Because Words Matter
Reframing Public Health Issues with a Focus on Aging

Alrie McNiff Daniels
Senior Communications Officer, Tufts Health Plan Foundation
Certified Facilitator, Reframing Aging
Today’s Agenda

- Welcome/review agenda
- Framing 101 and FrameWorks
- Framing social issues
- Why reframing aging?
- What the public thinks about aging
- Table exercise
- Telling a new story about aging
- Discussion: What we need from you
- Share resources
What is framing?

- The choices we make when presenting information
- How those choices affect attitudes, understandings, actions.
The power of frames

- Shifts how people understand/respond to issues
- Builds movements for change
Frames can drive broad social change

Communication → Discourse → Thinking → Policy
FrameWorks Institute

Changing the conversation on social justice issues

Gauging Aging: Mapping the Gaps Between Expert and Public Understandings of Aging in America

Sample size: 12,185
Picture This: How We Frame Issues Matters for Social Change

Picture This is a multi-part series presented in partnership with The Communications Network, the FrameWorks Institute, and leading organizations working on today's most urgent and seemingly intractable social issues. In this series, you will learn what framing is, why it matters, and how it profoundly influences our understanding of social challenges and how we think and talk about potential solutions.
Why are we Reframing Aging?
Systems, policies, practices outdated

1900
M 46.3  F 48.3

1935
M 59.9  F 63.9

CURRENT
M 76.3  F 81.1
A Century of Change
Population of the United States

1960
- Male
- Female

2060
- Male
- Female

Ages
85+
80-84
75-79
70-74
65-69
60-64
55-59
50-54
45-49
40-44
35-39
30-34
25-29
20-24
15-19
10-14
5-9
0-4

Millions of people
Impact of misperceptions

- Workforce discrimination
- Limit older people’s ability to contribute
- Less support for policies benefitting older people
- Ageism even has an impact on older people ourselves
Reframing works

- Changed attitudes
- Increased policy support
- Decreased implicit bias
Navigating “the swamp” of public understanding
Experts say . . . the public thinks

- How should we approach aging?
- What determines outcomes and who is responsible?
- How big a concern is ageism?
- What can be done to ensure well-being in older age?
- What is the role of public policy?
Cultural models drive people’s thinking

- People rely on cultural models to interpret, organize and make meaning out of all sorts of stimuli, including experiences, feelings, thoughts—and our communications.
Ideal vs. Perceived “Real”
- Accumulated wisdom
- Self-sufficiency
- Staying active
- Earned leisure

“Us” vs. “Them”
- Older as “other”
- Zero sum
- Digital incompetence

Individualism
- Lifestyle choices
- Financial planning

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

What’s in the Swamp of...

Aging

Nostalgia and Threat of Modernity
- Family dispersal
- Economic challenges
- Social Security is doomed

What Surrounds Us Shapes Us

Problems Can Be Solved

Collective Responsibility
Table exercise

What’s in the news?

- Read for 5 minutes
- Note “swampy” themes
- Report out
What can we do about it?

- Learn about the swamp and anticipate public thinking
- “Reframe” our messages applying this knowledge
- Invite rethinking by using metaphors and other tools
Telling a new story about aging
HOW DO WE TELL A DIFFERENT STORY?

We tell a social issue narrative.

1. Values
   Why does this matter?

2. Explanations and metaphors
   How does this work?
   If it doesn't work, why not?

3. Solutions
   What can we do?
   Concrete, Causal, Collective, Credible, Conceivable
 VALUES

Why does this matter?

- If we tap into our *ingenuity*, we can figure out ways to ensure our communities are ready to support residents continued wellbeing throughout later life.
Aging is a dynamic process. As we get older, we gather momentum and build up experience and insights. This momentum can add power and force to our communities and help them move forward.

Use your Community Profile to identify specific opportunities.
SOLUTIONS

What can we do?

- By adopting age-friendly policies, we make it possible to reap the benefits of the momentum of experience and wisdom that we accumulate as we age.

- Examples: intergenerational centers, age-friendly businesses, programs to engage older people
The Embracing the Dynamic Narrative
A social issue story about aging

How does this work?

Why does this matter?

The Ingenuity Value:
Let’s use innovation to re-envision aging in the US.

The Building Momentum Metaphor:
As we get older we build momentum, which powers us to take up new ideas and advance toward new goals. This energy powers up our society and moves our communities forward.

What solutions can we adopt?

A Concrete Solution:
Intergenerational community centers can boost older people’s participation in our communities.
FILL-IN THE BLANK: TELLING YOUR STORY

Value: INGENUITY

Metaphor: BUILDING MOMENTUM

3. Solution: YOURS
Lead with a value to explain why this matters

- When we support well-being, we make sure that everyone can maximize their potential and fully contribute to our communities. This helps our communities thrive and remain vibrant.
We need solid social “beams” in our society so that we can all participate fully in our communities as we age.

Allows people to think about coordinated, collective action.
SOLUTIONS
To support healthy aging

- Highlight collective solutions that are driven by structural changes.
- Healthy aging requires community resources, social relationships, and opportunities to thrive.
- Safe and reliable public transportation
Discussion
• Do you think these messages will work in your communities?

• What is missing?

• How can we help? What do you need?

*Discuss at tables and report out.*
Resources

- Gaining Momentum Toolkit
  http://frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/aging/

- Frame Brief: Faming Strategies to Advance Aging/Address Aging as Policy Issues

- Talking Rural Issues Toolkit
  http://frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/htri/index.html

- Elder Abuse
  https://frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/elderabuse/
Resources

- Stanford Social Innovation Review
  https://ssir.org/picture_this_how_we_frame_issues_matters_for_social_change

- Implicit Association Tests
  https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/
Thank you
The following slides are examples for reference; were not part of the presentation
As more of us live longer, healthier lives, New Hampshire faces a powerful opportunity to rethink the future of our communities. So many of us continue to have so much to offer as we age, but many of our current policies, structures, and cultural assumptions fail to take advantage of the new realities of an older Granite State.

Thanks to dramatic advances in medicine, public health and lifestyle choices, nearly half of our children in New Hampshire born today can expect to live to 100. Demographic trends show us that by 2030, nearly half a million people in New Hampshire will be over the age of 65.

This permanent shift toward longer lives affects where we live and how we work, obtain healthcare, and navigate our day-to-day lives. Current approaches, however, are insufficient. We must roll up our sleeves and imagine new ways to think and act, new ways to shape the places in which we live.

The New Hampshire Alliance for Healthy Aging (NHAHA)....
Changing the Narrative Colorado

Like people across the country and world, Coloradans are living longer and healthier lives. Yet national research conducted by FrameWorks Institute over the last three years shows that aging is misunderstood in America, and ageist and negative stereotypes about older people abound.

By marginalizing older people and minimizing their contributions, ageist attitudes and stereotypes harm not only older people but also our communities, which fail to benefit from the build up of experience and insights that all of us acquire as we age.
Words to watch

- “Us” vs “them” pronouns (they instead of we)
- Crisis; silver tsunami, demographic cliff
- Elderly, seniors, senior citizen
- Zero sum; finite resources
- Burden, vulnerable
- Stories without solutions