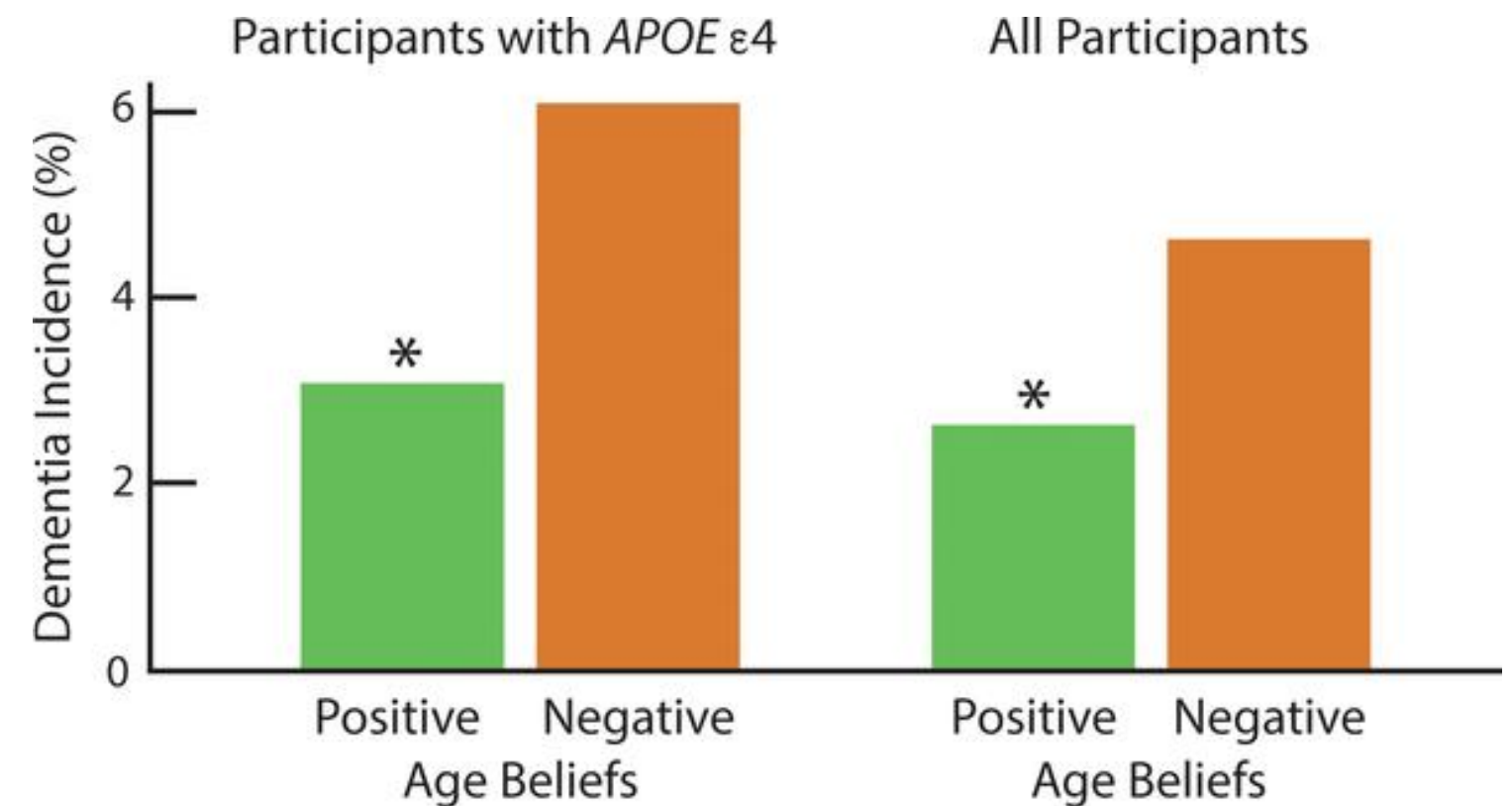
Common, unproductive assumptions about ageism:

- Ageism is less serious than other forms of discrimination
- Ageism is not considered a policy issue
- Ageism is impossible to address

The Good News

- Positive self-perception leads to 7.5 years longer, healthier lifespan
- Older persons with positive age beliefs who carry one of the strongest genes for developing dementia were nearly 50% less likely to develop the disease than their peers who held negative beliefs.

Fig 1. Positive age beliefs associated with resisting dementia among participants with APOE ϵ 4 and all participants.



Levy BR, Slade MD, Pietrzak RH, Ferrucci L (2018) Positive age beliefs protect against dementia even among elders with high-risk gene. PLOS ONE 13(2): e0191004.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0191004>
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0191004>

Positive views on aging

AMONG ADULTS AGE 50–80

88%

Feel more
comfortable being
themselves

80%

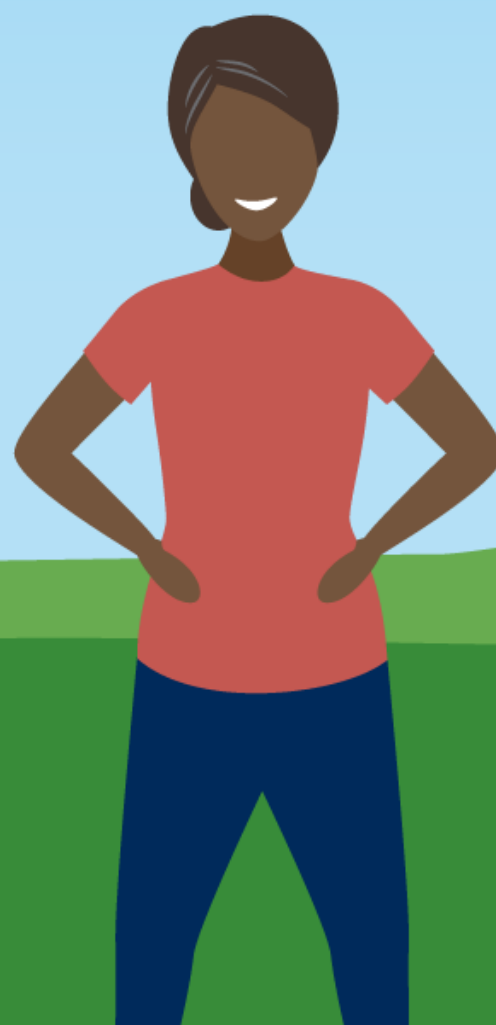
Have a strong
sense of purpose

67%

Feel more
positive
about aging

65%

Think their life is
better than they
thought it would be



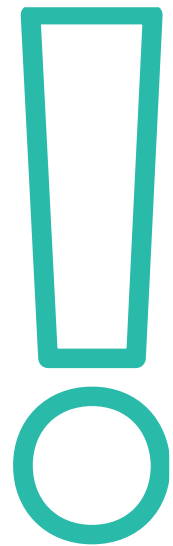
Learn more: www.healthyagingpoll.org | **Contact us:** healthyaging@umich.edu



**How we talk about aging is
important – aka Framing**

Framing Is about Choices

Frames are sets of choices about how information is presented:



