

LeadingAge®



## **OPENING DOORS TO AGING SERVICES**

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*A LeadingAge Initiative to Introduce the Aging Services Sector to the Public and Move Perceptions Positively*

**INSPIRATION GUIDE FOR LEADINGAGE MEMBERS**

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I'm incredibly proud of this groundbreaking initiative and think you will agree that Opening Doors is truly a gift to the field.

—*LeadingAge President and CEO Katie Smith Sloan*



## WHAT IS OPENING DOORS?

[Opening Doors to Aging Services](#) is a research-based communications initiative designed to introduce the public to the full continuum of quality aging services. This multi-year, national-local effort was developed for LeadingAge members and the entire field to help improve public perceptions of our sector.

Opening Doors addresses long-standing member concerns about public views and understanding of aging services, which were eroded by the COVID pandemic. It also will help showcase the sector favorably to potential aging services employees. The initiative helps LeadingAge members serve as the trusted voice for aging—and to make America a better place to grow old.

Now is the time for us to reset the narrative, proactively telling the story of aging services—and Opening Doors to Aging Services is our roadmap.

## FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH

The Opening Doors strategies and guidance are built on in-depth, first-of-its-kind research that explored the perspectives of the public at large, older adults and their families, caregivers to older adults, and experts across the sector. Conducted in the first six months of 2021, the findings present a mixed—and sometimes surprising—view of our field. [Review the research.](#)

More than twice as many U.S. adults view the sector favorably as view it unfavorably. So—even as we emerge from a pandemic and the unfair criticism we endured—the aging services field does not face a public perception *crisis*. We have a real opportunity in the central finding on which our strategies are built: more than one-third of U.S. adults say they don't know how they view the aging services sector. We don't need to persuade people to drop their negative views—we can tell our stories and build positive perceptions of the sector.

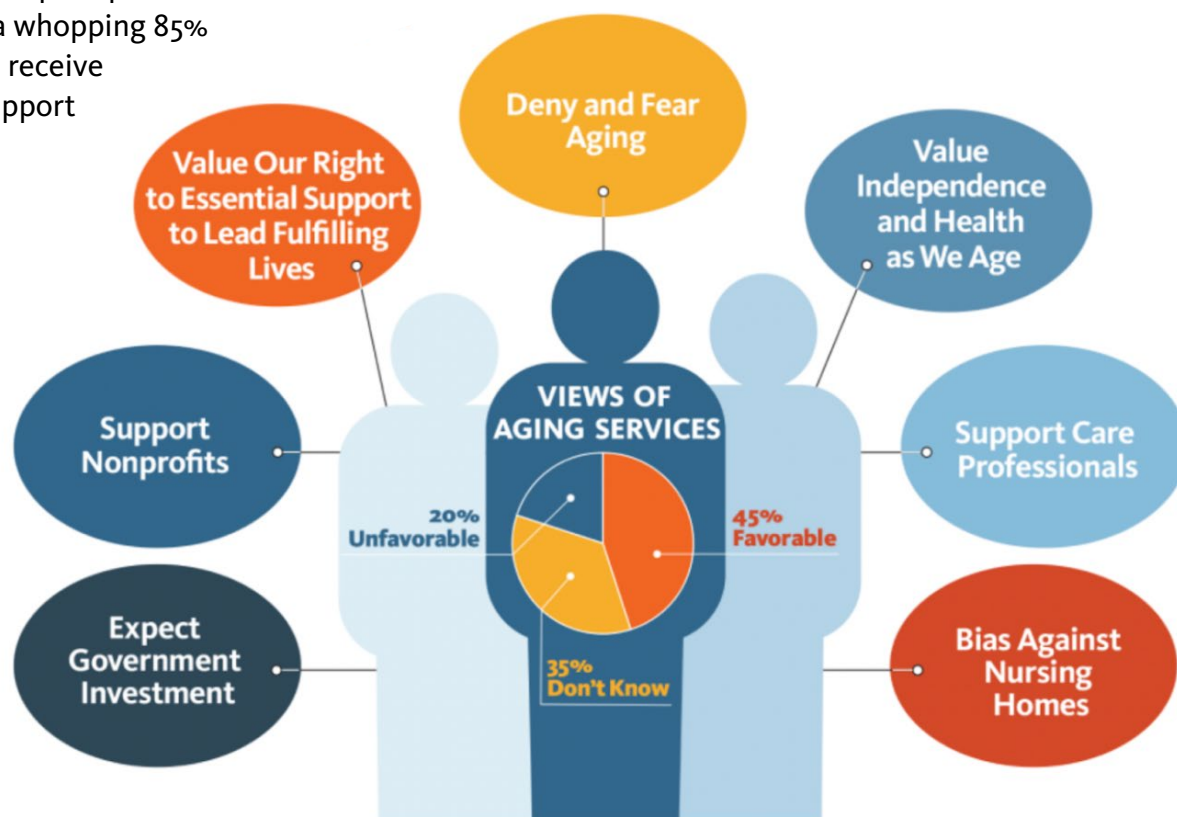
Also notable: the public views many parts of the sector positively. In fact, the majority (68%) of people who have had direct experience with aging services say it was a positive experience, most often citing quality as the reason. Quality is also a factor in why Americans have a more favorable view of nonprofits (63%) and faith-based providers (63%) than for-profits (47%): they believe quality at nonprofit providers is better than at for-profit providers.

