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**An evolving market**

Engage & support aging customers

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From research to practice

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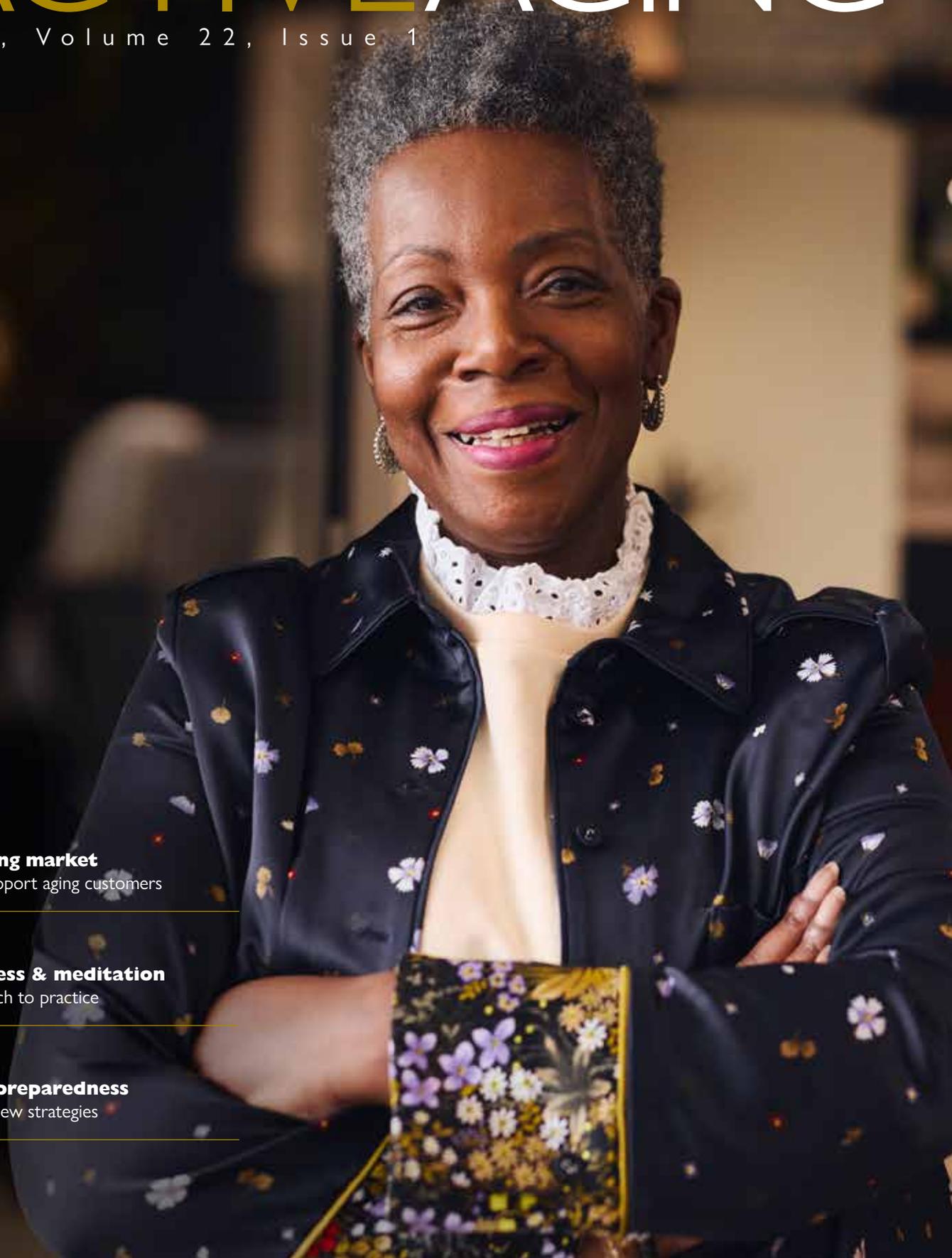
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# The aging market:

