

# IMAGE GUIDELINES FOR CARE AND LATER LIFE

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### Image Guidelines for Care and Later Life

Co-produced by the Images of Care Researchers and Participants

Published by the Advanced Care Research Centre (ACRC)

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Illustrations by everyoneIlovescake.co.uk

This publication presents guidelines for selecting and creating images of care and later life. Developed collaboratively by researchers and participants of the Images of Care research project at the Advanced Care Research Centre. We would like to acknowledge and extend our sincere gratitude to the participants whose invaluable insights and experiences have significantly contributed to the development of these guidelines.

This document has been developed with funding from the Legal & General Group (research grant to establish the independent Advanced Care Research Centre at The University of Edinburgh). The funder had no role in conduct of the study, interpretation, or the decision to create this publication. The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Legal & General.

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# ABOUT THESE GUIDELINES

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Thank you for reading our image guidelines for care and later life. Images have a significant impact on how we perceive older adults and the care they receive. Our guidelines are designed to help you use images that accurately and respectfully represent older adults and care.

These guidelines were developed through research conducted as part of the Images of Care project at The University of Edinburgh's Advanced Care Research Centre. This research found that media images often reinforce negative stereotypes when discussing care and later life. To address this issue and promote better representation of care in later life, we created these guidelines with older adults.

## WHY ARE GUIDELINES IMPORTANT?

Images are powerful, shaping our understanding of the world and how we think about people, including older adults. We increasingly rely on media images to help us make sense of the world around us. Images are a significant part of the media we see around us, impacting how we receive information and shaping our perception of the world. But sometimes, the media portray older adults and later life in a negative light. They tend to depict older adults primarily in terms of healthcare, as burdens or objects of pity, perpetuating unfavourable stereotypes about ageing. These stereotypes are mainly generated around discussions of care, often framed as a loss of independence and burden. Not all representations of older adults are bad, but when it comes to care, the news media is often guilty of reinforcing these stereotypes.

## HOW CAN IMAGES HELP?

Studies have found that older adults themselves feel that they are represented poorly in the media, and can internalise these negative messages about ageing. In our research, we found that people lacked trust in the media and had very low expectations of how older adults were being represented. We made these guidelines to help us be more thoughtful of the images that we choose to represent older adults and the messages we are sending about later life and care. If we use images that show older adults more respectfully and honestly, especially around topics of care, then we can potentially generate better attitudes towards both ageing and the media.

## WHAT DOES CARE MEAN?

In media, care is often narrowly defined. It is mostly portrayed as something medical or a formal relationship that is done by paid professionals. These representations of care often occur in a home or medical setting. These images make care seem like something older adults passively receive, rather than something they give or do. This media portrayal tends to focus on care as a problem or a burden. Such a limited portrayal affects how we think about care and makes it hard to imagine a positive future for ourselves as we age and develop different care needs.

But in reality, care is much broader and encompasses a wider spectrum of interactions and emotions. Care is something that we give and receive throughout our lives by many people and institutions. It is not just medical or done by paid care workers – it happens between family members, friends, neighbours, and even strangers. It can encompass caring for people, places, things, animals, and more. Though care can be difficult and sometimes requires hard decisions, it also shows up in everyday moments, making it a deeply emotional yet ordinary part of our lives. Given the breadth and fluidity of care as a concept, it is crucial to move away from the narrow, medical definitions of care.

**As you read through these guidelines, we invite you to rethink how you see care in later life:**

- Are you only framing it through a healthcare lens?
- Are older adults exclusively portrayed as care recipients?
- Are you exploring the full spectrum of care?

The sections that follow will help you choose images that give a more comprehensive and balanced perspective on care and later life.

**“...the power of the media is so magnificent, really. Whether you like it or not, it has the possibility to influence people.”**

Research participant, Female, 60-64

# TOP 10 TIPS

## 1 Involve older adults

Engage older adults from diverse backgrounds in the image selection process from the outset. Place older adults in decision making roles around representation.

## 2 Ensure images are relevant

Whenever possible, use your own photographs to represent real experiences. If you must use stock images, choose those that are relevant and that accurately represent the topic. The context of the image should align with the narrative and not be misleading.

## 3 Avoid isolation and disengagement

Images of older adults alone or isolated can perpetuate negative perceptions of later life. Choose images that depict older adults interacting with others, including intergenerational interactions, to highlight the social nature of care and challenge stereotypes of loneliness.