What to emphasize

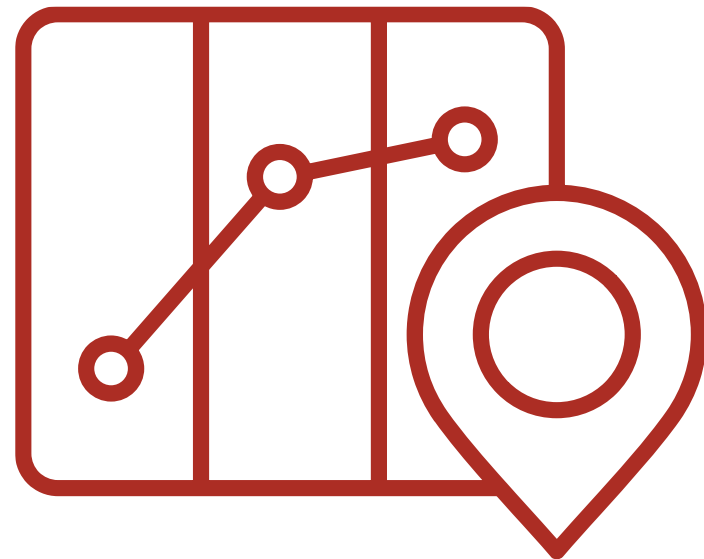


How to explain it



What to leave
unsaid

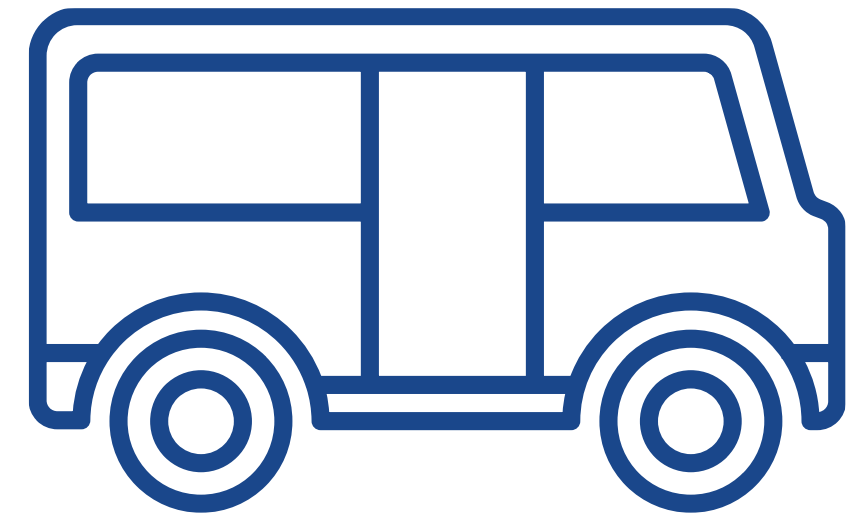
What does it take to reframe an issue?



Map the terrain



Develop a strategy to
navigate to higher
ground



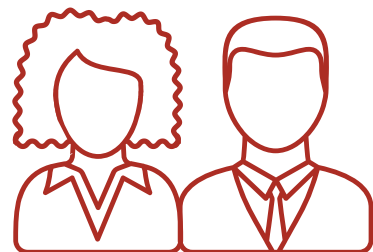
Build a caravan, equip
the travelers, and
start moving



Public Understanding About Aging

You Say...They Think

AAA



Expert/Advocate

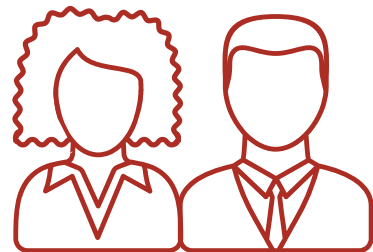
BBB



Public

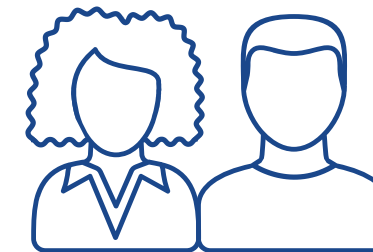
You Say...They Think

Aging populations pose a challenge to the fiscal and macroeconomic stability of many societies through increased government spending on pension, healthcare, and social benefits programs for the elderly. This may hurt economic growth and overall quality of life if governments need to divert public spending from education and infrastructure investment to finance programs for the elderly.



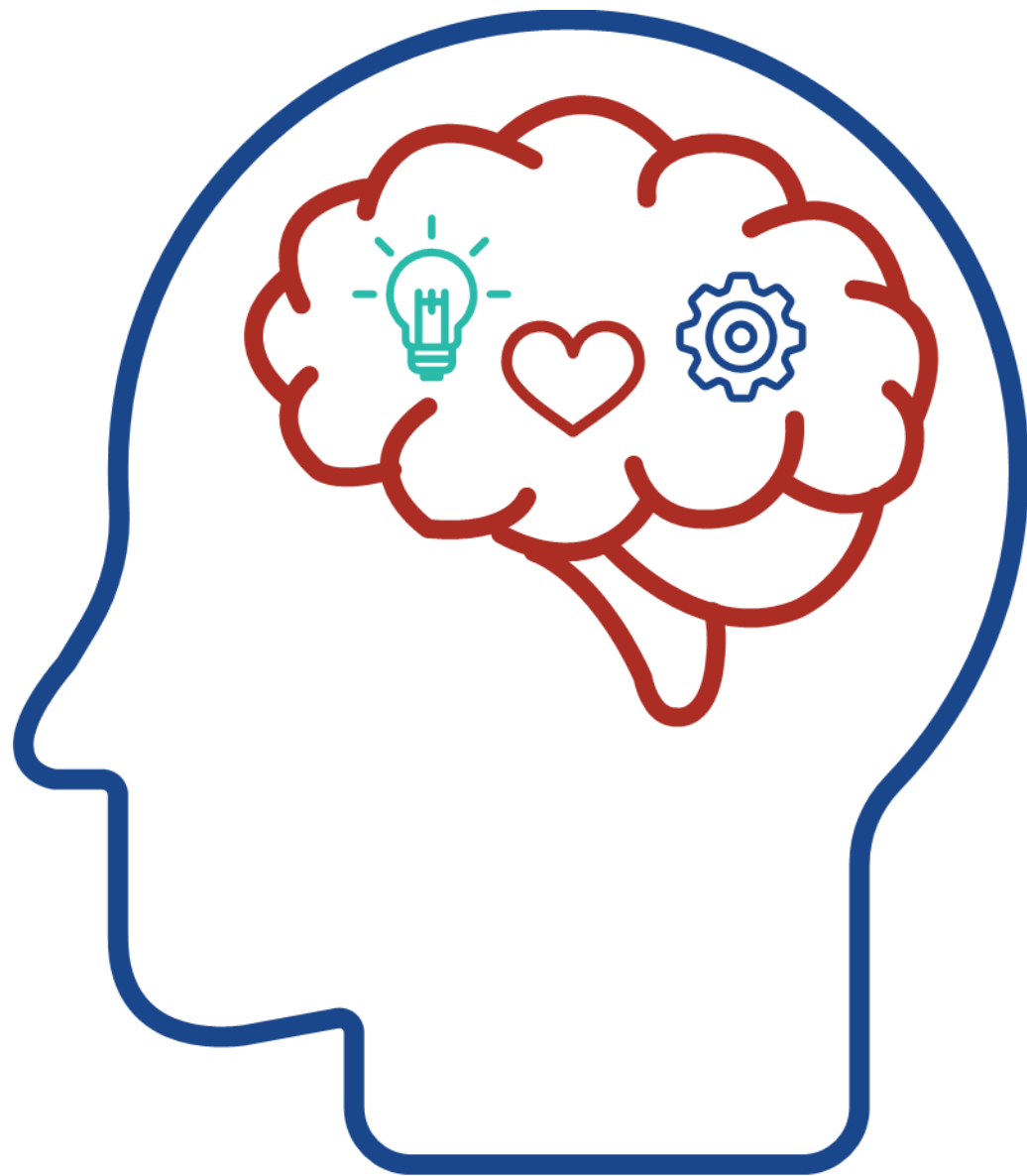
Expert/Advocate

I am tired of all of the taxes I pay being used to help other people. I am struggling too because I am taking care of my older family members. People need to stop depending on the government for taking care of their responsibilities. And I need to see benefits now of all those taxes I pay.

