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Just call me Bob: A focus on the individual helps bring us together

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Darren Birbeck



Language is a powerful tool. It can bring us together as quickly as it can divide us.

Over recent decades, we have become much more aware that using language to “label” others can cause deep harm and distress.

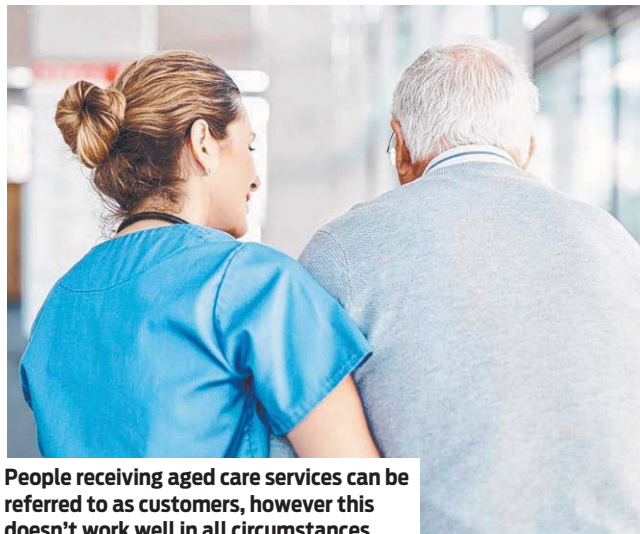
October 7 was Ageism Awareness Day, and it made me think about how the labelling of generations is also used to highlight differences between age groups.

While it is undeniable that the shared experiences of a generation influence their outlook on life, there are also times when these stereotypical generalisations read more like a poorly written horoscope than a true reflection of the individual.

Whatever language we use, many people continue to experience discrimination simply based on their age.

In Australia’s egalitarian society we place great emphasis on not taking ourselves too seriously.

Out of respect we often refer to someone as Mr or



People receiving aged care services can be referred to as customers, however this doesn’t work well in all circumstances.

Mrs, only to hear the quick retort: “Just call me Bob”.

Labels such as “consumer” or “aged care participant” used in aged care legislation are cold and impersonal and do not reflect the relational nature of the services provided. People receiving aged care services are also referred to as customers, however even this word doesn’t work well in all circumstances.

Aged care providers prefer resident or client, depending upon whether the older person is residing in a retirement village, residential care home or receiving services when living in their own home.

In aged care, it can be

difficult to find the right word.

On September 27, COTA SA hosted a Reimagining Ageing event here in Adelaide to celebrate the United Nations International Day of Older Persons.

It was an opportunity to reimagine the way people think about, act on, and embrace getting older, with a focus on ageing well by finding a purpose. It is a great message, and I encourage us all to do the same.

And rather than referring to someone as a baby boomer, an octogenarian, or an elder, perhaps we should just focus on the individual – and call them “Bob”.