Sector communications about quality should reflect two other strong research findings. Caregiving professionals are held in high esteem by the public, who describe them as compassionate, dedicated, essential and professional. And U.S. adults highly value independence and strength in all its forms—in particular their physical and mental health, along with living in their own home.

Public views take a turn more critical on government's poor performance in supporting older adults. Perhaps that is because a whopping 85% of U.S. adults believe “every American has a right to receive a basic level of housing, health care and essential support regardless of age.” And an equal number (86%) feel “the government must make a bigger investment in services and care for seniors.”

We can harness the additional focus on our field to deliver authentic information about aging services and move perceptions in a positive direction. This is our opportunity!

This and much more research is available at [openingdoors.org/research](https://openingdoors.org/research).



*The majority of people who have had direct experience with aging services say it was a positive experience, most often citing quality as the reason.*

## COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

Strategic guidance derived from the research that you can use to raise awareness includes: an overarching communications framework, messaging guidance, language and visual advice, audience segmentations and more. Find it all at [openingdoors.org/strategy](https://openingdoors.org/strategy).

Following are the eight core strategies of Opening Doors to Aging Services.

**1. Offer a look inside aging services.**

To know us is to love us! Invite people to experience the value you bring to older adults in your community—virtually, in-person, online or through story-telling. Show transparency, accountability and a commitment to quality of life.

**2. Talk about us, not them.**

We are *all* aging. A majority of us will need some kind of long-term care as we age—so be inclusive, talk about older adults as “we” and “us,” not “them.” Also, “them” contributes to ageism and “othering” of older adults.

**3. Focus on older adults and their families, not on providers.**

It’s not about providers; it’s about the people we serve. Keep older adults front and center. Frame communications from their perspective, and enlist older adults as messengers.

**4. Emphasize independence and strength.**

Demonstrate how getting extra help from the aging services sector can mean greater independence and the ability to continue to do things that are important to us. Avoid framing communications around the needs and frailty of older adults, but around their value, dignity and ongoing contribution.

**5. Demonstrate a commitment to delivering quality care and services.**

Emphasize quality, showing and telling how you deliver it. Underscore how you are mission-driven—and if you are a nonprofit, say so. Do not talk about the sector or individual providers as in crisis (older adults and their families are experiencing crisis).

**6. Highlight dedicated, compassionate care professionals.**

The public overwhelmingly supports front-line care professionals who support us and our families even under difficult circumstances. Spotlight the people who work in aging services, their skills and tenure in the field, and the bonds they build with the older adults they serve.

**7. Frame aging services as a basic right for everyone.**

The public believes that every American has a right to receive a basic level of housing, healthcare and essential support regardless of age. Stress that a range of care and services is available for people from all walks of life. Reinforce the government’s role in ensuring affordable access for all.

**8. Emphasize support for greater government investment in aging services.**

U.S. adults resoundingly expect state and federal government officials to invest in aging services to ensure access for all older adults. And they recognize the government must do more.

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*U.S. adults say these words best describe professional caregivers:  
compassionate, dedicated, essential and professional.*



## READY TO APPLY OPENING DOORS?

It's easy to apply Opening Doors in your work. And since there is no *one way* to do it, this Guide offers tips, hints, examples—inspiration—to communicate in a way more resonant with the public who needs us!