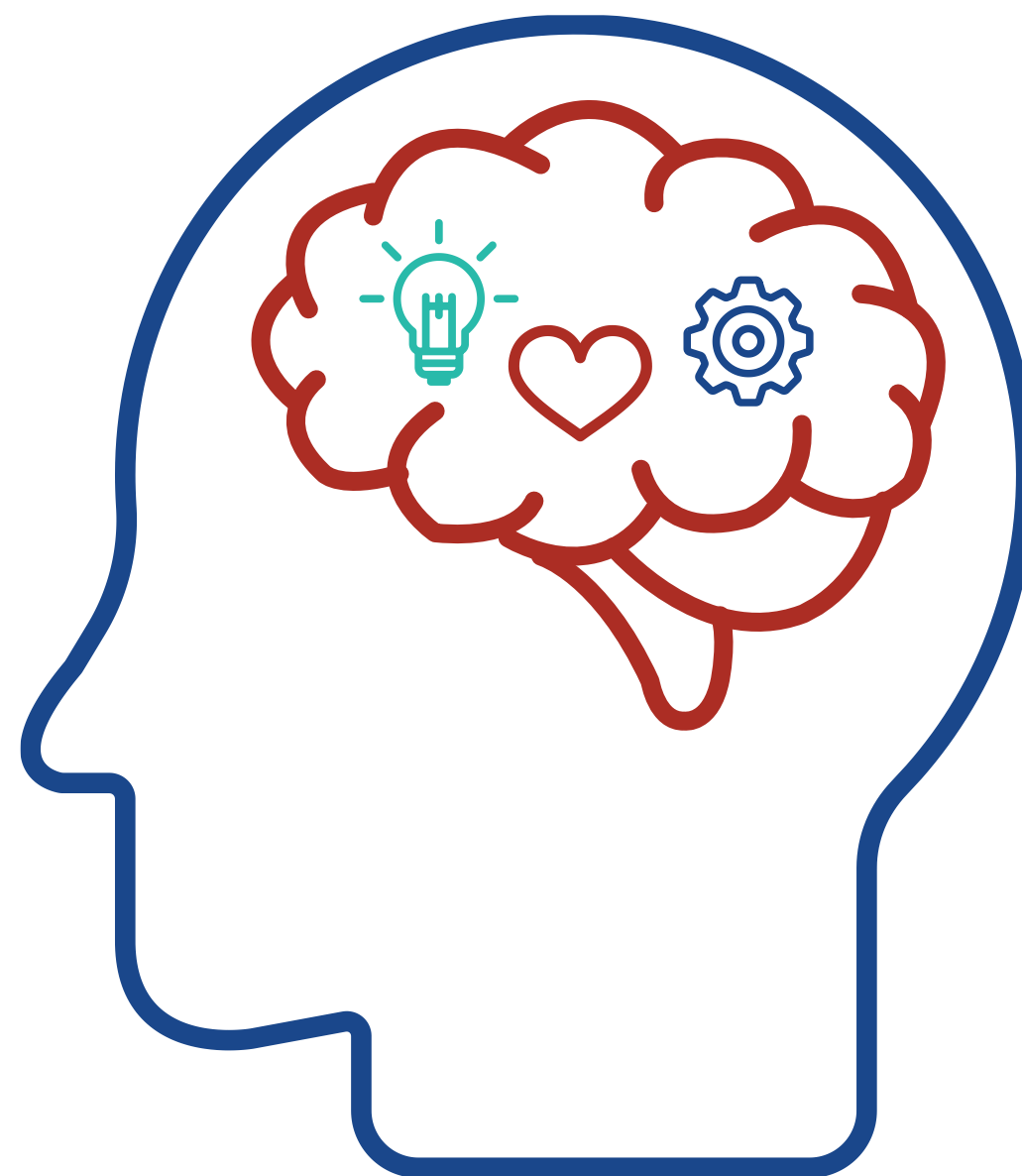


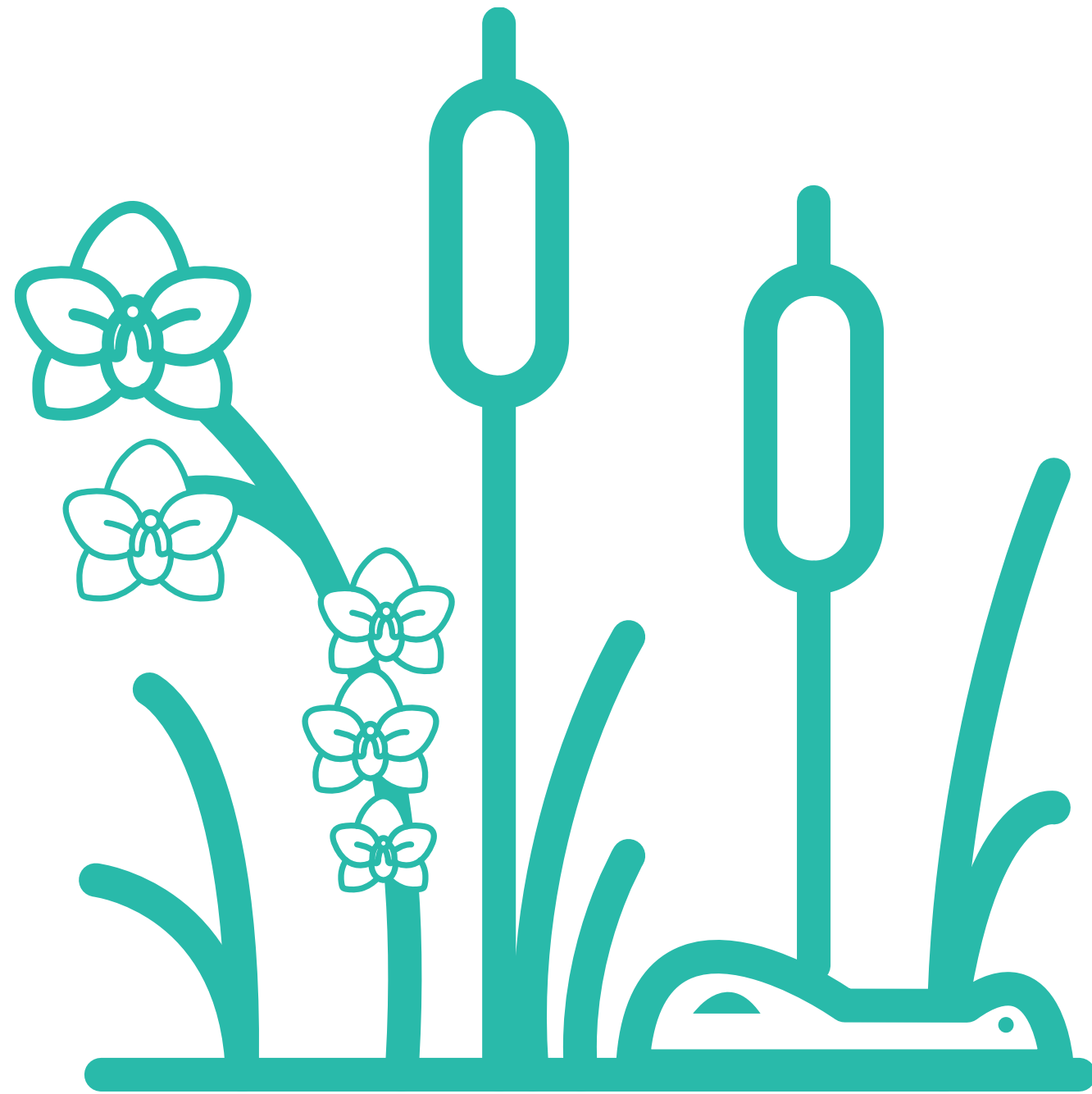
Public

Cultural Models Drive People's Thinking



- Cultural models are patterns of thinking created through years of experience and expectation.
- They are taken-for-granted and largely automatic assumptions.
- People rely on cultural models to interpret, organize and make meaning out of all sorts of stimuli, including experiences, feelings, thoughts ... and your communications.





The Swamp of Aging

**What patterns of
thinking about aging
did you hear in this
video?**

Ideal vs. Perceived "Real"

- Accumulated Wisdom
- Self-sufficiency
- Staying active
- Earned leisure
- Deterioration
- Loss of control
- Dependency
- Determinism

"Us" vs. "Them"

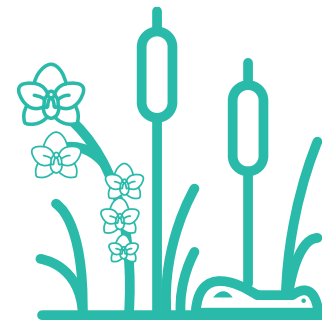
- Older as "other"
- Zero sum
- Digital incompetence

Individualism

- Lifestyle choices
- Financial planning

What is in the swamp
of...

Aging



What Surrounds
Us Shapes Us

Collective
Responsibility

Solutions

- Fatalism/Crisis—nothing can be done
- Better individual choices and planning
- More education and information

Nostalgia and Threat of Modernity

- Family dispersal
- Economic challenges
- Social Security is doomed

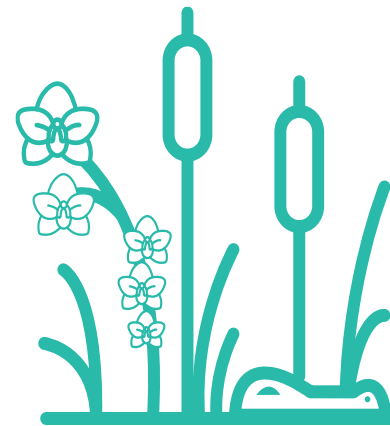
Problems can
be solved

Ideal vs. Perceived “Real”

- Accumulated Wisdom
- Self-sufficiency
- Staying active
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What is in the swamp of... Aging

Challenges, aka Alligators



“Us” vs. “Them”

- Older as “other”
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Ideal vs. Perceived Real

Ideal

- Accumulated Wisdom
- Self-sufficiency
- Staying active
- Earned leisure



Example:

"One of the advantages of getting older is you get to relax more."



Ideal vs. Perceived “Real”

Perceived “Real”

- Deterioration
- Loss of control
- Dependency
- Determinism

Example:

“Getting older means that you have more health issues, which means more doctor’s visits and medications”



Us vs. Them

- Older as “other”
- Zero sum
- Digital incompetence

Example:

