



# ReportAGE

Media guidelines for portraying  
people who are older





*'As the Chair of the NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing, I am pleased to release these media guidelines on reporting on older people. I hope that media professionals find the advice in this guide useful to their work in informing the community on issues related to ageing, and in celebrating the contributions and diversity of older people.'*

## Why do we need media guidelines?

This guide is to help journalists and other professionals working in the media to appropriately portray older people. It includes practical advice about what to consider when reporting on older people and on issues related to ageing.

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*In fifteen years time, one in three people in Australia will be 50 or older.<sup>1</sup>*

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As the number of older people in Australia rises and conversation continues about the challenges of an ageing population, there is growing concern about the negative influence of ageism on the community.

Inaccurate portrayals of older people can cause a lack of understanding of issues that are important to them and a belittling of their views. It can also lead to more harmful behaviour. When ageist attitudes are widespread, and when they come to be internalised by older people themselves, this can impact on older people's rights. For example, underlying ageist attitudes can play a role in the abuse or neglect of older people.





*Research by the Australian Human Rights Commission highlights the role of the media in shaping public perceptions of older people. Its report 'Fact or Fiction? Stereotypes of Older Australians' includes findings on how media content influences specific stereotypes about older people.*

*For example, over 70% of Australians feel that stories they have seen or read in the media influence their perception that older people are victims.<sup>2</sup>*

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Across most professional codes for media communication there are shared value statements encouraging high standards of ethics and behaviour among media professionals. For instance, the Australian Press Council principles of accuracy and clarity and of fairness and balance aim to ensure high standards of reporting, including reporting on people who are older.<sup>3</sup>

Accurate reporting includes avoiding reliance on stereotypes, which may be based on a person's age, gender, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.

This guide recognises the important role of the media in informing and influencing members of the community. It aims to ensure older people are respected, and their experiences, diversity and contributions are recognised.

# Thinking and talking about people who are older

This list includes some things to think about when developing material about older people:

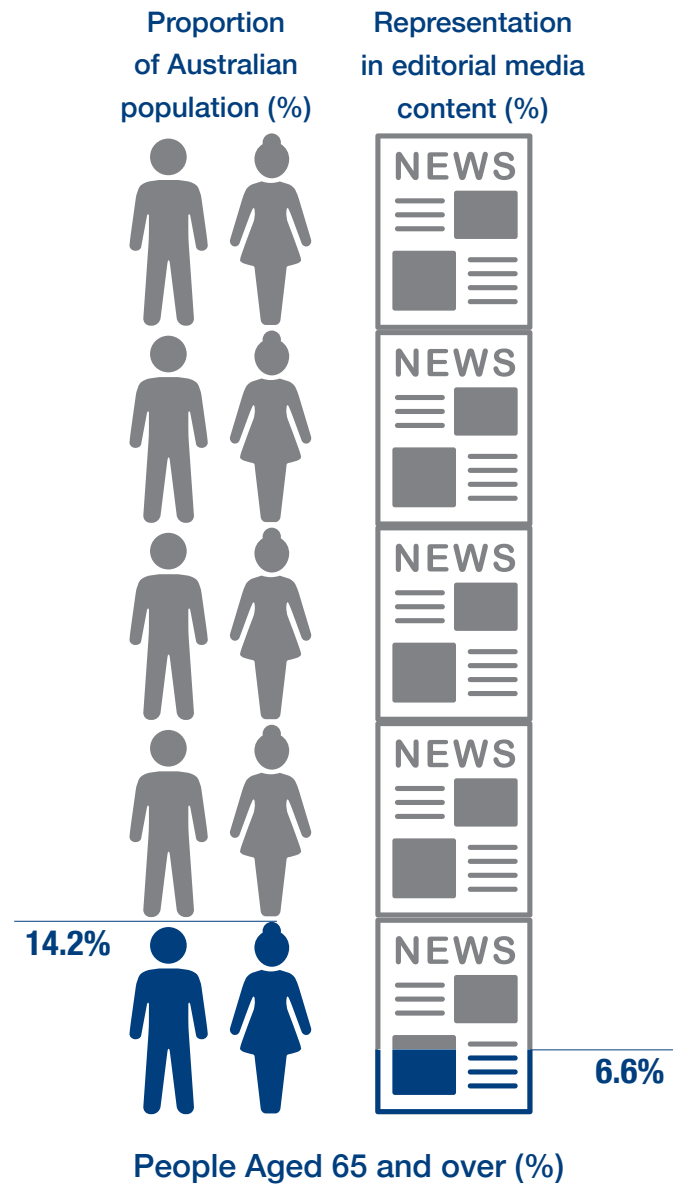
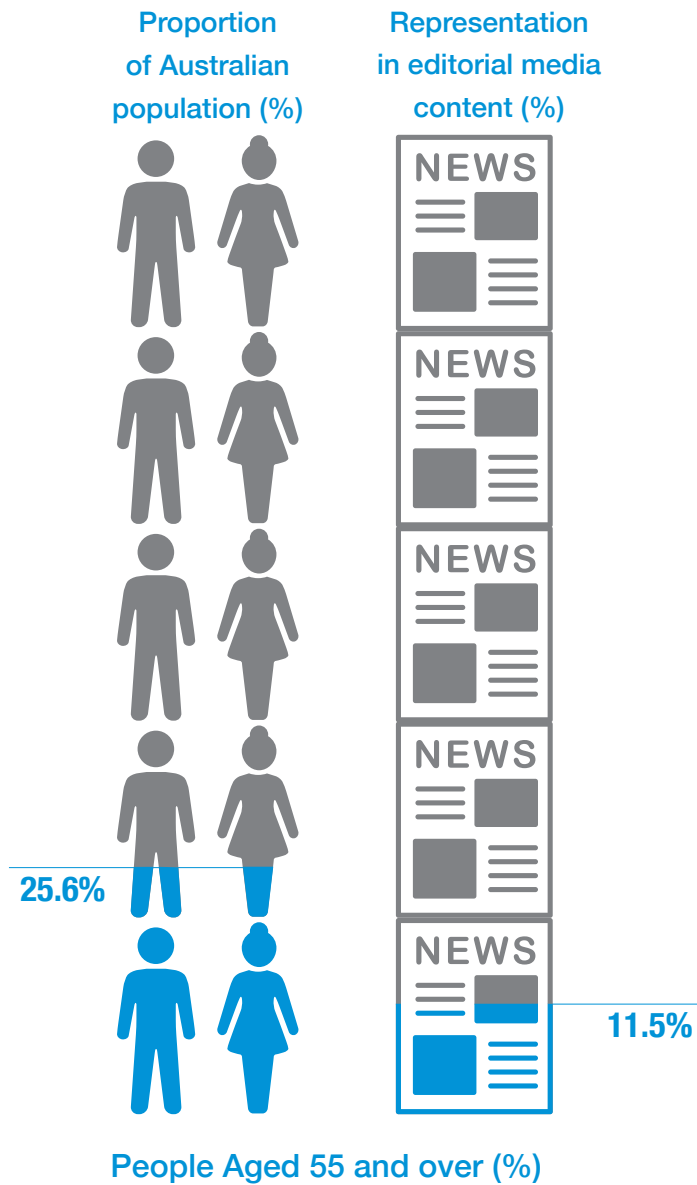
| Think About  | Because   |
|--|---|
| <b>How is the person's age important to the story?</b>             | A person's age does not define them. It may be more appropriate to detail their amount of experience, for example, 'Michelle has over forty years experience in the banking sector'.  |
| <b>How will the older person's voice be included in the story?</b> | Like people of all ages and backgrounds, people who are older have their own distinct opinions and beliefs. Generalising about the views of 'older people' as a uniform group can impact the accuracy of the story.   |
| <b>How are the older person's contributions described?</b>         | <p>People continue to contribute to the community and the economy in a variety of ways as they age. Achievements of an older person should be presented without being inappropriately framed as a remarkable feat.</p> <p>It may be helpful to think about how you would report on the same achievement of a younger person with the same level of experience and wellbeing, to help ensure language does not patronise older people.</p> |