## Tips to engage and support an evolving consumer

**Experts discuss pillars for living well throughout the lifespan, ideas for rethinking aging and pointers for marketing that aligns better with this diverse market**

*by Martyn Bryson, Larissa Long and Sydney Murphy, MS*

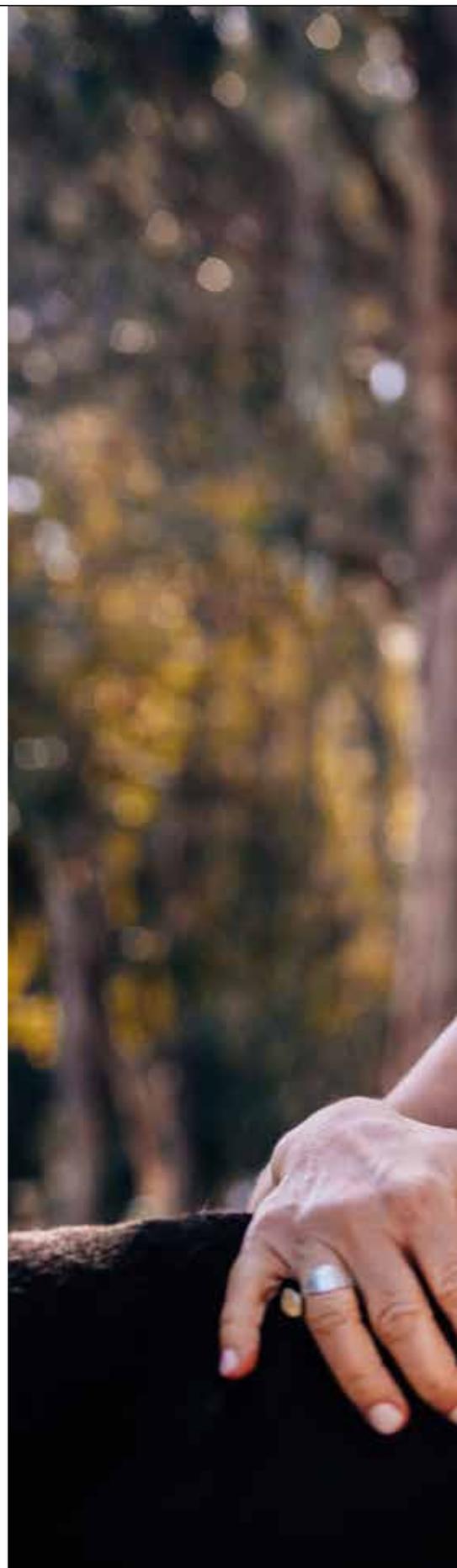
Aging looks a lot different today than it did even 20 years ago. As more people live longer, many older adults are working past retirement age and staying active, productive, social and purposeful in their later years.

How can we, as active-aging professionals, promote healthy longevity and foster wellness in life's various dimensions for *all* in this expanding life stage? And how can we, as a society, better meet the needs of today's aging adults and support their potential to grow, participate and engage fully in life?

Marketing and mass media are among the powerful forces that shape older individuals' perceptions of aging. It's important to understand how marketing impacts identity, health, longevity and the roles people play over the lifespan, influencing how we personalize wellness. Portrayals that show the diversity of aging experiences are key to improving expectations of later life.

To explore these areas further, the *Journal on Active Aging*<sup>®</sup> interviewed four leaders whose expertise includes the evolving needs and potential of aging adults. Conversations ranged widely across topics such as ageism, life stages, age diversity, increased longevity and technology. Let's look at four broad areas where these experts see opportunities to shape more inclusive, supportive approaches for living well and more effective marketing for the consumer.

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## 1. Influence identities by challenging expectations

How individuals see themselves in the world around them is an often overlooked but important factor in their overall wellness. Ageism and negative views of aging directly affect the mental and physical health of older adults.<sup>1,2</sup> How people behave, what kind of help or health advice they look for, and what they expect of their own aging process are all informed by how they see themselves and later life.

