

# Conversation Starter

Equality and respect  
for older women

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence



## Why we developed this conversation starter

The Together For Equality and Respect partnership in Melbourne's east are promoting conversations focusing on action for equality and respect for all women, as part of the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.

Gender inequality and disrespect are the underlying social causes of violence against women. The risk of this violence is increased for particular groups of women who experience other forms of discrimination including women with disabilities, older women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from migrant and refugee communities.

This conversation starter focuses on equality and respect for older women. You can find the other resources on the [website](#) here.

We encourage organisations and staff, community groups and families to use these resources to have conversations about equality and respect during the 16 Days of Activism in your own ways.

Here are some ideas to get you started

- Add a question in a meeting and ask everyone to answer for themselves. Then end with a reflection on learnings or a follow up action.
- Organise an event for your workplace or community group: you might create an artwork in response to the messages and questions, show a video or use a resource to get others involved.
- Whatever you do, take a photo and share it (with consent) to inspire others and to draw attention to the importance of us all helping to stop violence before it starts.

# Why we need to promote equality and respect for older women

While anybody can experience family, domestic and sexual violence, data shows that most victims are women and that violence against women in Australia is overwhelmingly perpetuated by men.

Violence against women occurs across the lifespan. Older women may experience family violence into older age and encounter new risk factors and perpetrators in their older age, including in aged care.

**“For older women, ageism and gender inequalities are bound together to create a heightened risk of elder abuse. As ageism increases with age – so too do the gender inequalities older women face.”<sup>1</sup>**

Women make diverse and valuable contributions to their families, communities, workforces and society in many ways across their lives. Despite their achievements and essential contributions, older women are often devalued and experience significant inequalities.

Gender inequality is compounded by ageist attitudes, stereotypes and practices that further disempower women as they age.

## Definitions

- **Gender equality:** the equal distribution of rights, opportunities, resources, responsibilities and outcomes between people of different genders.<sup>2</sup> Gender equality does not mean erasing gender differences, but that people’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities are not dependent on their gender.<sup>3</sup>
- **Ageism:** the systematic stereotyping and discrimination of people based on their age. The term ageism is usually used in relation to discrimination against older people; ageist attitudes and practices can also adversely affect younger people.<sup>4</sup>

## Research shows older women are:

- the lowest income earning family group<sup>5</sup>
- the largest group of unpaid carers. 70% of carers are women<sup>6</sup> and research shows that carers experience significant financial burdens (loss of income, future income potential, superannuation) and poor health and wellbeing<sup>7</sup>
- the fastest growing group of homeless, seeing a 31% increase between 2011 and 2016<sup>8</sup>
- more likely to live in poverty - 34% of single older women live in poverty<sup>9</sup>
- more likely to experience workplace discrimination<sup>10</sup>
- more likely to experience elder abuse than men<sup>11</sup>
- more likely to be among the 50 people sexually assaulted in residential aged care each week.<sup>12</sup>

## There is an urgent need to:

- listen to and learn from diverse older women
- combat the inequalities they experience
- prevent violence and discrimination against women in their older years.

# The Biscuit Tin project

## Raising awareness of the contributions and achievements of older women in Melbourne's east

In 2024 12 incredible women came together to share their stories and their biscuit tins as part of The Biscuit Tin project, a partnership by Celebrate Ageing and Whitehorse City Council.

Biscuit tins are an iconic, cross-cultural symbol of the caring and nurturing roles older women play. Older women told us they want these contributions to be recognised - alongside all the contributions they make. In response, The Biscuit Tin project raises awareness of the ageism and sexism experienced by older women - and promotes recognition of their achievements.

For more information:

[#TheBiscuitTin](#), presentation at the Embolden Festival 2024.

[Whitehorse Council website](#)



# Questions to start conversations

**Think about the older women that you know personally.**

- What contributions have they made/do they make to your life?
- What contributions do they make to their families, workplaces and communities?

**Consider how older women are depicted in advertising, films and television, popular culture.**

- Are there some common stereotypes or themes?
- What messages do they send to older women about how they are viewed?
- How do these representations compare to how older women are portrayed in our organisation's publications and materials?
- What can I/we do to challenge stereotypes and better represent the diversity and achievements of older women?

**In our organisation, how are we addressing the inequalities that older women experience?**

- What are we/ could we do to learn from older women about their experiences and needs to inform our program/service planning and delivery?
- What other ideas do we have to promote equality and respect for older women?



# Resources to support conversations

## Text based resources

Catherine Barret and Kate Burrige 2024, [From cauldrons to cardigans - the lurking prejudices behind the name 'Granny.'](#) The Conversation.

Deborah Wood 2023, [Society 'disappears' ageing women. So I harnessed that cloak of invisibility to do all sorts of 'inappropriate' things.](#) The Guardian.

Catherine Barrett, Ana Gilbard, Debra Nicoll, Geoff Rowe and Yumi Lee 2024, [The \[un\] silencing of older women – a gender lens for elder abuse. \(Draft version\).](#)

Eastern Community Legal Centre [Preventing Abuse of Older People in Melbourne's east: A Primary Prevention Framework and Guide.](#)

Women's Health Grampians & Ballarat Community Health. 2021. [Elder abuse and gender inequality: make the link](#)

## Videos

Celebrate Ageing, [Embolden 2024, a festival that aims to combat ageism and build respect for older people.](#) Recorded presentations.

OPERA (Older People, Equity, Respect & Ageing) [videos by older people in Melbourne's east.](#) These videos challenge ageism, age discrimination and elder abuse.

[Old School: A hub for age equity + ageism awareness.](#) These videos feature a range of campaign and celebrity videos challenging ageism and envisioning a world without it.

[Let's end ageism.](#) Ted talk by Ashton Applewhite urging us all to dismantle the dread and mobilise against the last socially acceptable prejudice.

Robyn Smith, Sarah Codling and Dilnaz Billimoria, [#TheBiscuitTin](#), presentation at the Embolden Festival 2024.

[For Her Age](#) a campaign developed by a partnership of Participant and AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) exploring this phrase, "She looks great for her age."

## References

1. Catherine Barrett, Ana Gilbard, Debra Nicoll, Geoff Rowe and Yumi Lee 2024, [The \[un\] silencing of older women – a gender lens for elder abuse. \(Draft version\).](#)
2. Victorian Government, [Gender Equality Act 2020 \(Victoria\).](#)
3. Victorian Government, [Free from Violence.](#)
4. Our Watch 2021, [Educating for Equality: Glossary of key terms and definitions.](#)
5. Melbourne Institute Applied Economic and Social Research 2017, [The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 15.](#)
6. Australian Human Rights Commission 2021, [Safety and Security for Older Women- National Summit on Women’s Safety.](#)
7. Carers Australia 2022, [Carers need more mental health and wellbeing supports this National Carers Week, and beyond.](#)
8. Australian Human Rights Commission 2019, [Older Women’s Risk of Homelessness: Background Paper.](#)
9. Melbourne Institute Applied Economic and Social Research 2017, [The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 15.](#)
10. Australian Human Rights Commission 2021, [Safety and Security for Older Women- National Summit on Women’s Safety.](#)
11. Australian Institute of Family Studies 2021, [National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report.](#)
12. KPMG 2019, [Prevalence Study for a Serious Incident Response Scheme \(SIRS\).](#)

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The resources are available to view and download at [whe.org.au/tfer/16-days/](http://whe.org.au/tfer/16-days/)

