

# IMPROVING COVERAGE OF OLDER PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIAN NEWS

## 📍 THE CONTEXT:

As journalists, we have a responsibility to ‘boldly tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience’ and ‘seek sources whose voices we seldom hear’. One of these is older people, who comprised in 2022 about [one-third of Australian voters](#) but are **under-represented in Australian news coverage**.

When older people are represented in the news, journalists tend to depict them in stereotypical, shallow, or disempowering ways. Our [team](#) reviewed more than 500 aged-care related news stories and depictions from 2018-2021 across 13 Australian outlets and [identified](#) several trends about how journalists tend to cover ageing and older people.

## 🌱 A MORE CONSIDERED APPROACH:

The below nine considerations can help you ponder your and your outlet’s coverage of older people in order to disrupt these patterns and create more respectful, representative, and engaging news about older people in the future:

- 1. How much are you showing older people as frail, isolated, or lonely?** News coverage can shape how older people see themselves as well as how the broader population sees them. Is your coverage representative of the connections older people have to family members, friends, and carers, or does it portray them as isolated or lonely?
- 2. How much are you focusing on the financial or political implications of an ageing population entering aged care?** Do you do this at the expense of stories about the social implications for individuals, families and communities?
- 3. How prevalent are older people’s views, images, and stories in your coverage?** Is this representative of your audience’s demographics?
- 4. Does your coverage humanise older people and cultivate empathy and compassion toward them, or does it present them as depersonalised?** Our ability to empathise with older people can be hindered or prevented entirely when we see them not as individuals with unique stories and histories but rather as statistics or depersonalised figures.
- 5. Does your coverage draw on disembodied visual clichés, such as clasped hands, mobility aids (walking sticks, wheelchairs), or pills being dispensed?** Using specific imagery—such as footage of older people interacting with family members or carers, or participating in activities or hobbies, as well as specific details such as their favourite possessions in their room and family photographs—is more engaging and helps humanise older people and enhance empathy for them.



*News coverage of older people in Australia from 2018-21 was replete with ‘disembodied’ shots that focused on aged hands, mobility aids, and wrinkled skin.*

6. **How egalitarian are your sources?** Do you tend to over-rely on elite sources—such as peak bodies, politicians, businesspeople, or experts—at the expense of ordinary people in your coverage of older people and associated topics? Have you sought the perspectives of older people, their carers, nurses, family members and advocates?
7. **How inclusive is your coverage of compounded identities on the margins?** For example, does it include older people who are also queer or Indigenous? These groups tend to be under-represented in general news and doubly so when multiple marginalised identities, like age and Indigeneity, are combined.
8. **How generic are your representations?** About 20 percent of the imagery accompanying aged-care related coverage from 2018-21 was stock photography. Without concrete context and specificity, such stock images depersonalise the issues of ageing and aged care, and make it appear less important or serious than it is.
9. **How much are you relying on the ‘consonance’ news value and reinforcing existing stereotypes rather than disrupting them?** For example, are you perpetuating the myth that older people aren’t users of digital technology or are you disrupting this?

### **🗣️ SUGGESTED CITATION:**

Thomson, T. J., Miller, E., Holland-Batt, S., Seevinck, J., & Regi, S. (2022). *Improving Coverage of Older People in Australian News*. Brisbane, Australia: Design Lab.

*Supported by [QUT](#) and the [Australian Research Council \(DP210100859\)](#)*