Ken Dychtwald, PhD, CEO and founder of the think-tank Age Wave in Orinda, California, has, for 49 years, been exploring the impact that marketing has on people's perceptions of aging and ways to change that for the better.

**JAA:** *What role does marketing play in how older people see themselves, in your opinion?*

**KD:** Marketing plays a powerful role in whether we think we're good enough,

attractive enough, have the right mix of friends, and have a useful purpose in life. We have a marketing ecosystem that's profoundly ageist by only portraying older people in states of calamity or by not showing them at all.

During COVID, a lot of attention was on how older people were more immune-suppressed. Through research that Age Wave did in partnership with Edward Jones and the Harris Poll, we learned that older people were actually doing far better with regard to their mental health than younger people. Often when people think of wellness, they mean physical wellness—you know, fitness—but mental fitness is important too. While there surely are some cranky older men and women, older people are more emotionally well-adjusted and resilient than we often see them being portrayed in TV ads, shows or movies. The more we see a healthier longevity portrayed, the more it might give us all hope in active aging.

**JAA:** *What are some challenges to figuring out what kind of marketing is appropriate?*

**KD:** Very often, the creatives for advertising agencies and for companies are under the age of 35, so there's a whole lot being missed. A few years ago, I was brought into one of the biggest food manufacturers, and they had 200 people who were on the 50-and-over marketing team, but there was not one person who was over age 50 on the team! To not include older people in the creative process, to look at or review the marketing is foolish, in my opinion.

[**Ed.** New survey results underscore how few marketers are older. According to *Marketing Week's* 2023 Career and Salary Survey, only 14.5% of 3,000 respondents were aged 46–65 years.<sup>3</sup>]

**JAA:** *Where should we focus our efforts to encourage health and wellness for aging adults? And how can marketing help to engage consumers in this area?*

**KD:** The most important ingredient that people say is needed for living a good life is health. So first is to have a recognition and appreciation for that. I coined the phrase *healthy aging* in 1990. But I have become increasingly captivated by a next level phrase, *healthy longevity*. For some reason people tend to think of aging as being about decline and loss, but the word *longevity* conjures up more positive impressions.

We talk about income inequality, but we also have longevity inequality. The wealthiest segments of our populations live 15 years longer than the poorest, who are disproportionately people of color. There's no equity there. How do we create a health system and health information and health-oriented media so that everyone can live a long, healthy life? We ought to have a "Health Waze," like the popular driving directions app, so that people can identify, through a series of biometrics, what a healthy 100-year-old version of themselves would be and be guided to that. This is an area where artificial intelligence could be playing a more useful role, as a sophisticated mechanism that could guide us to a healthier version of ourselves. We're also just at the beginning of more precision diagnostics, so people can be more confident they're doing the right things.

We don't really see enough examples of healthy, fit older men and women, though. In fact, in TV ads, older people are seven times more likely to be portrayed negatively than other age groups. I think the more we are exposed to the possibilities of healthy and fit older people, the more we'll all seek to be like them. Unfortunately, we've created a version of aging where people don't really take great care of themselves. They don't necessarily pursue a path to wellness. So we have to create and actively promote a new version of aging and longevity. We have to trigger that to happen.

## 2. Show authentic aging

Marketing veteran Jeff Weiss, like Dychtwald, also works with a range of businesses and marketers to break through



the stereotypes and myths of aging. In 2017, Weiss launched Age of Majority (AoM), a marketing consultancy based in Gloucester, Massachusetts, of which he is president and CEO. Insights from AoM's online research community help clients better understand and engage with age 55+ consumers.

**JAA:** *Can you tell us about some stereotypes associated with aging, and what you see in reality?*

**JW:** We have this thing called the Dirty Dozen Myths of Aging. One we call "I've fallen and I can't get up." It's about this generalization that people become frailer as they get older. [...] In research we did with our Revolution55 community, we asked people to rate their overall health. Fully 83% of respondents rated it as good or above. Then we asked about exercise levels. About 85% are physically active at least a few days a week, 37% almost every day. The reality [for this research community] is

that older adults are more physically active than younger people. [Ed. Revolution55 members are considered active-agers. As a group, this community tends to skew younger and more affluent than the general 55+ population in the United States.]

