



How to be an **Age-friendly Business**

A framework for
customer-facing settings



About the Centre for Ageing Better

Everyone has the right to enjoy a good life as they get older and our whole society benefits when they do. But far too many people face huge barriers that prevent them from doing so.

As a result, many older people are living in bad housing, dealing with poverty and poor health, and being made to feel invisible in their communities and society.

The Centre for Ageing Better is pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone.

Its key areas of work include challenging ageism and building a nationwide Age-friendly Movement, creating Age-friendly Employment and Age-friendly Homes.

For more information visit ageing-better.org.uk

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Introducing the framework

As we get older, we need age-friendly environments and infrastructure that enable us to remain active, maintain connections and live independently. Customer-facing businesses and community settings have a vital role to play in this.

Our framework for customer-facing settings brings together evidence and insights from a wide range of [sources](#) in the UK and further afield - mapping out five interconnected areas to consider if you want your business to be age-friendly: your people, your premises, your communications, your offer and your place within the wider community.

In this summary there are some easy steps you can take to ensure that respect for, and inclusion of, older people is embedded in all your business practices. It's not about being perfect, it's about making improvements - even the smallest changes can make a huge difference to how older people experience your business.

Older people in the UK are a large and diverse group, with differing abilities and needs, interests, and preferences. We believe the steps included in this framework reflect principles and practices for customer-facing businesses that are not only good for your older customers, but for all customers.

Being age-friendly is good for your business, good for people of all ages and good for our wider society.





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Showing respect for and ensuring the inclusion of older customers, service users, staff and volunteers across these five areas lies at the heart of being age-friendly.



Your people

An age-friendly business recognises the importance and value of the older staff and volunteers in its workforce, as well as the pivotal role this workforce plays in providing a service that attracts and retains customers of all ages. Treating people with respect, not making assumptions based on age and offering appropriate levels of support and interaction are all important parts of a high-quality customer service.

Employment practices

Multigenerational workforces are more innovative and productive, but as people get older many experience workplace discrimination based on age – or face challenges accessing or retaining work.

To be an age-friendly business, you could sign the [Age-friendly Employer Pledge](#) which would help you:

- Create an age-friendly culture that challenges stereotypes about older workers and celebrates multigenerational teams.
- Hire age-positively through appealing adverts, job descriptions and interview processes that minimise bias and reduce the likelihood of assumptions being made about age requirements.
- Be open to flexible working, advertising the right to request it and supporting the line managers of people who take up this option.
- Encourage career development at all ages by ensuring equitable take-up of training opportunities, and by providing career guidance at different life stages.
- Ensure everyone has the support they need, encouraging staff to talk about topics such as health concerns, caring responsibilities and key life stages such as the menopause.



Training and awareness

By understanding the barriers some people face – including many older people – business owners, managers and staff can better support the diverse needs and challenges of their customers and help them feel valued, respected and included at any age.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Provide staff with training and information that relates to engaging with people who may be living with specific health conditions or disabilities.
- Include age-awareness training and initiatives for all your staff and volunteers.
- Provide training on how to handle incidents like falls and make sure staff are aware of any legal responsibilities or regulations.
- Ensure staff who take phone calls have the relevant skills, experience and training.

Tackling ageist attitudes and assumptions

An age-friendly business will try to identify and address any ageist behaviours and encourage a positive, inclusive and open-minded approach among all its staff and volunteers.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Actively check that assumptions aren't being made about people based on their age.
- Use the [Age Without Limits resources](#) to raise awareness of ageism and identify suitable ways to challenge it amongst your staff and volunteers.
- Implement ways of working to support your customer-facing staff and volunteers. This might include establishing approaches to customer communication, using age-friendly language, and ways of showing respect and patience.
- Establish formal complaint processes and empower staff to resolve issues in a quick, supportive, respectful and solution-focused manner.

Empowerment and agency

It is important to ensure that any provision of help doesn't stop people making choices and taking action themselves, and that everyone receives the support that is right for them on an individual bases.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Ensure customers are always asked whether they would like any help or support, rather than stepping in and taking over.
- Encourage staff to make customers feel they are being supported rather than pressured to leave or make purchasing decisions.
- Provide knowledgeable customer-facing staff who have the time to listen carefully and respond to questions.
- Ensure staff are available to demonstrate new products, systems or technology.