“We cannot support everyone, if we increase support for older people, we won’t be able to support the needs of others”



#IN THIS
TOGETHER 
Ohio



o4a
@o4aadvocacy

...

Reframing
Aging

Kudos to [@GovMikeDeWine](#) for [#ReframingAging](#) in question about vaccine access! Q: When can average Ohioans get the vaccine? A: "I think a lot of the people who are getting the vaccine now consider themselves average Ohioans." [@ReframingAging](#)



Feb 4, 2021 #COVID19 Update with Governor Mike DeWine

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine and Lt. Governor Jon Husted will hold a media availability today at 2:00 p.m. to give an update on the status of the Coronavirus ...

[youtube.com](#)

Individualism

- Lifestyle choices
- Financial planning



Examples

- *“To age well all you have to do is exercise and eat healthy”*
- *“You have to ensure you’re saving enough money to be able to retire, poor decisions now will have consequences later.”*

Solutions

- **Fatalism/Crisis—nothing can be done**
- **Better individual choices and planning**
- **More education and information**



Examples:

- ***"The "silver tsunami" is coming and we're not prepared"***
- ***"We need to teach young people how to make better health and financial choices, so they're prepared"***

Nostalgia and Threat of Modernity

- Family dispersal
- Economic challenges
- Social Security is doomed

Examples:

- *“Older people have to be able to pay to take care of themselves, especially when family isn’t close by anymore”*
- *“In the good old days...”*

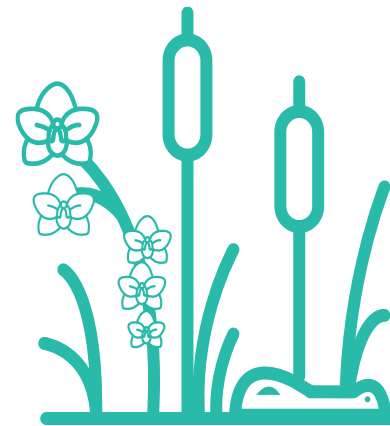


Ideal vs. Perceived “Real”

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What is in the swamp of... Aging

Challenges, aka Alligators



“Us” vs. “Them”

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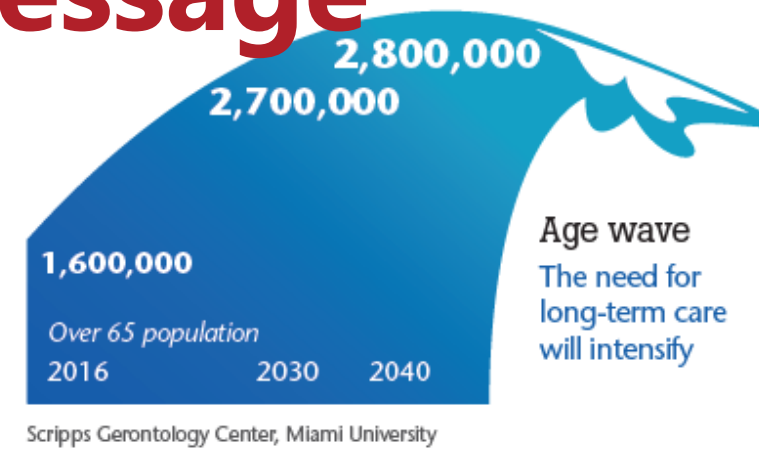
- Lifestyle choices
- Financial planning

Nostalgia and Threat of Modernity

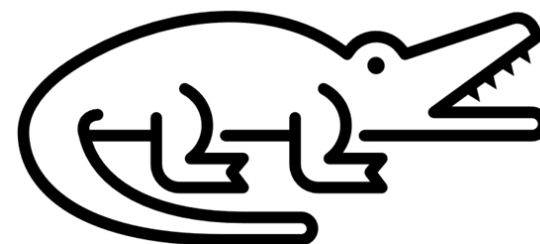
- Family dispersal
- Economic challenges
- Social Security is doomed

What Part of the Swamp (Alligators) Might This Message Cue?