Following are examples of how LeadingAge members are using Opening Doors in a range of their communications. Want to learn more about applying Opening Doors? Visit the LeadingAge Knowledge Center for online trainings at [learninghub.leadingage.org/catalog?query=opening%2odoors](https://learninghub.leadingage.org/catalog?query=opening%2odoors).

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

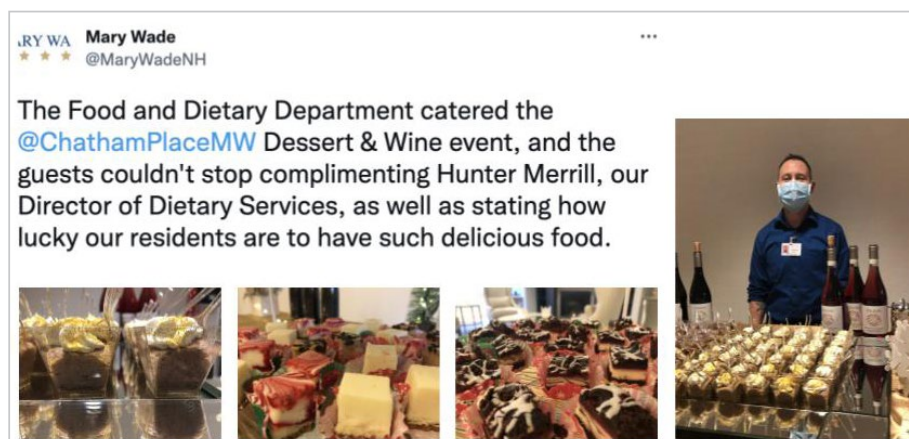
Building public events around the central Opening Doors strategies can build authentic awareness of the aging services sector. When the public interacts with your staff members—at your organization or at community events—you are “opening your doors” and introducing yourself to the public. Meeting new people and giving them a positive experience with your organization adds to the number of people who speak favorably about your organization—and word of mouth is one of the best referrals, according to LeadingAge members.

### USEFUL OPENING DOORS STRATEGIES

- Demystify aging services by offering a look inside. Replicate experiences at your organization during events and showcase your differentiating expertise.
- Include professional caregivers and other employees as representatives of your organization.
- Demonstrate the quality care, programs and services you deliver.
- Share your nonprofit status.

### FACEBOOK POST

Mary Wade (New Haven)



- » Offers a “taste” of living at Chatham Place (open your doors!).
- » Validates expertise of employees—dining staff.
- » References outside validators' appreciation of the quality food.

### PUBLIC EVENT

Debut of the Joyful Hearts exhibit recognizing professional caregivers



- » Showcases the personnel's expertise/professionalism.
- » Uplifts the professional caregivers. (“Because despite the extraordinary challenges that these caregivers have faced—and still face—their pictures and stories reflect the true compassion, commitment, and pure joy that they have for the older adults in their care,” says A.G. Rhodes CEO Deke Cateau.)
- » Creates the “feel” of the organization.

Photo by Heidi Wagner Photography

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Direct engagement with the public in your community is an ideal way to build authentic awareness of the aging services sector and show how your mission aligns with community values. You can reach new audiences and connect with like-minded members of the public through partnerships.

### USEFUL OPENING DOORS STRATEGIES:

- Open your doors—highlight community connections and introduce yourself to new audiences through the partnership.
- Elevate older adults living with strength and agency—and their ongoing contributions.
- Emphasize your public service mission and commitment to community.

### FACEBOOK POST

#### Pebble Tossers

- » Provides a statement of excellence and commitment from community partner: “superstar professional Care Partners dedicated...”
- » Demonstrates unity among nonprofits serving community members: “Both mission-driven, community-oriented nonprofits...”
- » Offers a clear statement of commitment to people: “enrich the lives of elders...”

### FACEBOOK POST

#### A. G. Rhodes

- » A.G Rhodes elevates community partner and vice versa—both reach new audiences.
- » Restates dedication of care partners.
- » States commitment to quality: “excellent and loving support...”

### PARTNERSHIP TO DEVELOP INNOVATIONS

#### Oklahoma State University and Spanish Cove, product conceptualized with residents



- » Showcases older adults’ independence, vibrancy and abilities to make on-going contributions.
- » Offers a peek into how older adults live at Spanish Cove (open your doors).

