

Caroline Nokes MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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Email: caroline.nokes.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Caroline

I'm writing to you following the Women and Equalities Committee's recent session on the rights of older people in which there was a discussion about ageist stereotyping in advertising.

We know that communicating about ageing and older people in a positive way can help to tackle negative perceptions, but negative and offensive stereotypes about ageing and older people are still common. Although we receive a small number of complaints about depictions of older people in advertising, the Advertising Codes recognise the impact of harm and offence caused on the grounds of age.

Using stereotypes about age in advertising can breach the Advertising Codes, and we provide [guidance](#) to help advertisers ensure that they do not include offensive depictions of, or references to, age in their advertising.

Whilst the Codes do not require advertisers to ensure that ads are demographically representative, advertisers are responsible for ensuring that the content of their ads does not cause serious or widespread offence. Rule 4.1 states that particular care must be taken to avoid causing offence on the grounds of particular characteristics, including age.

The rules are clear that advertisers must not make offensive generalisations about older people; for example, implying that people over a certain age are senile, pitiable, or incapable of carrying out certain tasks. Suggesting that certain activities are inappropriate or socially unacceptable for older people is also likely to be considered problematic for causing serious or widespread offence; as demonstrated in an ASA ruling against an [ad for electronic cigarettes](#), which implied that a

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relationship between an older woman and a younger man was a socially unacceptable and inappropriate 'taboo'.

It's important that advertisers are able to recognise and celebrate the contribution of older persons to society, both in their lifetime and their achievements today. However, advertisers looking to market their products to this demographic, and indeed more generally, should do so responsibly and be mindful of avoiding causing harm or serious or widespread offence on the grounds of age.

I would be happy to meet if you want to discuss this issue further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Guy". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Guy Parker
Chief Executive, ASA