## 4 Emphasise diversity

Showcase the diversity of older adults, including various identities, ethnicities, races, styles of dress, social classes, interests, sexual orientations, genders, and abilities.

## 5 Show realistic, active older adults

Select images showing older adults actively engaged in diverse yet realistic everyday activities, not extraordinary activities. To improve perception of later life, avoid both overly positive portrayals and images of older adults struggling with activities.





## 6 Consider the carer

Be mindful of who you're portraying as the caregiver. Balance formal and informal caregivers to reflect the multifaceted nature of care. Show older adults engaged in caregiving and consider the gender diversity of carers to normalise male contributions to care work.

## 7 Depict mobility aids thoughtfully

When featuring mobility aids, ensure they are present but not the primary focus of the image. Focus instead on the older adult's engagement in various activities with others and avoid images depicting struggles with mobility aids.

## 8 Be mindful of touch & assistance

Consider how touch and assistance are depicted in images. Show older adults caring for others to challenge the portrayal of care as a unidirectional. Also avoid images of older adults that hide or crop out their faces, unless it is of a sensitive topic.

## 9 Diversify the image setting

Go beyond depicting care in homes and medical facilities. Choose images that show care in various settings, such as outdoor environments and community spaces, to normalise care as part of everyday life.

## 10 Consent, credit, & caption

Always obtain explicit consent for image use and credit the image source, even if it is not required.

Include captions to acknowledge the source, explicitly state that consent was obtained, and provide truthful background context to the image.

# HOW TO CHOOSE & USE IMAGES

In this section of the guidelines, we provide tips for sourcing and using images. Creating better representations of care and later life begins with considering where your images come from and the best practice for using and publishing images.

## SOURCING IMAGES

The first thing to keep in mind when selecting images is that people have varied responses to them and not every image is appropriate in all contexts. There's no one-size-fits-all perfect image. However, there are general trends and considerations that can help guide you when selecting an image.

### DO YOU NEED AN IMAGE?

In our image-saturated world, it's easy to add pictures without giving it much thought. But, images are powerful and should always serve a purpose. People appreciate images that are personal, tell a story, and have a clear intent. Ask yourself, 'Does this image serve a purpose?' If not, consider whether you need an image at all.

### TAKE YOUR OWN PHOTOGRAPHS

If possible, it's best to take your own photos rather than using stock images. It is crucial to be as truthful as possible in your images in order to represent the individuals or story. Images should reflect real experiences. However, we understand that in situations with fast approaching deadlines or significant budget constraints, using stock photos might be necessary. Continue reading to learn more about how to use stock photos.

#### Ask yourself...

'Does this image serve a purpose?' If not, consider whether you need an image at all.

## **CHOOSE PHOTOS THAT ARE RELEVANT**

Sometimes taking your own photos is not an option and you can't avoid using stock images. In this case make sure to select stock images that directly relate to the topic and are representative of real life situations. This might seem obvious, but more than anything else, the context of an image is the most important criteria. Ensure that the context of the image is accurate and not misleading.

## **SEEK INPUT FROM OLDER ADULTS**

If you are not a part of the older adult demographic group that you are representing, it is good practice to involve older adults from diverse backgrounds in the image throughout your project. Rather than seeking their input only at the end of the process, engage older adults from the beginning. Include them in decision-making positions during image selection, creation, editing, and curation.

## **CONSENT, CREDIT, AND CAPTIONS**

Receiving care can still carry social stigma. Responsible media and image use can help reduce this stigma, but care is still personal and requires informed consent. Gathering consent is essential, and explicitly stating that consent was obtained for image reproduction is important. This practice normalises the need for consent and reinforces individuals' rights to privacy and confidentiality. When publishing or reproducing an image, specify the image's source and give proper credit. Captions should provide context for the viewer.

See next page for detailed instructions on how to effectively caption your image.

**“...context is important. And if you get a preponderance, for no reason, of negative images, it just, reflects the way that people see older people. [...] Everybody assumes that in older age, it goes downhill.”**

Research participant, Female, 65-69



## How to caption your image:

### 1. Credit:

Credit the image by stating the image's source, even if you are not required to do so.

### 2. Consent:

If people are present in the image include a statement that individuals in the image gave their consent, even if it is not legally required to do so. This is especially important when using images of people in vulnerable positions, such as in a hospital.