Atmosphere and culture

Older people can often feel invisible and overlooked, and a good customer service culture that includes a warm and welcoming atmosphere can help tackle this and create an experience of inclusion and respect.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Ensure staff are always warm, friendly and visible to customers.
- Invest in developing soft skills and good communication techniques.
- Encourage staff to recognise regular visitors and take time to interact with them.
- Visit the [Age-friendly Employer Pledge](#) section of our website to learn how other businesses create an age-friendly workplace culture for their staff.



Your premises

Providing a positive experience by creating an environment that is safe, accessible, warm, and welcoming as well as acoustically and aesthetically pleasing can help you retain and grow your customer base. Think about the indoor and outdoor parts of your premises and remember to consider your older staff as well as your customers.

Accessibility

The accessibility of a business is determined by how easy it is to find, to get onto the premises, to move around, and to participate in what's on offer. This applies to both the external and internal aspects of your premises and the surrounding environment.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Provide easy to find information about your business, including accessibility details online and in other relevant communications.
- Offer ramped or level access where possible and ensure internal spaces are wide enough to navigate freely with lightweight or automatic doors.
- Ensure parking, drop-off and entrance points are clearly visible with suitable lighting and signage and provide hazard-free access routes.
- Install a hearing loop or infrared system (if possible) that is permanently switched on with instructions and staff who can provide support.

Furniture and facilities

The provision, design, placement and maintenance of furniture and facilities can have a significant impact on your customers, your staff and other visitors to your premises.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Install counters, tables and workstations at a suitable height for wheelchair users, as well as shelving that is positioned so customers don't need to stretch to access it.
- Provide toilets that are accessible, clearly signposted, well-maintained and easy-to-use with useful features like mirrors and incontinence bins.
- Provide permanent seating or the option for customers to request a temporary seat.

Health and safety

If older customers perceive your business premises to be unsafe or a risk to their health they are likely to take their custom elsewhere.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Identify trip and slip hazards and take steps to remove them.
- Ensure all facilities and equipment are cleaned and maintained regularly using suitable warning signs and cordons.
- Identify, fix and remove hazards such as spillages, breakages and obstructions as soon as they occur.
- Install handrails at suitable points to provide support for those that might need it.
- Seek guidance on how to remove unnecessary barriers when designing new premises or refurbishment schemes.

Sensory factors

Sound, lighting, temperature and smells all contribute to a welcoming environment, but can also present as barriers and deter people from returning.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Establish quiet zones or periods of the day and consider your choice and volume of music so that it doesn't prevent conversation or deter people from participating.
- Minimise the amount and impact of background sounds such as outside noise, coffee machines and internal maintenance work. Consider including softer surfaces and furnishings to absorb sound.
- Ensure that areas requiring careful navigation – such as stairs or ramps – are well-lit, consider how you use task lights, and reduce glare from labels, menus or screens.
- Monitor and maintain comfortable temperature levels throughout your premises.

Easy interactions

Customers are likely to spend more time and money with you if it is easy to use your business. In addition to those things mentioned elsewhere there are other small changes that can support easier interactions.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Provide information on how to get about your premises easily, such as floor plans, seating plans, exhibition layouts and 360-degree virtual tours.
- Offer flexible opening hours that are clearly advertised and communicated offline as well as online.
- Where queuing is required, provide options for customers who are less able to stand for long periods, such as timed entry or seating.





Your communications

Age-friendly marketing and communications use language and imagery that make older people feel they are being acknowledged, represented, and included. An age-friendly business also provides up-to-date and relevant information that is accessible and readily available in a range of formats. Investing in non-digital communications can help reach the millions of potential customers who are digitally excluded.

Easy-to-find information

Accurate information about your business such as opening hours, contact details and accessibility guidance should be easy to find in advance as well as when visiting your premises.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Display information in a range of places, including online, on printed materials at key points around your premises, and also elsewhere in the local area.
- Present information upfront about any customer needs your business may or may not be able to support, such as personal assistance or special discounts or services.
- Clearly communicate any changes to schedules, products, pricing, booking systems or floor and shelving layouts.
- Provide advice on the logistics of getting to your premises and interacting with your business.
- Communicate alternative ways for people who are not online to book or locate information.

