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ARE THE PUBLIC & PROFESSIONALS SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE WHEN IT COMES TO AGING? NEW REPORT FROM EXPERT COLLABORATIVE AIMS HOPES TO GET US CLOSER

Developed by members of Leaders of Aging Organizations and the FrameWorks Institute, “Gauging Aging” calls for a new conversation on aging as more of us approach age 65

NEW YORK (April 28, 2015)—A new report from an eight-member expert collaborative, Leaders of Aging Organizations (LAO), and the FrameWorks Institute proposes to reclaim the social narrative on what aging really means by building better perceptual connections between health care experts, advocates, and the thousands of Americans who turn 65 every day.

“The ultimate goal of this project is to increase the public understanding necessary to promote well-being for older adults and their families and to ensure their full participation in society. Despite growth in our understanding of how to improve aging, much of this knowledge isn’t penetrating public discourse,” said Laura A. Robbins, founder of Laura A. Robbins Consulting, LLC, and manager of the LAO project. “It will take *all of us* to make that happen—and this report is a critical first step.”

Breaking from traditional public opinion research, “Gauging Aging: Mapping the Gaps between Expert and Public Understanding of Aging in America” used methods from psychological anthropology to delve deep into connections between attitudes and actions around aging. The report uncovers an important disconnect between pessimistic public opinion and different perceptual reflections from experts and advocates. This communication breakdown may hold the key for reframing how we think and talk about the universal process of getting older.

According to the report, public perceptions of aging describe this process as:

- **Someone Else’s Problem.** Instead of perceiving aging as an inherent aspect of development, people tend to focus on “the aged” as an “otherized” group to which they do not belong.
- **Undesirable.** The public associates aging with decline and deterioration. A large percentage of interviewed individuals emphasized their belief that capability “faded away” with time.
- **Inevitable.** For most, this “fading away” also is tied to a strong sense of inevitability—a resignation to “slowing or breaking down” as a central aspect of growing old.
- **Isolated.** A majority of the public perceive old age not only as an outside obstacle or opponent, but also as a personal or familial problem and not a challenge that society shares.
- **Fatalistic.** Intimately tied to these perceptions are fears of decline, depression, and dependence. Such fears not only imbue the aging process with dread, but also impede support for policies and solutions that actually address the challenges (and opportunities) associated with age.
- **Out of Sight and Out of Mind.** Fear and misperception ultimately fuel a lack of attention to older adult health. But keeping aging “off the radar” does little to remedy impediments to health as we grow older.

In contrast, experts in aging believe that advances in research, care, and services to extend longevity have opened a world of possibilities for personal, social, and economic contributions by the fast-growing older adult population. These contributions can be leveraged for the benefit of all, but that entails adjusting public institutions, policies, and infrastructure by chipping away at outdated ways of thinking.

“Aging is something we all experience. It isn’t a barrier or a battle, but it is a characteristic of who we are—and who we are becoming—and it needs to be reflected in public thinking, public policy, and public discourse,” said Eric Lindland, PhD, a senior researcher with the nonprofit FrameWorks Institute and a lead author of the report. “Not surprisingly, that type of change begins with *the public*—or more specifically, with our ability to convey a truer vision for what aging in America *really* means for us all.”

Dr. Lindland and his colleagues used methods from psychological anthropology to identify and assess the deep, underlying cultural models that people routinely bring to the topic of aging. The use of these novel methods led to FrameWorks Institute’s receipt of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Award for Creative and Effective Institutions in 2015.

As a first step toward getting the public and professionals to see the same future through a reframed conversation, LAO members—AARP, the American Federation for Aging Research, the American Geriatrics Society, the American Society on Aging, The Gerontological Society of America, Grantmakers in Aging, the National Council on Aging, and the National Hispanic Council on Aging—will discuss findings in an online town hall with stakeholders from across the aging field on May 5 at 2 p.m. ET (visit <http://bit.ly/ReFramingAging> for more details). Efforts also are ongoing to secure support for subsequent FrameWorks research to design and test specific strategies that will take report findings from paper to practice in the United States.

About Leaders of Aging Organizations (LAO)

Administered by Grantmakers in Aging and including AARP, the American Federation for Aging Research, the American Geriatrics Society, the American Society on Aging, The Gerontological Society of America, the National Council on Aging, and the National Hispanic Council on Aging, the Leaders of Aging Organizations (LAO) seeks to develop a new, evidence-based narrative around the process of aging in our country and the roles and contributions of older Americans. The collaboration is supported by grants from AARP, the Archstone Foundation, The Atlantic Philanthropies, the John A. Hartford Foundation, the Fan Fox and Leslie R. Samuels Foundation, The Retirement Research Foundation, and the Rose Community Foundation. The project is managed by Laura A. Robbins of Laura A. Robbins Consulting, LLC.

About AARP: <http://www.aarp.org/about-aarp>

About the American Federation for Aging Research: <http://www.afar.org/about>

About the American Geriatrics Society: http://www.americangeriatrics.org/about_us/who_we_are/

About the American Society on Aging: <http://www.asaging.org/about-asa>

About The Gerontological Society of America: <https://www.geron.org/about-us>

About Grantmakers in Aging: <http://www.giaging.org/about>

About the National Council on Aging: <http://www.ncoa.org/about-ncoa>

About the National Hispanic Council on Aging: <http://www.nhcoa.org/about-us>

About Laura A. Robbins Consulting: <http://larc.net/what-we-do/>

About the FrameWorks Institute: <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/mission-frameworks.html>

The **American Federation for Aging Research (AFAR)** is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to support and advance healthy aging through biomedical research. Founded in 1981, AFAR has championed the cause and supported the funding of science in healthier aging and age-related medicine. To address the shortage of physicians and researchers dedicated to the science of healthier aging, AFAR funds physicians and scientists probing the fundamental mechanisms of aging, as well as specific diseases associated with aging populations at critical points throughout their careers. AFAR engages the public through webinars, conferences, and our online resource, InfoAging.org, which features over two dozen downloadable guides, edited by guest experts on topics ranging from theories of aging, age-related conditions, healthy lifestyle tips, and more. Learn more at www.afar.org or follow AFARorg on Twitter and Facebook.