"By 2030, adults 65 years and older will make up nearly 25% of Ohio's population, up from 14% today. This dramatic change in life span is a cause for both celebration and concern. The massive numbers of the "oldest old" will unleash a torrent of Medicaid spending that threatens the state treasury. The burden falls to Medicaid because many individuals deplete their assets to pay for long-term care that Medicare doesn't cover. "



- ☐ Ideal
- ☐ Perceived Real
- ☒ Us vs Them – Older as "other"
- ☒ Zero Sum
- ☐ Fighting Aging
- ☒ Individualism – better choices and planning
- ☒ Crisis Messaging/Fatalism
- ☐ Nostalgia
- ☐ Threat of Modernity



Ideal vs. Perceived “Real”

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“Us” vs. “Them”

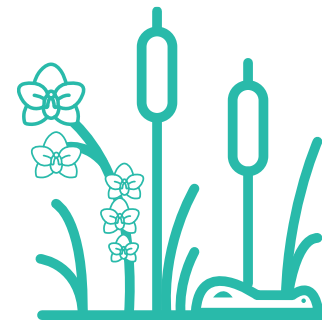
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**What is in the swamp
of...**

Aging



**What Surrounds
Us Shapes Us**

**Collective
Responsibility**

Solutions

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Nostalgia and Threat of Modernity

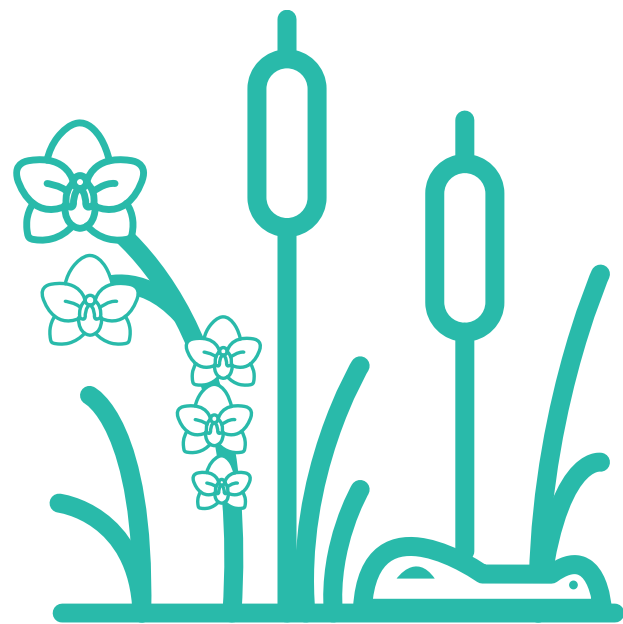
- Family dispersal
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**Problems can
be solved**

Opportunities a.k.a. Orchids

What is in the
swamp of...

Aging



**What Surrounds
Us Shapes Us**

**Collective
Responsibility**

**Problems can
be solved**

What Part of the Swamp (Orchids) Might This Message Cue?

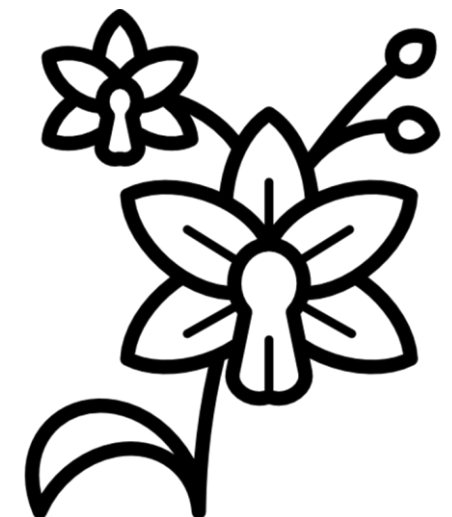
“How well we thrive as we age is really a question of how well-equipped our communities are to tap into this resource by enabling us to be engaged participants. Everyone is more likely to enjoy positive aspects of aging like good health, personal growth, longevity and expanded productivity if we start to think a little differently about how we shape the places we live.

Area Agency on Aging programs provide dignity, self-determination, and quality of life for us as we age. We must ensure adequate funding and system resources are dedicated to the full spectrum of supports to enable us to live healthy, engaged and secure lives and access the supports we need in our homes and communities.”

 **What Surrounds us Shapes Us**

 **Collective Responsibility**

 **Problems Can Be Solved**



What to avoid

- **Don't lead a story with demographic shifts; don't say silver tsunami or age wave or crisis messaging**
- **Don't use language that refers to older people as "other"**
- **Pay attention to pronouns. Example: Change "what older people need" to "what we need when we are older."**
- **Don't be overly positive.**



Avoid

- Individual action drives aging outcomes
- Aging is the process of decline
- Older people as other
- Aging (population) is a crisis
- Fixed, finite resources
- Just another -ism



Advance

- Context shapes decisions and outcomes
- Future is a time for improvement
- We are all better off by being inclusive
- Interventions can change outcomes
- Solution stories: systems, supports
- How ageism works