One more myth we've all heard: "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." From a business perspective, companies think that as you get older, you're totally brand loyal. But if you give older adults a reason to try new products, services or activities, and if the price is right, they'll try it. Beyond business, people want to try new things and enjoy life.

Then there's the myth, "Oh, to be young again." It's this belief that as you get older, you aspire to be younger. But we're seeing more and more that people aren't looking backward. In our research with women in their mid-40s, they're looking at their future and see parents or older friends just

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enjoying life. Now they're making decisions because they aspire to be like them when they get older. It's kind of a reverse of what we used to see.

**JAA:** *How do you think marketers can better portray aging to engage older consumers in the health and wellness area?*

**JW:** A lot of ads and marketing still show frail older adults. A lot show older adults with disabilities. There are all these societal expectations that aren't true, and they're reinforced by marketing. Marketing to older adults should be real, it should be authentic. People need to be able to relate or aspire to someone in an ad. Language is also really important. Older adults don't want to see a product targeted to them because they are old. That is the kiss of death.

When you get into physical health, for example, many marketers don't know where to start, especially with imagery. People want positive reinforcement and imagery can help with that. And, we know that older adults love a supportive community. We've done work for some companies in the physical-fitness studio space, and a big reason why people go is because they love the community.

**JAA:** *How will technology play a role in providing personalized health to the aging market? And how might this connect with health and wellness marketing in the future?*

**JW:** I think there will be consolidation of technology across a wide variety of areas. There's so much money being thrown into health tech, for example. I've had conversa-

tions with companies in the remote health-care monitoring space, where people place devices around the house, and the doctor gets a lot of info that can assist with prevention and detection of things, including falls.

[In the future], you'll go to one provider—it could be Google, or Amazon, I don't know. I think personalized health will be easier, and because people will be more aware of what impacts their health and happiness, they're going to live longer, healthier and happier lives.

**JAA:** *What do you think of bringing older adults back into the workplace, joining marketing teams and tech teams?*

**JW:** Two industries are the worst when it comes to ageism in employment: technol-



ogy and marketing. In both, once you're over 40, you're treated as a dinosaur. If you're marketing to or designing for older adults, then it's tougher to do without an older person's perspective. In general, you want to have diversity in your marketing team for different points of view.

Also, we have all this talk about DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) in ads and marketing, yet age is rarely talked about. I call it "fear of marketing older." It's this belief that people don't want to think about getting old, because all this baggage comes with aging.

### 3. Focus on healthspan

Increased older-adult input in marketing and media could change how these industries understand aging. A cultural shift has the

potential to benefit both industries and older adults in profound ways, encouraging more authentic portrayals of aging and expectations that include longer, healthier lives.

The right supports are essential to healthy longevity, however. At Stanford Center on Longevity (SCL) in California, a "New Map of Life" report examines the ways social institutions, norms and policies impact our longer lives and future centenarians. Ken Smith, MS, a senior research scholar and director of programs, supervised the fellows who produced the 2022 report. He works with SCL staff to determine where faculty expertise can be best used to drive change.

**JAA:** *How do life stages influence the life journeys of individuals?*

**KS:** Age is a bad measure of where people are in their life. [We tend to] say when people are 60, we expect them to do this. And when they're 70, we expect them to do that. And it's just so wrong. Life journeys are fluid. Some people find that they're done working at 55 years old. Other people find that they never want to stop working, for example.

I do think there is some inflection point, around 50, where people start to realize where they are in life. That's when you start thinking about what's coming ahead and an endpoint rather than simply an infinite future.

**JAA:** *SCL's "New Map of Life" report looks at supports for healthy longevity. Tell us more about this initiative, which may guide opportunities for wellness and marketing approaches.*

**KS:** We know individuals on the whole are living longer. How would you look at life knowing that you're going to live 100 years? Would you do things the same as you do them now?