| Think About  | Because  |
|--|--|
| <b>Is the person's age framed as a barrier?</b>  | A person's age does not indicate their ability to contribute to the community. Wording such as 'despite being 88 years old' suggests people are limited by their age, instead of focusing on their level of skill and ability.   |
| <b>When reporting on ageing issues, is equal focus given to both the challenges and opportunities?</b> | An ageing population creates change that can bring both challenges and opportunities. For example, there can be challenges in delivering services, but may also be new opportunities, such as expanded markets for goods and services tailored towards people who are older.   |
| <b>Does the story highlight diversity among older people?</b>  | People value media that shows the diversity within the older population, rather than relying on stereotypes that lump older people together. <sup>4</sup>  |
| <b>Does the story focus on the person's past or present contributions?</b>                             | Recognising the current contribution of older people is equally important as their past contributions. Stories with a purely retrospective angle that focus on an older person's contribution in their youth, for example, war stories, fail to acknowledge the present contribution of an older person to society. <sup>5</sup> |

# Media representation of older people compared to proportion of Australian population<sup>6</sup>





## Other resources

Alzheimer's Australia NSW has produced media guidelines for reporting on dementia and dementia language guidelines, available at

[www.fightdementia.org.au](http://www.fightdementia.org.au)

## Acknowledgements & references

This guide draws on information from:

*Department of Human Services, Victoria Government. Reporting it Right: Media Guidelines for Portraying People with a Disability. 2012*

*The Australian Human Rights Commission Research Report Fact or Fiction? Stereotypes of Older Australians. 2013.*

*The Australian Press Council. Statement of General Principles. 2014.*

*The Australian Bureau of Statistics. Population Projections. 2013.*

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. 3222.0 – Population Projections, Australia, 2012 (base) to 2101. 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission. Research Report Fact or Fiction: Stereotypes of Older Australians. 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Press Council. Statement of General Principles. 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission. Research Report Fact or Fiction: Stereotypes of Older Australians. 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Figures are as at 2012.

## About the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing

The NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing (MACA) is the official advisory body to the NSW Government on matters of interest to older people.

Through its work, the MACA supports the Minister for Ageing in achieving healthy and productive ageing for the people of NSW, consistent with the NSW Ageing Strategy.

For more information including about the MACA media awards for reporting on ageing and older people, visit the MACA website at [www.maca.nsw.gov.au](http://www.maca.nsw.gov.au)