Readability and language

Readability can be affected by the way written text is presented and the language you use in your communications has the power to increase customer satisfaction and sales.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Use inclusive design standards for font size and colour contrast.
- Use linear layouts, plenty of white space and easily distinguished fonts such as Ariel, Calibri or Century Gothic.
- Use everyday language that avoids jargon and does not assume any specialist knowledge. Provide clear explanations for new or unfamiliar concepts.
- Think about how you refer to older people in your communications. Refer to our [writing guide](#) for more practical support with making your communications and writing age-inclusive.

Images and representation

When designing your marketing materials it is important to show diverse and realistic representations of older people. Avoid images that reinforce ageist stereotypes and visit our [free image library](#) for age-positive photos you can use.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Feature images of people from a range of ages, including older people, in your communications.
- Show people of different ages interacting with each other while engaging with your products, services and activities.
- Where relevant, use images from your local area that represent the diverse range of over-50s who live there.
- Refer to our guidance on [how to take and use age-positive photos](#).

Signs and labels

Good signage gives your customers important cues to help them achieve what they have set out to do, supporting independence and increasing confidence and satisfaction.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Cater for people with visual impairments and accessibility needs when designing signs and printed materials such as price lists and menus.
- Place signs and labels so they are clearly visible, unobstructed and positioned at eye level, while still being visible to wheelchair users.
- Make sure temporary signs and labels such as hazard warnings are readily available and used appropriately.

Channels and formats

There are many communication channels at your disposal and whilst some older people may prefer more traditional channels like speaking on the phone or in person, it is important not to make assumptions about this.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Consult with older customers when developing your communications and marketing strategies.
- Provide a range of ways for customers to find out about and contact your business – by phone, email, online and in person, and through written materials.
- Follow widely available guidance on designing accessible websites that make the user experience as simple and straightforward as possible.
- Consider your automated answering service. Do you need it? Is it working well?





Your offer

People want to have access to products, services, activities and offers that best meet their changing needs, including as they age. Businesses that fully understand and provide for the diverse range of older people's needs, interests and preferences are best placed to win them as valuable customers.

Giving customers choice

People want to be able to choose what works best for them and their individual circumstances.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Review how you schedule activities and services. This includes taking into account things like public transport timetables, or parking options if people rely on cars.
- Think about the customer journey in its entirety - and identify how you might cater for the needs of people with limited mobility issues.
- Avoid labelling and promoting offers based on people's age and instead prioritise inclusive offers that focus on needs and interests.
- If you offer online services, ensure that offline services are also available wherever possible, including when making purchases or booking a service in advance.



Designing products and services

The products and services you offer should cater for the needs and wants of the wider population, taking into account differing degrees of ability and mobility, and how these can change throughout our lives.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Ensure that the needs and preferences of different age groups are included when you are designing new products, services or activities.
- Consider customers who might not be able to access your products and services as easily as others, including those living in more rural or remote locations.
- Avoid applying additional costs like charging for a carers space, when designing for different needs or abilities.
- Think about how you can 'design in' social interaction as part of the design process. Social opportunities are important for many older customers, and they encourage repeat business.
- Include the views and experiences of disabled and older customers when you are undertaking hazard identification and risk assessments.

Feedback and improvement

Capturing and responding to the views and experiences of your older customers can help enhance and refine your offer and best meet their needs.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Train and monitor staff in how they respond to both solicited and unsolicited feedback. Use this feedback to make necessary changes.
- Use a range of formats and channels to seek feedback, giving your customers the opportunity to share their views and experiences. Recognise the value of all comments, including customer complaints.
- Openly communicate the changes you have made as a result of feedback and acknowledge when and why changes might not be possible.

Offering incentives

Special offers can encourage customers to try new things, make multiple purchases or come back for more. While the spending power of older adults as a whole is sizeable, many older people experience financial challenges on a fixed income.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Give people the chance to try things out before having to commit.
- Reward loyalty through schemes that suit people's needs and interests.
- Consider signing up to local voucher schemes, such as gift cards or accepting food coupons and other vouchers issued by local government or charities which support people in financial hardship.
- Ensure discounts and special offers are communicated through a range of channels, with any expiry dates and other important information made clearly visible.