Old Think

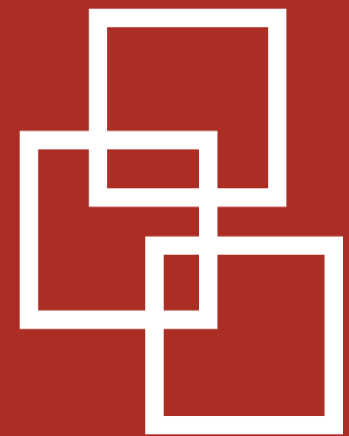


Any Story Will Do

New Think



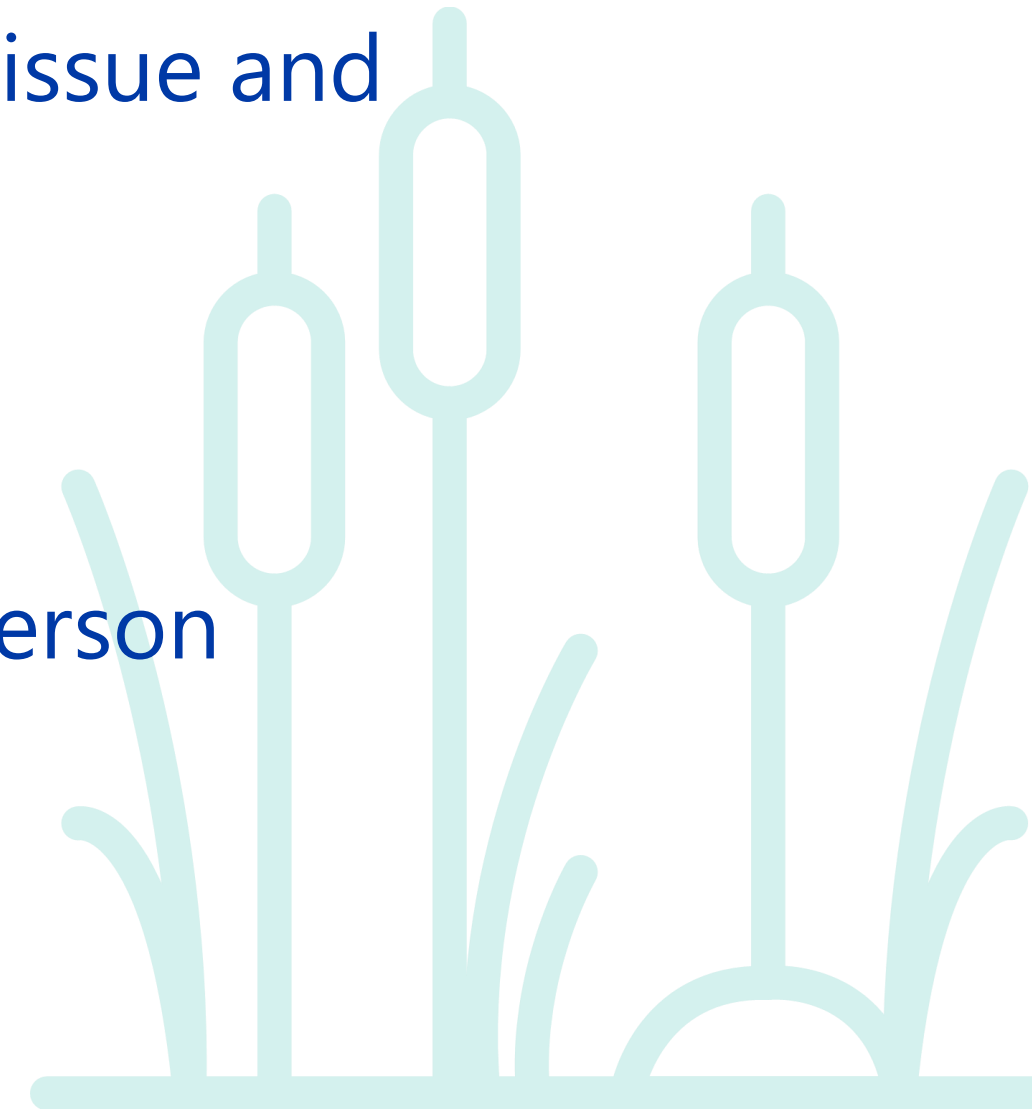
**What Will That
Story Do?**

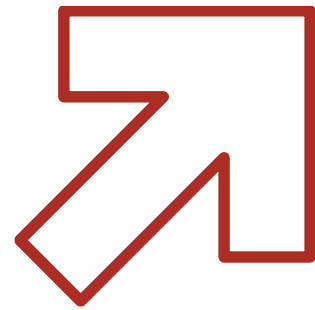


Telling a New Story about Aging

Explanatory Metaphors Help You Navigate the Swamp

- Using metaphors to explain works because we think in metaphor
- Metaphors channel attention to certain features of an issue and redirect attention away from others
- Metaphors help people remember important points
- Metaphors are sticky and pass easily from person to person





Building Momentum

The story you are telling:

As we get older we gather momentum, which powers us to take up new ideas and advance toward common goals. This energy powers up our society and helps move our communities forward.

Redirect away from



- Us versus them
- Aging as discrete categories
- Decline and deterioration
- Aging as a “battle” or “fight”
- Dependency

Move thinking towards



- Aging as opportunity
- Policies support well-being as we age
- Collective benefits accrue older people can contribute

Framing Practice

Using Building Momentum Creatively



Building Momentum in Practice



Before



After

Age Strong Shuttle Redesign

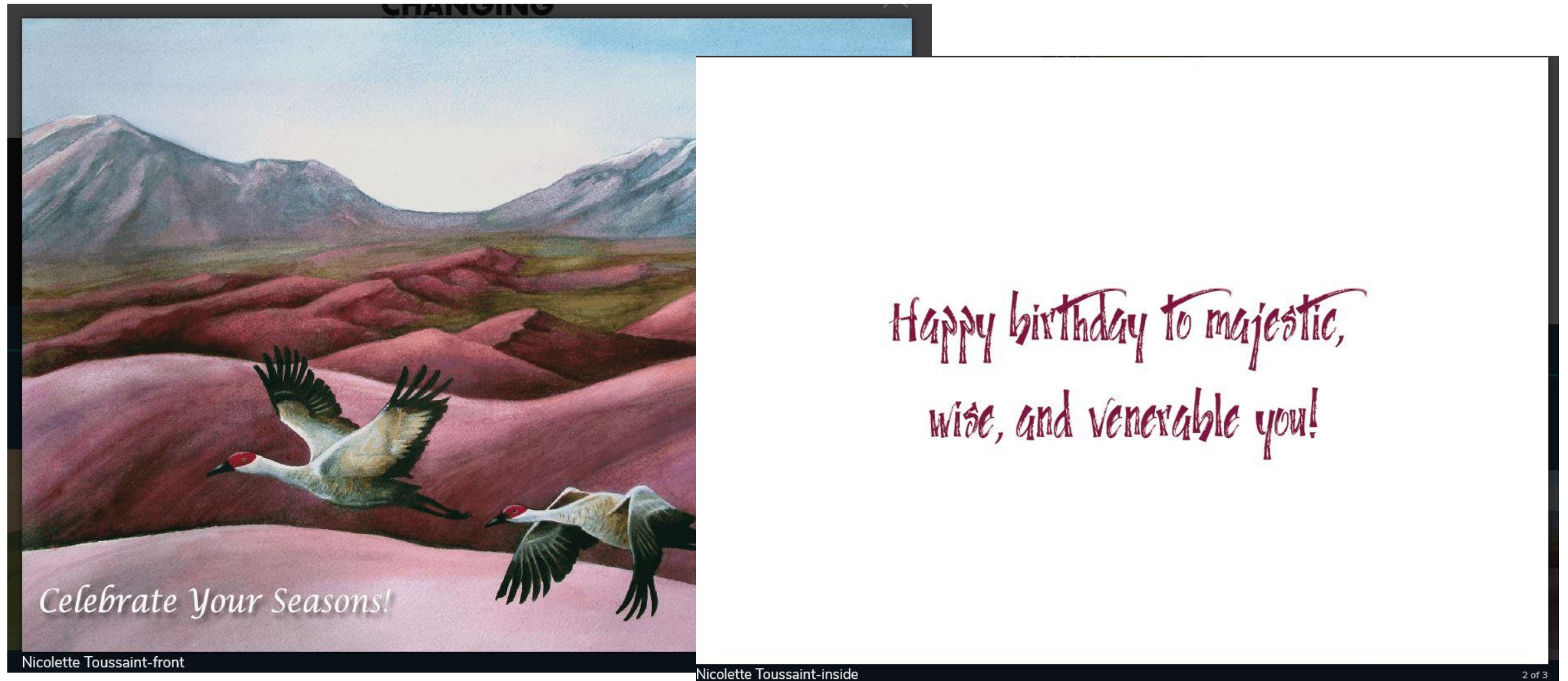
Building Momentum in Practice

"America's aging population is not in decline, as the outdated paradigm of the arch of aging suggests, but rather entering what has come to be known as life's third act."

--*Jane Fonda*



Building Momentum in Practice



What can I do?