One of the underlying premises that the Center on Longevity started with is the

### Dychtwalds to headline ICAA event

Interested in hearing more from Dr. Ken Dychtwald? Plan now to attend the International Council on Active Aging Conference and Expo 2023, where *two* Dychtwalds will headline The Main Stage.

Futurist Maddy Dychtwald will join husband Ken at this year's ICAA event, to be held October 31–November 2 in Anaheim, California. In 2016, the couple received the Esalen Prize for their outstanding contributions to advancing the human potential of aging men and women worldwide.

Watch for full details to follow at <https://icaaconference.icaa.cc/>.

idea that the extension of life for most people accelerated faster in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than we were ready for. We still tend to anchor on all these life events that happened in a life that was maybe 60 or 70 years old, in terms of when we go to school, when we decide to retire, how we handle our careers. What happens if you push that away and say, "You've got 100 years? What are you going to do with it?"

We brought together a group of experts from all over the world—engineers, doctors, psychologists, educators. And [we] said, where do we think there are opportunities? What do we know about how life progresses and the things that you do along the way and how they lead to positive outcomes? And where are the areas where we might be able to make an impact? We focused on impact because we know that where people are born is correlated to what their lifespan can be.

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And then we came up with nine different domains where we felt there were opportunities. What do you do in early childhood? What about exercise and lifestyle? Financial security? Work? Education? Built environment? Climate? Healthcare/technology? Or the role of intergenerational relationships?

We found a Stanford faculty expert in that area, and we raised enough support to hire a postdoctoral researcher in that domain for a two-year fellowship. They each produced a report for their area, and we worked to create a centralized report, which is what you can download now [see “Resources” on page 33]. And then we distilled these various findings. There were things in there like age and diversity are net positives for society, and the impact of early education on people’s lives. [...] There’s a lot of data around the value of making sure

kids get early childhood education and get started on the right path.

And, while everybody looks at lifespan, healthspan is what everybody cares [most] about. If we’re going to focus on making changes, we should focus on healthspan, or living healthy and well right where we are.

#### **4. Understand consumers’ evolving needs**

For entrepreneur Chip Conley, MBA, the inner world is the wellspring of healthy longevity. Conley cofounded a school in Baja California Sur, Mexico, dedicated to helping people in midlife and beyond navigate career and personal life with renewed meaning, passion and vigor. More than 3,000 people have completed the program at Modern Elder Academy (MEA), where he is CEO. We can gain insight into the

evolving needs and desires of the aging consumer by paying attention to what Conley calls “the mature heart and soul.”

**JAA:** *Tell us about the idea of building purpose, wellness and community into life.*

**CC:** Research has shown that purpose, wellness and community are the three most important foundations to create and curate a life that’s as deep and meaningful as it is long.

As people get older, they may retire. What they’re not expecting is that their sense of purpose was so defined by their work. They feel a little bit naked, like “I don’t have a purpose.” Learning how to retire *to* something as opposed to just *from* something is important.

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## Snapshots: More about the thought leaders

### Chip Conley, MBA

Chip Conley is a best-selling author, entrepreneur and cofounder/CEO of Modern Elder Academy (MEA), a “midlife wisdom school” in Baja California Sur, Mexico. Over 3,000 people from more than 40 countries have completed the MEA program.

Known as an industry disruptor, Conley navigated a midlife transition himself when he sold Joie de Vivre Hospitality, a boutique hotel brand he established at age 26 and ran for 24 years. In 2013, Airbnb’s founders invited him to join the company to advise them and help grow the start-up. Conley’s experiences there led him to write *Wisdom@Work: The Making of a Modern Elder*, in which he tackled ageism in the workplace and how older individuals can repurpose their wisdom and experience to stay relevant in an age-diverse workplace.

In addition to presenting keynotes at the International Council on Active Aging® annual conference, Conley has written for the *Journal on Active Aging*® and contributed his insights to other *JAA* articles and the *Colin Milner Rethinks Aging With...* podcast series. He resides in Austin, Texas.