### 3. Context:

Include a clear and truthful description and context of the image. This is instrumental for building trust in the message being communicated.

## GATHERING CONSENT

When taking your own photographs, always obtain consent for their use and explicitly state consent was gathered in the image's publication, even if not legally required. Ensure individuals in the photo understand how and where the image will be used. Stating that consent was gathered in the publication of an image helps viewers feel more comfortable, especially when discussing sensitive topics.

## IMAGE CREDIT

Always acknowledge the image's source by giving credit, even when not legally obligated. Increasing transparency in the selection and sourcing of images helps build trust with the viewer and ensures continued consent for image reproduction.

## ONLINE ACCESSIBILITY

For images published online, ensure they have alt text for the visually impaired.

# IMAGE CONTENTS

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In this section, we take a closer look at the content and composition of an image. We provide suggestions and considerations for portraying older adults and care, steering clear of stereotypes, and ensuring inclusivity in images by addressing the following questions.

## WHO IS IN THE IMAGE?

When selecting images, think about whether the central subject reinforces stereotypes about older adults as vulnerable or a burden. Ensure that older adults are depicted in diverse and meaningful ways rather than solely as care recipients.

### KEEP THE FOCUS ON THE OLDER ADULT

In contexts involving older adults, it is essential that the image features an older adult. For example, if you're creating a news article about care in later life, avoid using images of experts or politicians to speak for the experiences of older adults. Instead, prioritise images of older adults themselves speaking about the issue. This approach ensures that older adults have a voice in representing their own experiences.

### CONSIDER THE OLDER ADULT'S POSITION

When an image has multiple subjects, consider the placement of the older adult within the frame. Avoid images where the older adult is in a lower position in the frame. These images can unintentionally infantilise older adults by showing them with relatively less power and importance.



**Avoid:**  
images that are framed too close up and that remove people's faces

### AVOID FACELESS IMAGES

Make sure the faces of older adults are visible. Avoid images that focus only on one body part or exclude the face such as a close-up of hands, images taken from the back, or images that crop out the face. Such faceless images can dehumanise older adults. However, in cases where an image is of a sensitive topic,

anonymising identifiable features may be necessary to respect that person's anonymity. Though, in such instances it may be better to reconsider whether an image is necessary at all.

#### Consider:

framing images so that you can see the person and the wider context



## AVOID EMPHASISING AGE AND CARE

Images of care can oversimplify older adults by focusing solely on their age and care needs. Yet, older adults have diverse identities beyond age. When portraying their experiences, use images that capture their full identity. For example, in an article about a woman in a care home, focus on her as a whole person beyond being a care home resident. To achieve this, consider images that reflect the diversity of individuals in later life.

## REPRESENT DIVERSITY

Along with an overall lack of diversity, our research found that only 3% of images of older adults in news articles about care feature people of colour. To make visible the diversity in later life, select images of older adults with greater diversity not only in ethnicity and race but also in style of dress, social class, interests, sexual orientation, gender, ability, etc. Such images are inclusive and combat the notion that all older adults are the same.

## AVOID SHOWING OLDER ADULTS ALONE

Images of older adults alone are the most common images we see in the media. These images can perpetuate negative perceptions of later life as lonely, unproductive, or as a decline. They are also often used to communicate to us that care is a problem or something to avoid. Images that include others are more effective in conveying care and in changing negative perceptions of both care and later life. Consider images of older adults interacting with one another and explore intergenerational images that break stereotypes of care in later life as isolating.

### Ask yourself...

A good way to judge if an image is perpetuating negative stereotypes is to ask yourself, **'Would I want to be the subject of this image?'**

If the answer is no, reconsider if you need to use that image.

**“I think, as we get older, we don't lose hope and belief that we can still do things”**

Research participant, Male, 60-64

## ARE THERE CARERS IN THE IMAGE?

Carefully consider the images you choose to represent carers. These images not only affect perceptions of care but also shape how we view older adults and experiences of ageing.

### CONSIDER THE TYPE OF CARE

In media images, carers are often portrayed as formal, paid care workers. However, this representation overlooks informal caregivers, such as family members, and oversimplifies the complexity of care. Consider images that balance formal and informal carers to reflect the multifaceted nature of care.

### REPRESENT OLDER ADULTS AS CARERS

Images of carers are also rarely of older adults. Our research found only 2% of images of carers were older adults. This obscures and devalues the care that older adults provide, such as spousal caregiving. Showing older adults in caregiving roles is crucial to changing incorrect assumptions about care.