Practice using the tips on the Quick Start Guide

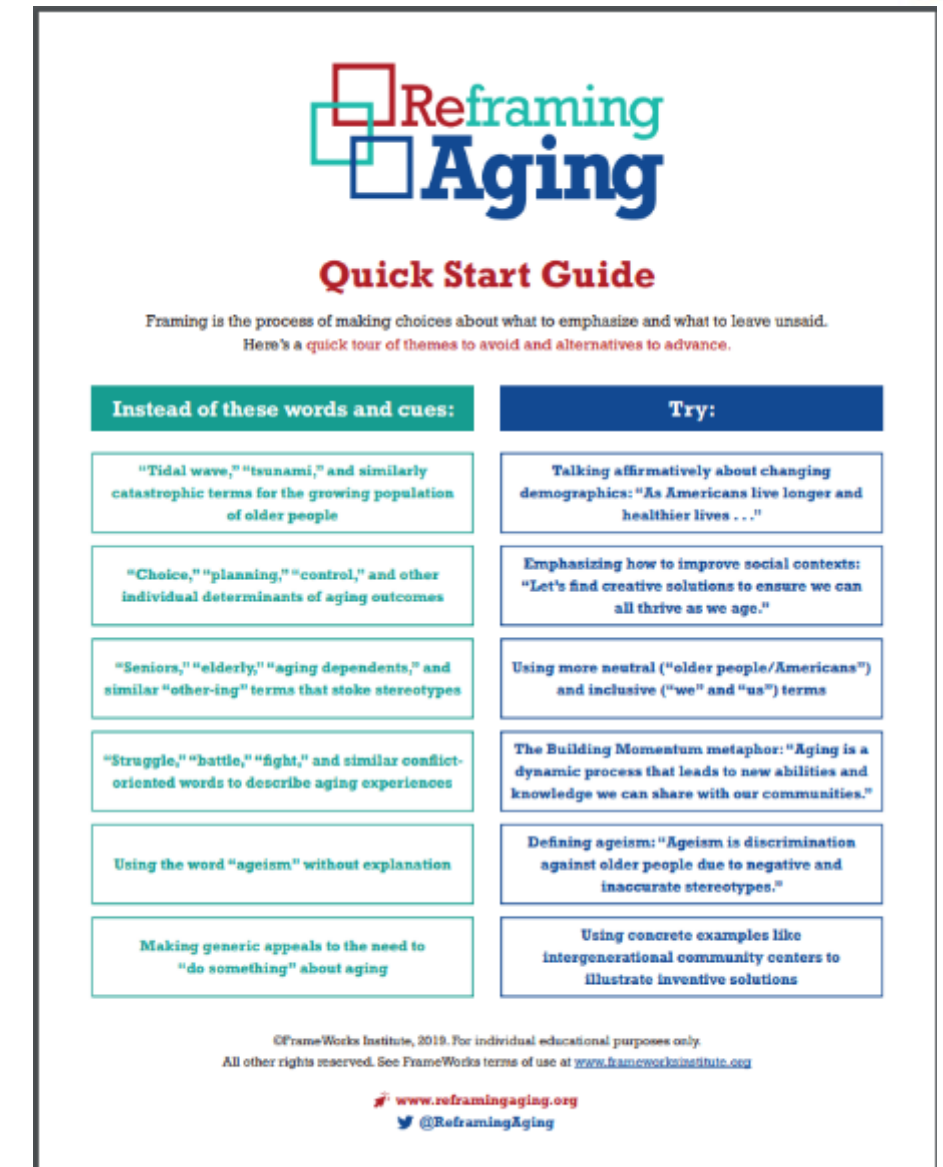
Learn about the Swamp of Public Opinion on Aging and other research on the Reframing Aging Initiative webpage (www.reframingaging.org)

Take the Implicit Association Test to measure your implicit bias (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>)

Call out ageism when you see it or hear it

Request a workshop or presentation for your organization

www.reframingaging.org



Reframing Aging

Quick Start Guide

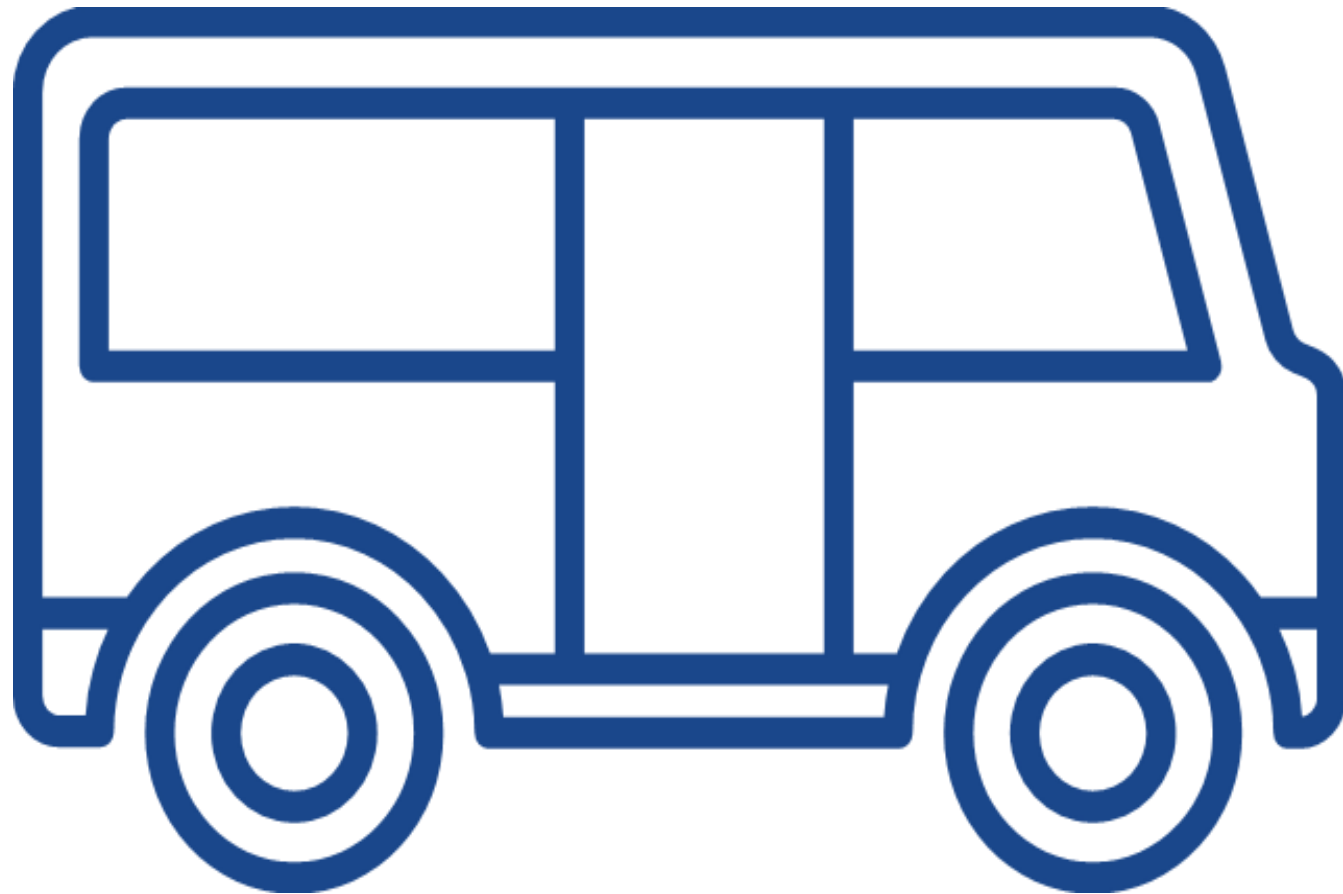
Framing is the process of making choices about what to emphasize and what to leave unsaid. Here's a quick tour of themes to avoid and alternatives to advance.