### Ken Dychtwald, PhD

Dr. Ken Dychtwald is CEO and founder of Age Wave, a think-tank and consultancy in Orinda, California. This firm has guided companies and government groups in product/service development for Boomers and older adults since 1986.

A psychologist and gerontologist, Dychtwald is a foremost thought leader on the marketing, healthcare, lifestyle, financial and workforce implications of population aging and increased longevity. He is also the best-selling author of 19 books. Dychtwald’s most recent book, *Sages of Aging*, inspired a PBS program featuring his discussions with 12 change-makers in the field of aging.

In addition to sharing his views in *Journal on Active Aging*® articles, Dychtwald gave a keynote at the ICAA Conference 2020 and returns to offer a Main Stage presentation in 2023 (see the box on page 29). He also has appeared on the *Colin Milner Rethinks Aging With...* podcast.

In 2018, Dychtwald received the ICAA INSPIRE Award for his exceptional and long-lasting contributions to the active-aging industry. The award also recognized his efforts to make a difference in the lives of older adults globally.

### Ken Smith, MS

Ken Smith is a senior research scholar and director of programs at Stanford Center on Longevity (SCL) in California. Founded in 2007 by Stanford University professors Laura Carstensen, PhD, and Thomas Rando, MD, PhD, SCL exists “to accelerate and implement scientific discoveries, technological advances, behavioral practices and social norms so that century long lives are healthy and rewarding.”

At SCL, Smith’s areas of focus include aging in place, design, health and wellness, and technology. Along with determining with staff where Stanford expertise can best drive change, he leads SCL’s Mobility

Division and its annual Design Challenge. The global prize competition spurs students to create products and services to enhance people’s lives across generations. He also supervised the fellows who worked on SCL’s “New Map of Life” report.

Smith’s views about wearable technologies appeared in the *Journal on Active Aging*’s Special Technology Issue in 2018.

### Jeff Weiss

Jeff Weiss, president and CEO of Age of Majority (AoM), has more than 30 years of marketing experience on both the client and agency sides of the business. Prior to starting his Gloucester, Massachusetts-based marketing consultancy in 2017, he led the public relations agency Harbinger, which focused primarily on brand launches and marketing to women.

In 2020, AoM launched its online insights community, Revolution55. Members are active-agers “invested in supporting innovations and marketing that better meet their needs and desires,” with active-agers defined “as people ages 55+ who are digitally, socially, mentally and physically active.” The community tends to skew younger and somewhat more affluent than the general 55+ population in the United States.

Together with Peter Boyce, AoM’s head of research and content, Weiss recently presented an ICAA webinar on technology’s ability to support older adults in living more autonomously. He has written several articles for the *Journal on Active Aging*®.

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Community is also important. What often happens for people is in middle age, a lot of the friendships they had start to wane, partly because they don't have time for them. We have to help people in midlife and later learn how to build friendships again, as well as to get conscious and intentional about what community they want to live in.

The third one is wellness. When people leave the structure and discipline of a full-time job, that structured discipline starts to fall apart in all of their life. And that means that often, they spend less time in active motion. Research shows the average retiree in the United States spends 47 hours a week in front of a TV<sup>4</sup>—and TV is about the worst thing you can do for your wellness.

**JAA:** *What about efforts to personalize wellness to meet an individual's multi-dimensional needs?*

**CC:** One of the challenges with the wellness conversation is how it focuses on the

personal rather than the social. I would just caution against getting too fixated on the person directly in front of [you]... It's good to do that, to understand, to customize what that person is looking for, but then look at how to connect them with other people. Because often, when people try to do individual wellness paths, if they're not connected to other people, they actually stop doing them. It's that social interaction and maybe the social pressure of being part of a group that keeps people committed.

I advise people to balance the things that are easy to measure—the number of steps per day, for example—with the things that are meaningful. How are you spending your time with those who you care about? How are you spending time doing something that puts you into a state of flow, that allows you to feel mindful?

**JAA:** *How may fluid life stages influence the life journey and impact marketing to the aging population?*

**CC:** A term that I'm starting to talk about a lot is *age fluidity*. Being age fluid is different than being ageless. The definition of ageless is "never looking old or growing old." I don't love the term *ageless* because it suggests that age is a negative.