## MEDIA RELATIONS

Media outlets are pivotal to shift the narrative on aging services. Positive stories can begin to balance the narrative by presenting “good news” stories and valuable information from the sector. LeadingAge members cited local television as one of the most influential factors on the perceptions of aging services.

### USEFUL OPENING DOORS STRATEGIES

- Open your doors. Show and tell what you do, who does it and the significant benefits to older adults.
- Demonstrate the high-quality services you deliver and how you do it.
- Include professional caregivers' words and images.
- Emphasize your mission-focus on older adults and your nonprofit or faith-based status.

#### WRIC TV STORY

##### Marywood Apartments feature



Watch the [full news story](#).

- » Employs an older adult, affordable housing resident as a spokesperson.
- » Illustrates independence—living with minimal support.
- » Provides a quick peek inside the apartment community, including some amenities and services.
- » Presses for more government support for affordable housing—recognized as a fundamental right by nearly all U.S. adults.

#### WGCL TV STORY

##### Lenbrook, Presbyterian Homes of Georgia and A.G. Rhodes featuring professional caregivers



Watch the [full news story](#).

- » Lets the viewer hear directly from a professional caregiver (trusted messenger).
- » Creates endearment for caregivers with authentic photography.
- » Reflects the value of indispensable professional caregivers throughout the exhibit.

#### CHARLOTTE OBSERVER STORY

##### Abernethy Laurels feature



Read the [full story](#), with video excerpts.

- » Opens their doors!
- » Demonstrates innovation to ensure quality care.
- » Showcases dedicated professional caregivers.

“In the initial installments of *Left Alone*, an ongoing investigation, *The Charlotte Observer* revealed how staffing shortages endanger thousands of nursing home residents in North Carolina, causing some to wait hours for needed help, miss crucial medications and develop life-threatening infections.

**But Abernethy Laurels has managed to maintain better staffing than most, largely by pursuing “outside the box” solutions, according to executive director Amber McIntosh.** One example: The home has recruited dozens of new caregivers by paying them to become trained and certified.”



## PAID MEDIA

To disseminate your message widely and *exactly* the way you want it—you must pay for advertising. You have numerous options for paid media—to accommodate budgets of any scale. You also have customizable content ready to roll in the [Keep Leading Life assets](#). Get some inspiration for paid media placement right here. Consider this sample media plan, the advertising LeadingAge purchased during the 2022 Leadership Summit.

Medium & Creative Unit	Consumers 45+ Metro-Geo	Partners Micro-Geo	Cost Per 1,000/Unit	Impressions	Cost (thousands)
<b>Digital/Social</b>	Programmatic Digital Facebook & YouTube	Geofencing Mar 26–31	\$16–\$18	420,000	\$7.4
Video: 00:15, 00:30					
Display: Banners			\$5–\$7	715,000	\$5
			Digital/Social:	1,135,000	\$12.4
<b>Outdoor</b>		Woodley Park Metro 8 locations: 4 wks	\$4	290,000	\$6.1
2-Sheet Posters					
Shelters		8 area locations: 2 wks	\$5	1,600,000	\$6.5
			Outdoor:	1,890,000	\$12.6
<b>Television</b>	National & Local News	Cherry picked	\$28–\$30	500,000	\$15
00:15, 00:30					
			\$11	3,525,000	\$40

### EXPLANATION OF MEDIA PLAN

Our goal was to reach Summit delegates and older adults 45+ in the Washington, DC, metro region.

