

LANGUAGE GUIDE FOR AGING SERVICES

The aging services sector encompasses a broad range of care and service providers that meet the needs of older adults and their families. This guide is intended as a resource to aid in understanding aging services' depth and breadth. It also offers guidance to promote accurate, unbiased, and inclusive communication about this ubiquitous, yet relatively unknown and often mischaracterized, field.

SUGGESTED LANGUAGE FOR REFERRING TO ORGANIZATIONS

“Sector” or “field” INSTEAD OF “industry” or “market”

Because the term “industry” or “market” implies for-profit entities, the term is not appropriate for the aging services sector, which includes thousands of nonprofit providers in addition to for-profits nationwide. Using “sector” or “field” is more accurate and appropriate.

“Nonprofit” or “mission-driven or nonprofit organization” INSTEAD OF “company” or “business”

Many aging services providers are nonprofit organizations or mission-driven care and service providers. The distinction between nonprofit and for-profit providers is important to consumers when seeking aging services. When referring to a for-profit provider or one whose status is unknown, use “organization” instead of “company” or “business.” When referring to a nonprofit aging services provider, identify it as a “nonprofit.”

“Communities” or “residences” INSTEAD OF “facilities” or “institutions” or “buildings”

Terms such as “facilities” or “institutions” imply that nursing homes and other residential aging services settings are akin to a factory or prison. Instead, use language that denotes that these are places where people live, such as “residences” and “communities.”

SUGGESTED LANGUAGE FOR REFERRING TO PEOPLE

“Older adults” INSTEAD OF “the elderly” or “the aged”

Consistent with AP's Style Book, “older adults” is the general term for multiple people. It is considered more respectful and less “othering” than phrases such as “the elderly,” which implies frailty.

“Caregiving professionals” or “professional caregivers” INSTEAD OF “care workers” or “unskilled workers”

To accurately portray professional caregivers—who are paid, skilled, trained, and frequently certified—and to distinguish them from informal or family caregivers, describe these individuals as “caregiving professionals” or “professional caregivers.”

SUGGESTIONS FOR REFERRING TO AGING SERVICES

“Aging services” INSTEAD OF “elder care” or “aged care”

Describing the field using ageist terms such as “elder care” suggests that consumers of aging services are only the most frail. Additionally, the term “aging services” encompasses a wide range of services and supports, from minimal at-home help to residential-based medical care.

Note: The aging services sector provides a continuum of care and service options for older adults in a range of settings including adult day services, affordable housing for low-income older adults (senior housing), meals programs, assisted living, home health and home care, hospice, life plan communities, nursing homes, senior centers, villages, etc. When referring to aging services broadly, use “aging services,” “aging services sector,” or “field of aging services.” When referring to a subset of the sector, be specific.