

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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OPINION – Own your age or let ageism win
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It's high time we challenged ageism, called it out, and replaced the stereotypes that blight the lives of older South Australians.

Today, on International Day of Older Persons, we should be celebrating ageing and the continuing and invaluable contributions older people make. Alas, we are not.

Instead, as a society, we cannot get past our aversion to ageing.

We duck and weave to avoid mentioning a number for fear it means we're entering 'old age', as though that label somehow defines us.

We have an irrational fear of getting older. The result is that, as a community and as individuals, we are at grave risk of wasting our older years.

We are in danger of treating our older years with disdain and writing them off as if they have little value, even though we've worked so hard to get them. Our significant investment in clever public health over the last century has resulted in longer and healthier lives.

As children, we are impatient to 'grow up' fast and be older. Now that time's here, we should own it. We need to reject the 'use by' date imposed by ageism.

The challenge for our community is to reframe ageing, to grasp the opportunity of our longevity, and to explore what the possibilities may be.

The President of COTA SA, Emeritus Professor Anne Edwards AO, turned 80 this year.

We knew it was a significant milestone birthday, but we were unsure just how she would want it to be marked.

Would she, as an outstanding achiever and significant leader, want the world to know she is 80 years old? The answer is yes.

By owning and embracing her age, Anne is challenging ageism, and we urge other older South Australians to do the same.

Together, we must reject the stereotypes about 'old' and rewrite the rule book on ageing.

We also need to tackle the phenomenon that many older South Australians increasingly feel as they age – invisibility.

Older people are disproportionately underrepresented in the media and in popular culture, despite being the fastest growing and largest segment of the population.

Worse still, when they are, their appearance often panders to the stereotypes and is littered with ageist overtones. Older age is made to look frail, sad, poor, and lonely.

There is a move to refer to International Day of Older Persons, designated by the United Nations, as Ageism Awareness Day.

It's a move that COTA SA fully supports. It's well and truly time that we fronted up to the damage that ageism has done and continues to do.

After all, as ageism activist Maggie Kuhn once said, "old age is an excellent time for outrage".

COTA SA is an older people's movement and the peak body representing the rights, interests and futures of more than 633,000 older South Australians aged over 50.

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