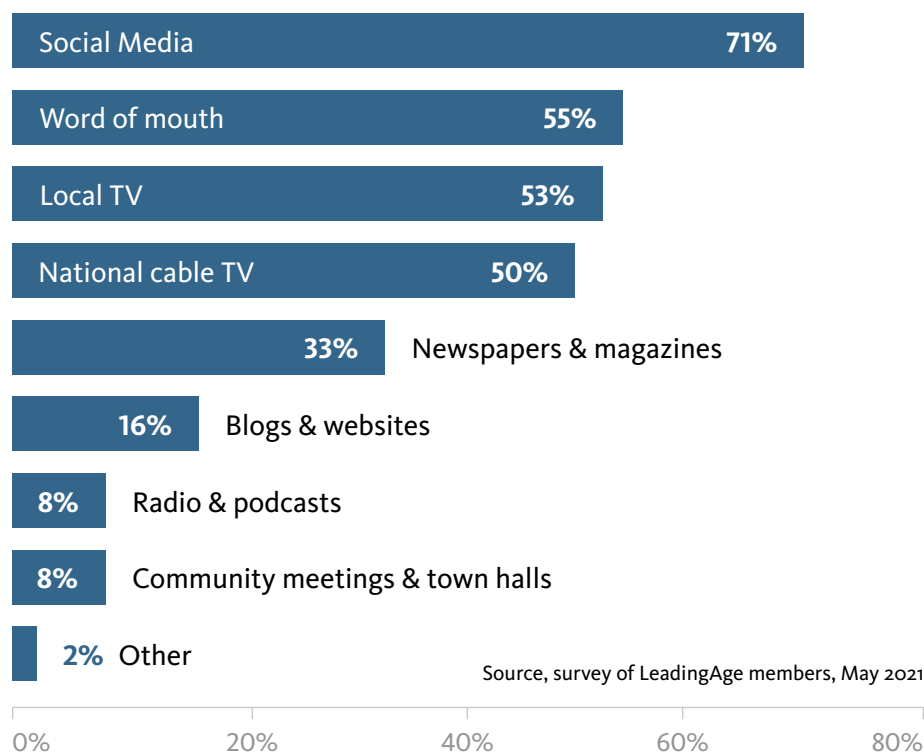
Column 1 indicates all the channels we used—digital, outdoor (Metro rail subway and bus shelters) and television.

Columns 2 and 3 show the channels we selected to reach the two target groups. “Cherry picked” means times during specific programs was purchased to reach the target audience; in this case, morning and evening news, when delegates were likely in their hotel rooms, and during Jeopardy!

Column 4 shows the cost to reach 1,000 people. Given how precisely digital advertising can target the desired audience, its cost per person is higher than less-targeted advertising, such as the outdoor ads.

Column 5 shows the number of impressions (estimated) that our advertising generated.

### PUBLIC PERCEPTION INFLUENCERS



## SOCIAL MEDIA

LeadingAge members cited social media as having the greatest influence on perceptions of the aging services sector. Word of mouth was cited as the second most influential, and social media is a great way to spur chatter and info-sharing among peers.

### USEFUL OPENING DOORS STRATEGIES

- Lead with the older adults you serve and how they thrive with the support of your organization—remaining independent, strong and with agency.
- Feature professional caregivers and a variety of your staff in words, pictures and videos.
- Include your nonprofit status regularly.

### FACEBOOK POST Trinity Woods Tulsa



- » Recognizes professional caregivers' excellence. The series title and hashtag reinforce the employee's talents. (Consider creating an ongoing series!)
- » Highlights caregiver's expertise by listing her training and education.
- » Viewers hear from employees in their own words—they are trusted messengers!
- » Validation from other trusted messengers boosts the message.

### FACEBOOK PAGE Parker Health Group



- » Showcases an award to recognize employees' excellence.
- » Validates employees talent with external entity.
- » Uses language such as "dedication" to describe employees.
- » Reinforces the message with hashtag: "#aboveandbeyond."

### SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA GRAPHICS WITH PHOTOS Joyful Hearts exhibit



- » Illustrates authentic photos of employees and clients/residents that are warm and feel honest.
- » Evokes emotion. The bonds between caretakers and residents shine through! The viewer hears the voices of the trusted professional caregivers: includes language such as "like family," "this is my calling" that expresses their dedication.
- » Reinforces the messages with the series name.

Photos by Heidi Wagner Photography

## WEBSITE

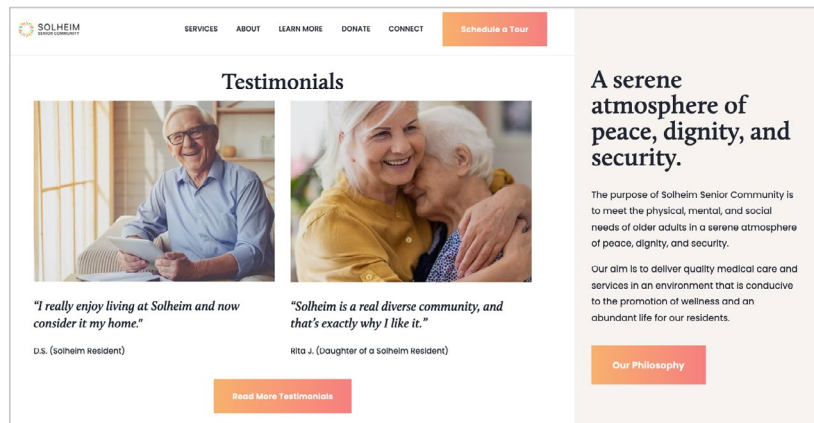
Websites are a primary communications vehicle for all types of organizations. They are your calling card, first introduction, brand builder and storyteller to the world. From the first words and images, your website should reflect the research-backed strategies of Opening Doors to Aging Services.