Instead of these words and cues:	Try:
"Tidal wave," "tsunami," and similarly catastrophic terms for the growing population of older people	Talking affirmatively about changing demographics: "As Americans live longer and healthier lives . . ."
"Choice," "planning," "control," and other individual determinants of aging outcomes	Emphasizing how to improve social contexts: "Let's find creative solutions to ensure we can all thrive as we age."
"Seniors," "elderly," "aging dependents," and similar "other-ing" terms that stoke stereotypes	Using more neutral ("older people/Americans") and inclusive ("we" and "us") terms
"Struggle," "battle," "fight," and similar conflict-oriented words to describe aging experiences	The Building Momentum metaphor: "Aging is a dynamic process that leads to new abilities and knowledge we can share with our communities."
Using the word "ageism" without explanation	Defining ageism: "Ageism is discrimination against older people due to negative and inaccurate stereotypes."
Making generic appeals to the need to "do something" about aging	Using concrete examples like intergenerational community centers to illustrate inventive solutions

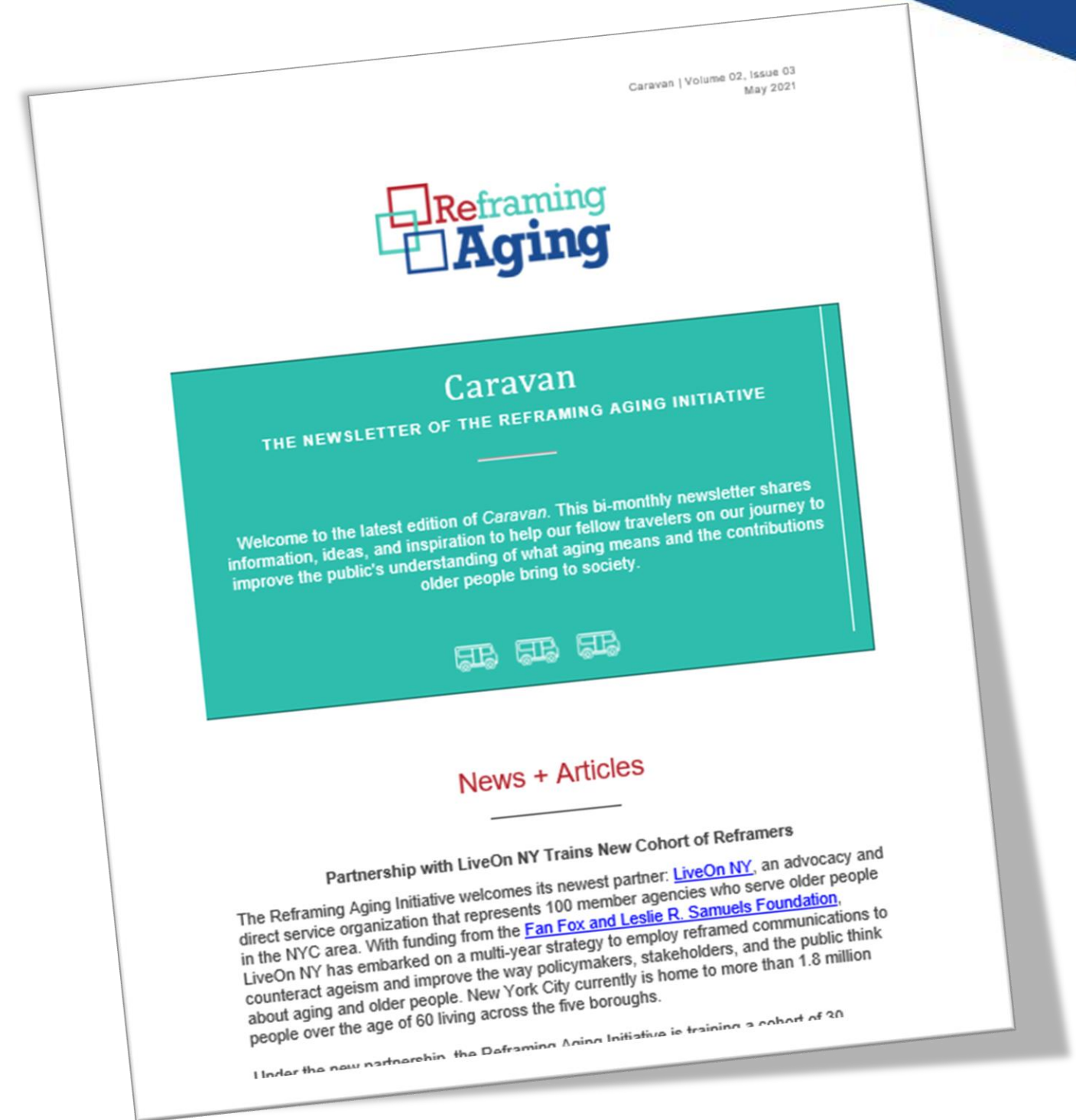
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www.reframingaging.org
@ReframingAging

Caravan newsletter



<https://www.reframingaging.org/Join-Us>



Reframing Aging Research and Resources

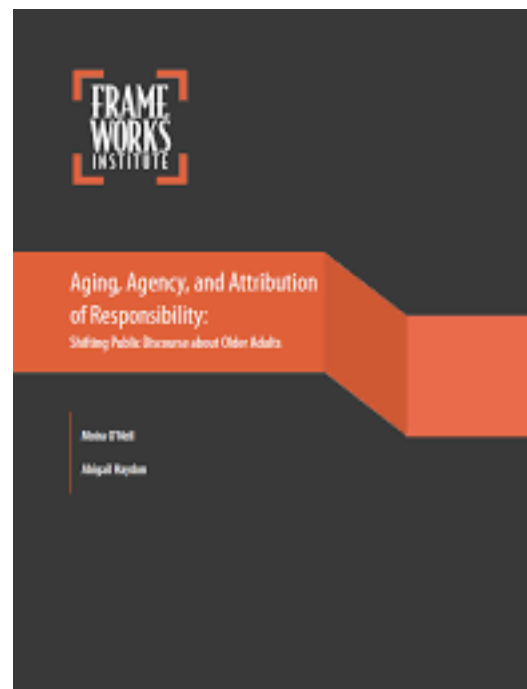
www.reframingaging.org



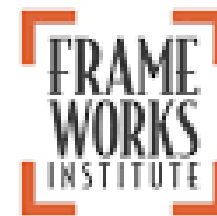
Compares the public's perception of aging with that of aging experts and explains how the disconnect presents challenges for building support



Access this free Video Series to hear the research findings and learn how to apply the reframing aging tools



Identifies six narratives dominating conversation in the media and in advocacy organizations



Finding the Frame:

An Empirical Approach to Reframing Aging and Ageism

Explains the process and research behind the evidence-based narratives shown to improve attitudes about aging

www.reframingaging.org