### PORTRAY CARE AS RECIPROCAL

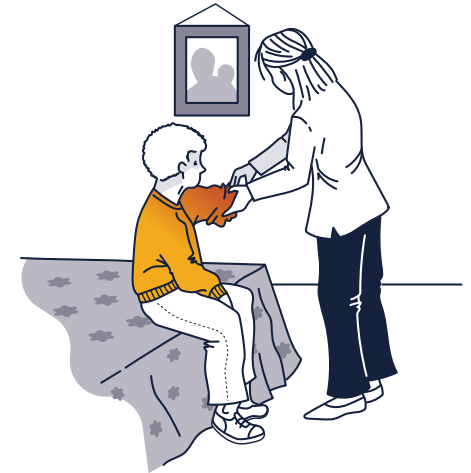
Care doesn't only flow from caregiver to receiver. The dynamics of giving and receiving care are complex and change throughout our lives. Yet, media images often portray care as something only happening to older adults. To challenge this portrayal, select images that show the reciprocity in care relationships.

### DIVERSIFY GENDER IN CARE WORK

The media predominantly depicts carers as female. While women generally take on the bulk of formal and informal care responsibilities, a more balanced representation of genders in care work is one step towards normalising male caregiving.



**Avoid:**  
relying solely on medial or formal images of care that focus only on caring for the body, and avoid images where older adults are disengaged or passively receiving care



**Consider:**  
images where older adults and carers are engaged in activities and where care is seen as reciprocal and communal



## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE IMAGE?

A significant part of an image's meaning can come from the actions it portrays and what is happening in the image. This section will provide tools for considering the activities in images related to care and later life. Remember it is important consider how relevant an image is to the context. An image of someone being assisted doing a daily task may be relevant in promotional materials for a care service, however viewers would consider it inappropriate for a general topic on older adults.

### AVOID DISENGAGED IMAGES

Steer clear of images in which older adults appear disengaged from activities or are portrayed as mentally absent, such as gazing off into the distance or separate from others in the image. These images can reinforce stereotypes of older adults as detached, separate, incompetent, unproductive, and irrelevant. Instead choose images where older adults are actively participating in the actions portrayed.

### AVOID OVERUSING PASSIVE IMAGES

In most news media images, older adults are often depicted doing passive activities like sitting or lying down. When they engage in activities, they are often being assisted. These images contribute to the negative perception of later life as a loss of independence. It's important to select images that depict older adults actively engaged, even if they require assistance.

#### Ask yourself...

'Is this image realistic?' Images that are overly positive or portray unrealistic levels of activity can inadvertently blame those who may not be as active. Choose realistic depictions of everyday activities.

**“You want to promote happiness, you don't want to promote misery.”**

Research participant, Female, 60-64

## BE MINDFUL OF TOUCH IN IMAGES

Older adults are more likely to be the recipients of touch and physical assistance in media images of care. In order to represent care as a reciprocal act that older adults also engage in, consider how touch and assistance are being depicted. Avoid using images that solely show older adults receiving comforting touch. Instead, opt for images where older adults are in control of touch and/or are offering physical care to others.

## USE ACTIVE IMAGES WITHIN REASON

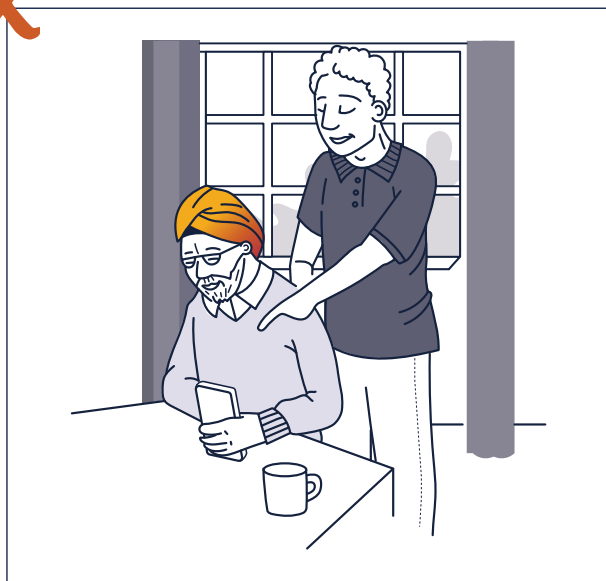
Choosing images that depict older adults in active, realistic roles is a powerful way to combat negative stereotypes. However, it's equally important that these images remain true to life and are not unrealistic. Images that are overly positive or portray unrealistic levels of activity can inadvertently blame those who may not be as active. Opt for images of older adults engaged in everyday activities to promote a realistic view of ageing.