### USEFUL OPENING DOORS STRATEGIES

- Emphasize the older adults you serve.
- Feature professional caregivers and a variety of your staff in words, pictures and videos.
- Ensure your nonprofit and/or faith-based status is prominent and clear.

## WEBSITE

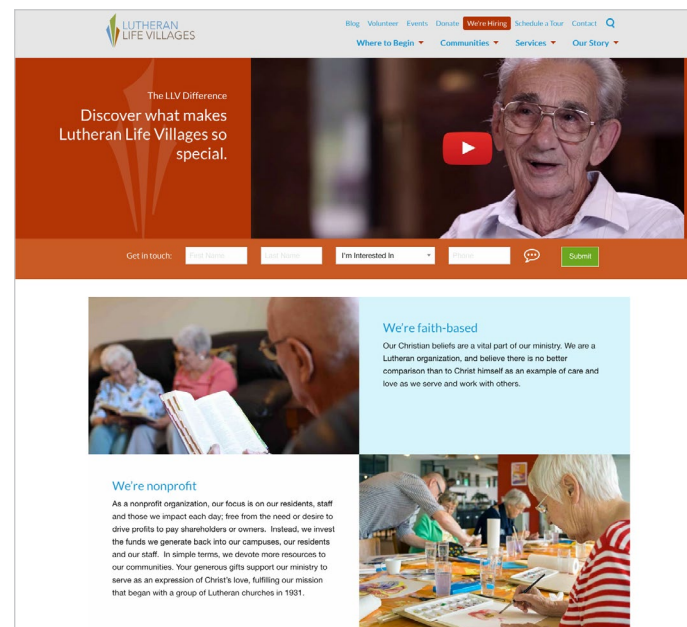
### Solheim Senior Community



- » Provides authentic quotes from trusted messengers: a resident and a child of a resident.
- » States clearly the mission: “to meet the physical and mental needs of residents” (highly valued).
- » States the goal to deliver quality medical care and services.
- » Links services to healthy life.

## WEBSITE

### Lutheran Life Villages



- » Uses authentic video and photos of residents.
- » Presents nonprofit and faith-based status prominently.
- » States clearly mission-focus on older adults.

## WEBSITE

### Brandon Oaks



- » Focuses on older adults—and their agency and independence.
- » Highlights quality services—and the benefits they deliver.
- » States qualifications of professional caregivers and other staff (“expert,” “dedicated”).

## WEBSITE

### Kingsley Manor



- » Older adults are front and center, visually and in text.
- » Highlights the nonprofit status—and how people are the mission.
- » Features trusted professional caregivers.
- » Links quality service to strength and independence.

## DEAR LEADINGAGE MEMBER,

Last year, LeadingAge launched a vital initiative with the goal of shifting perceptions of our sector positively. After a spotlight shone on our sector during the height of COVID, it was important for us to understand public perceptions of our field and reach the public with a positive story of aging services.

That is why we launched Opening Doors to Aging Services. Our team conducted in-depth, first-of-its-kind research on public attitudes about the sector and leveraged those findings to develop communications strategies and resources to inform and align public-facing efforts across our sector.

While there is no fast way to change widely held public views, our research shows that when we talk about our field, public confidence increases. With these new strategies and resources grounded in research, we have a significant opportunity to proactively define the aging services sector for millions of people across the country and to showcase our organizations as inviting places to work.

This Inspiration Guide provides examples of how LeadingAge members are already applying the Opening Doors guidance, so you too can modify your own communications. I look forward to working together as we reclaim the narrative and tell the authentic story of aging services.



**Susan Donley**  
Senior Vice President  
LeadingAge  
July 2022

### RESOURCES

All the strategies, messages, audience info, visual guidance and the following resources are available for you at [openingdoors.org/strategy](https://openingdoors.org/strategy).

- Dos & Don'ts
- LeadingAge Language Guide