Here's my definition of age fluidity: denoting or relating to a person who does not identify themselves as having a fixed age or being part of a specific generation. In other words, someone who rebels, who doesn't fit easily into a chronological age; they might be younger or older than their actual chronological age.

**JAA:** *How will active aging look in years to come? And where should we focus to develop authentic marketing and wellness approaches that support long, healthy lives?*

**CC:** The idea of "super agers" is going to be more mainstream; people celebrating their

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## Resources

### Internet

#### Age of Majority

[www.ageofmajority.com/](http://www.ageofmajority.com/)

#### Age of Majority: Revolution55

[www.ageofmajority.com/revolution55](http://www.ageofmajority.com/revolution55)

#### Age Wave

<https://agewave.com/>

#### Chip Conley

<https://chipconley.com/>

#### Modern Elder Academy

[www.moderneracademy.com/](http://www.moderneracademy.com/)

#### Stanford Center on Longevity

<https://longevity.stanford.edu/>

#### Stanford Center on Longevity:

##### The New Map of Life

<https://longevity.stanford.edu/the-new-map-of-life-initiative/>

### Multimedia

#### Colin Milner Rethinks Aging With...™

podcast series

Host: Colin Milner, ICAA

- Season 1, Episode 4: “The hidden gifts of aging,” with Ken Dychtwald, PhD
- Season 1, Episode 2: “Regeneration instead of retirement,” with Chip Conley, MBA

Available at [www.rethinkaging.co](http://www.rethinkaging.co) and [www.icaa.cc/listing.php?type=podcasts](http://www.icaa.cc/listing.php?type=podcasts)

#### ICAA Webinar Series

“How technology can enable older adults to live more autonomously”

Presenters: Jeff Weiss and Peter Boyce, Age of Majority

[https://www.icaa.cc/store\\_detail.php?id=9069](https://www.icaa.cc/store_detail.php?id=9069)

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100<sup>th</sup> birthday will become more frequent. With each passing generation, it feels like active aging has gone up a decade.

Active aging is also about how we engage people not just [in terms of] mental acuity, but the heart and the soul of someone's life. As we get older, these become some of our greatest qualities as humans. The fact that we have a mature heart and soul and a big curiosity around those.

That's part of the reason MEA exists. Yes, we are all focused on social wellness and physical wellness and community, but we also really focus on how to create a deep and meaningful life. That usually means we focus on the kind of questions that are life-changing around our heart and soul.

## **Align with the aging market for growth**

From age fluidity to age diversity, fluid life stages to the "New Map of Life," experiences of aging are evolving along with ex-

panding lifespans. Efforts to rethink aging can help shape a society more supportive of living well in later life. As important is how this new thinking can help marketers connect with the aging consumer.

Marketing and mass media are central parts of modern life, and their power to alter people's perspectives on themselves and the world around them can have far-reaching impacts. This includes how we all understand what it means to age, which in turn affects health, longevity and quality of life.

Together, healthspan, increased longevity and age fluidity have the potential to completely change the marketing model, with its focus on market segments and chronological age. The industry will likely need to rethink its methods to capitalize on opportunities emerging from these shifts.

As active-aging professionals, we can support ideas to rethink aging by encouraging individuals to bolster their inner and outer

worlds to enhance their experiences of aging. By keeping in mind the expert guidance above, we also can strive to ensure our marketing professionals and dollars help us engage the evolving consumer and align better with a diverse, growing market. 

*Martyn Bryson has over a decade of experience as a writer and editor covering a wide range of health and wellness topics. Bryson is a medical writer for HealthDay.*

*Larissa Long is a freelance health writer with 20 years of experience creating content for various print and online publications. Visit Long at [www.larissa-long.com](http://www.larissa-long.com).*

*Sydney Murphy, MS, is the associate editor of HealthDay Physicians Briefing and a freelance science writer based in New York City. Follow Murphy on Twitter @SydneyLiz\_Murph.*

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