## DIVERSE ACTIVITIES WITHOUT STRUGGLE

Choose images that present a variety of tasks and activities in which older adults are engaged. It is important to show older adults using technology, doing administrative tasks, and working. However, refrain from portraying older adults as struggling or in need of

assistance with these tasks. The aim is to normalise the idea of older adults, even those with care needs, participating in a wide range of everyday activities. When older adults are struggling in these images, it can have the opposite effect.

X



**Consider:**  
showing older adults doing reasonable and diverse activities. Also consider images of older adults using technology but without struggling

**Avoid:**  
images that show older adults as incapable or struggling with everyday tasks like using technology

✓



## WHAT IS THE SETTING LIKE?

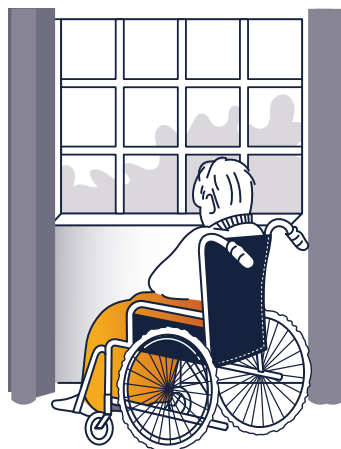
The setting is crucial in how people understand an image. It is highly important but often overlooked when choosing images. Ask yourself if the setting fits the context and what it tells you about care, later life, class, identity, and more. This section will provide you with helpful considerations for the settings in your images.

### CHOOSE DIVERSE SETTINGS

Most images related to care and later life are taken indoors, often in homes or medical settings. These settings can make care seem like a private, medical issue, further isolating ageing and care in a negative light. However, care happens in various places like outdoor environments and public or community spaces. Consider using images of older adults in work and community settings which have a more positive impact on changing perceptions of ageing than images in the home. More diverse settings can also normalise care as part of everyday life.

### TRY NEW PERSPECTIVES

In media images, the typical perspective positions us as outsiders looking in on the scene. This can make us feel detached from the action. But, we can also explore composing images from the older adult's perspective. This framing diversifies how we represent care and encourages empathising with older adults by seeing their point of view.



**Avoid:**  
images of older adults alone and images of mobility aids as isolating or the main focus of the image

## USING MOBILITY AIDS THOUGHTFULLY

Mobility aids, like canes or wheelchairs, need more visibility in media in general. They are important tools for many people, both young and old. Avoid making the aid the main focus or depicting older adults as struggling. Instead, use images where the aid is present but not the primary

focus. Additionally, refrain from using images that only show the mobility aid without people. By using images of mobility aids in this way, we help normalise these aids in our daily lives.

**Consider:**  
showcasing older adults with mobility aids engaging in various activities and interacting with others





# KEY TAKEAWAYS

We hope these guidelines can help you choose images that make a positive impact on how we see older adults and care. When you opt for images that give a fair representation, you're taking a step to challenge stereotypes and tackle biases, promoting a more inclusive view of later life. Here are some important key points we hope you will take away from these guidelines.

## **OLDER ADULTS BEYOND AGEING**

Older adults are rarely visible in the media, seen only when they are being marketed to or in topics directly about ageing. To change how we see older adults and think about later life, we need to give them more visibility in various media topics unrelated to ageing and care. This means featuring older adults in all sorts of contexts and activities, breaking the habit of only featuring them when problems arise.

## **STRIVE FOR BALANCE**

Our goal is to show older adults in a balanced light. Avoid going too far in emphasising the negatives or exaggerating the positives of later life. Overly positive images tend to be anti-ageing by implying that staying young is better, potentially shaming those who require care. Additionally, avoid humorous images that make older adults the punchline. Let's shift our focus towards images that are realistic, respectful, and maintain the dignity of older individuals, offering a more nuanced perspective of the complexity and diversity of later life.

“...it’s about  
stopping  
discrimination,  
and stereotyping  
people, in all  
shapes and  
forms”

Research participant, Female, 60-64





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