Innovation

Innovation is about developing new products or services that better meet your customers' needs, improving their experiences and making their lives easier and better.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Provide products, services and activities that celebrate ageing and challenge stereotypes.
- Look out for ideas for new products and services - including what other businesses are doing - to create new offers that older people might want or need.
- Take an intergenerational approach utilising the experience, expertise and potential of older workers and blending perspectives to inform your decisions.



Your place within the community

Your local community has a vested interest in your success, how you operate and what you do to support it. There are many things you can do to support your local community and contribute to the lives of older people, now and in the future.

Knowing your community

To be able to support your local community, you need to understand its make-up – the people living in the area, along with the organisations and individuals responsible for supporting and managing local services and facilities.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Find out about who lives locally, including their ages, the languages they speak and other demographic information.
- Identify whether your local area is part of the [UK Network of Age-friendly Communities](#) and get in touch to find out how you might work together.
- Look for local groups and initiatives that support older people within your community (including faith groups and community organisations) and identify some that your business might be able to help, for example, through promoting or fundraising activity.
- Talk to customers to understand the different challenges that older members of your community might experience living in the area.



Increasing social connections

By providing activities that support social connections you can improve the customer experience, drive wider engagement and increase repeat business.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Encourage people to talk and connect through initiatives like 'chatty tables'.
- Involve staff or volunteers in organising activities that foster social connections between different age groups.
- Identify ways you might be able to make your space available for community gatherings.
- Provide activities and events for different age groups and consider how they might work together.
- Focus on regular and ongoing opportunities that encourage interaction and social connections rather than just one-off events.

Community engagement and support

Community engagement and support is a key aspect of corporate social responsibility that benefits staff, customers and the wider community, while also increasing sustainability for any organisation.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Offer volunteering days to employees and if you provide volunteering opportunities ensure they are inclusive of older people.
- Consider incentives or discounts to maximise footfall during off-peak hours while supporting local people on lower incomes.
- Promote healthy ageing locally – join a community toilet scheme, allocate a notice board or window space for sharing community information, and promote opportunities for people to be active and make healthy choices.
- Find ways to support bigger events and activities taking place in your local area and nationally, including the International Day of Older Persons and our own annual [Age Without Limits Action Day](#).

Collaborations and partnerships

Working with local groups or businesses by offering complementary products and services can help your business reach a greater number of older people in your local community and encourage repeat business.

To be an age-friendly business, you could:

- Identify other local services where your business could collaborate to offer more, like library lending in a café, or exercise classes in the community.
- Connect with local care homes to see if there is anything your business can offer the home or its residents.
- Identify charities or community organisations who provide services to older people that your business is happy to endorse.
- Support wider campaigns or social movements that align with your business.

Resources

The following resources were reviewed in the development of this framework.

Age Friendly Aotearoa New Zealand (2020)
[Becoming an Age Friendly Business](#)

Age Friendly Ireland (2022)
[Towards An Age Friendly Stadium](#)

Age-friendly NYC (2014)
[Age-Friendly Business Resource Guide](#)

Age UK (2017)
[Age-friendly business: Valuing and including older consumers in supermarkets and service companies](#)

Alzheimer's Society (2018)
[Dementia-friendly retail guide: A practical guide for shops and retailers to support people affected by dementia](#)

Bristol Ageing Better (2019)
[Make Your Business More Age-friendly](#)

Family Arts Campaign (2022)
[Age-Friendly Standards](#)

International Longevity Centre (2023)
[Healthy Retail Guides](#)

Manchester Libraries (2022)
[Age Friendly Pledge](#)

Museum Development North West (2019)
[Age-Friendly Museums](#)

UK Active (2021)
[Life in our Years: Unlocking physical activity participation for older adults](#)

University of Surrey. Hospitality Connect (2023)
[Welcome ALL: A Toolkit for Age-inclusive Hospitality Venues](#)

Want to know more...

A detailed version of our framework for customer-facing settings is available for anyone interested in finding out more.

It includes further information, useful links and resources for each of the five areas, and extracts from a range of reputable sources.

For more information or to request a copy please email localities@ageing-better.org.uk

Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.

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The Centre for Ageing Better is pioneering ways to make ageing better a reality for everyone, including challenging ageism and building an Age-friendly Movement, creating Age-friendly Employment and Age-friendly Homes. It is a charitable foundation funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and part of the government's What Works Network.