Older and Wiser: Ageism Awareness Day a reminder of challenges seniors face

It's time to celebrate the contributions seniors make while recognizing the barriers they face, writes columnist Margaret Coates

Margaret Coates **North Shore News** October 9,2025

Oct. 9 was Ageism Awareness Day, offering a chance to celebrate seniors and recognize the challenges they face *Metro Creative*

In October, we are encouraged to recognize seniors for all their contributions to the community locally, nationally and internationally.

In Canada, we are asked to celebrate how older people shaped our families and communities. Globally, this October the United Nations is promoting "local and global action" to recognize the aspirations, well-being and rights of older people. Of course, to my mind, we should be celebrating older people every day.

Unfortunately, many older people are treated badly because of ageist attitudes. On the World Health Organization's website they say, "Ageism is rife in our society," noting that one in two people are ageist when it comes to older people." Unfortunately, this includes seniors who have internalized stereotypes about older people. The WHO argues that stereotypes and false assumptions about older people underlie ageism.

On Oct. 9, we join communities across North America in marking Ageism Awareness Day. This year's theme, "Age Is a Strength: Building Belonging, Challenging Ageism," reminds us that aging is something to celebrate and respect.

But ageism is widespread, with about half of people holding moderate to high ageist attitudes. The impacts are serious. Ageism can harm health and well-being, increase isolation, reduce opportunities, and even shorten life expectancy.

So how can we combat Ageism? We can challenge stereotypes when we hear them and share stories that highlight the strengths and contributions of older adults.

And there is much to acknowledge and highlight about seniors' contributions to our society. Seniors volunteer extraordinary amounts of hours providing friend or family caregiving, working at a senior's centre, for their church, at hospitals and most anywhere a volunteer is needed.

Older people continue to contribute to the economy through taxes (yes, we still pay taxes, some seniors on as little $33,000 income a year) and through transfer of wealth, and they still have buying power. Also, many seniors remain in the work force after the age of 65, thus continuing to contribute to the economy.

According to Statistics Canada, this in large part is due to necessity rather than choice.

As well, some people blame seniors for the "sorry" state of the world, forgetting their positive contributions such as creating and building the rich fabric of our society. Let's also not forget the contributions that seniors gave to the overall fabric of Canadian society in the way of civic duty, in the creation and fostering of values, building of community and preserving our rich history. They worked hard to ensure people had libraries, community and recreation centres and other people-centred spaces.

Older people are acutely aware of issues that affect all of us such as the lack of affordable housing, the ups and downs of the economy, ageism and the impact of climate change, to name a few issues.

You will find seniors on committees and in organizations committed to bringing positive change. For instance, there is Seniors for Climate Change, a dedicated group of elders who are committed to bringing our attention to the issue of the climate crisis.

This October and beyond let's celebrate aging, challenge ageism, and build communities where people of all ages feel respected and included.

Margaret Coates is the co-ordinator of Lionsview Seniors' Planning Society. She has lived on the North Shore for 55 years and has worked for and with seniors for thirty of those years. Ideas for future columns are welcome. Email lions_view@telus.net.