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**Aging in the time of
COVID-19**

A visionary's views on
life, legacy & generational
identity

**Disaster preparedness
in a pandemic**

Safeguard elders & staff—
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to reduce fall risk

**White Paper inside:
“Creating the ‘next normal’ in
senior living”**

*Dr. Ken Dychtwald, Age Wave
founder & CEO*

Aging in the time of COVID-19, part one:

An ICAA interview with Age Wave's Dychtwald



As the pandemic continues to disrupt daily life, this renowned visionary discusses life, aging, generational identity and legacy with ICAA's CEO

by Colin Milner

My journey into the what would become the active-aging field began when I was in my 30s. After more than a decade in the fitness industry, I joined a well-known manufacturer of fitness equipment whose

clients included senior living communities. Trips to these communities included conversations with staff who embraced the emerging evidence for the benefits of exercise for older adults, including the frailest elders. These professionals were often the sole believers within their organizations. Yet they passionately supported the use of exercise and adopted these practices to improve health, function and quality of life for residents.

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Dr. Ken Dychtwald, a seminal figure in active aging, has made exceptional contributions to the industry. Image courtesy of Age Wave

Aging in the time of COVID-19, part one: An ICAA interview with Age Wave's Ken Dychtwald *Continued from page 20*



'As elders we need to stand up tall and be loving and concerned for all people in the world who are grappling with fear, loss, trauma, poverty and inequality in their communities—especially during COVID-19,' says Dr. Ken Dychtwald. He adds that older adults 'can teach perspective and be society's steady-ers'

Active aging has grown into a movement on the shoulders of individuals who have made a difference by challenging the status quo, conducting or disseminating research about aging, and envisioning new possibilities in cultural and demographic shifts.

Among its seminal figures is psychologist, gerontologist, Age Wave CEO and best-selling author of 17 books, Ken Dychtwald, PhD. His newly released book, *What Retirees Want: A Holistic View of Life's Third Age*, with Robert Morrison was just published in July 2020 (see "Resources" on page 25).

As founder and CEO of the International Council on Active Aging®, I've had the privilege to get to know Dr. Dychtwald. Over the past 40+ years, Dychtwald—a Boomer who just turned 70—has emerged as a foremost visionary on the lifestyle, health, marketing, economic and workforce implications of the age wave, a term he coined in the 1980s. And, in 2018, I was pleased to present him with the INSPIRE

Award on behalf of ICAA. This award recognized his exceptional and lasting contributions to the active-aging industry as well as his efforts to make a difference in the lives of older adults globally.

Currently, Dychtwald co-chairs the ICAA COVID-19 Senior Living Task Force with Dr. Richard H. Carmona, MD, MPH, FACS, 17th Surgeon General of the United States and chief of health innovations at Canyon Ranch, and myself. This industry-wide group is working to generate ideas, tactics, strategies and messaging that organizations can consider as they emerge from the early stages of isolation to evaluate and plan their "next normal" for the pandemic and look toward the opportunity of a post-COVID era. The Age Wave guru will also deliver a keynote presentation for the ICAA Virtual Conference, Leadership Summit and Expo 2020, in the fall. [Ed. A link to information about the Task Force appears in "Resources" on page 25. To learn more about Dychtwald's upcoming

keynote, see the "Mark your calendar" box on page 26.]

In June 2020, as COVID-19 continued to upend daily life, Dychtwald and I discussed aging in this unique and unsettling time. Let's dive in to part one of what turned into a wide-ranging interview about life, aging, generational identity and legacy. Watch for part two to follow in the *Journal on Active Aging's* September/October issue.

CM: *Ken, much of North America, including where you live in Northern California, is still under some level of physical distancing. How have you felt about sheltering in place?*

KD: I've chosen not to think about this as "sheltering" in place. When I was a kid, we had a bomb shelter in our house in Newark, New Jersey. That was clearly protection from fear. I prefer to think about what we're doing right now as "cocooning."

Just as a caterpillar takes time to cocoon in order to reconstitute itself before re-emerging as a butterfly, I believe we're in the middle of a COVID-19-driven pause, a collective chrysalis. The whole world is going through a near-death experience—perhaps the life you were living just died, or you're worried about someone you love dying or you're possibly even thinking about your own mortality. I'm hoping we can all come through this together and find a way to make a better world. Especially as we see what's happening with the Black Lives Matter movement right now. Maybe I'm a dreamer, but I'm hopeful that we're at a profound turning point in American history, a moment of real change for the better.

CM: *I understand that while you've been cocooning, you also celebrated your 70th birthday. How did that feel?*

KD: It was peculiar because the day before my birthday in late March, I was supposed to keynote the general session at the American Society on Aging conference in Atlanta, Georgia. I thought it would be a

great way to highlight the transition from my seventh to my eighth decade of life. From there, my wife and I planned to fly to meet our kids in the Caribbean to spend the week bonding, playing and partying. Instead, for my birthday, we had a group Zoom call at home.

I asked something different of my wife Maddy; our daughter Casey, who's 33 and lives in Los Angeles, California; our son Zak, who is 30 and had been living in China but was forced to hunker down in Brooklyn, New York; and my older brother Alan, who lives in Florida. "Rather than trying to find a gift," I said, "I'd just like each of you to tell me three things from your heart. First, what do you feel was the best experience we ever had together? Second, what quality of mine do you love the most? And, third, what has been the best day of your life so far?"

As it turned out, what they said in that Zoom call were the most wonderful birthday gifts I could ever receive.

I had felt sad going into my birthday: I couldn't travel, I couldn't be with all the people I love most (except Maddy), but that call helped me feel so much gratitude for this life I'm living. That night, Maddy cooked me a fantastic, healthy dinner of salmon and veggies, after which we cuddled up all by ourselves watching a movie on Netflix. It was the most tender birthday I ever had.

CM: *As you reflect upon 70 years, do you think aging has been an ascent for you—or a descent?*

KD: I'd say that physically I'm trying to keep it from being a descent. My lifelong commitment to healthy living has been paying off, and I'm doing pretty well. But I don't have the body or vitality I did when I was young. I've got an artificial shoulder. I've gained some weight, and I don't sleep as well as I used to. And even though I haven't eaten meat for 50 years and have worked out and also done yoga for the

same period, I have to work diligently to manage my stress, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Emotionally and mentally, my personal aging has most definitely been an ascent. I like to think that I've not just been having birthdays but instead, in *Star Trek* fashion, I've been circling the sun 70 times, and it's been quite a journey. I feel a far greater sense of perspective than when I was younger—and every now and then I notice some buds of wisdom trying to bloom. I also feel far more appreciative of all the people I love and the friends I've made and the work that I've been fortunate to do. Let me also add that watching the nurses and doctors on the frontlines during this pandemic, I have deeper appreciation for the greatness in so many people and for how hard so many of us are trying.

Oh, and lately, I've come to realize that I don't want to be young. Although I like the idea of feeling "youthful," I am more drawn to wanting to be "useful" than "youthful." All in all, I feel really good about my 70th birthday and my own aging.

CM: *I noticed in our recent Zoom call that you haven't shaved for a while. It was surprising to see you with a gray beard!*

KD: I'm actually having fun not cutting my hair and letting my beard grow. It reminds me of my more free-spirited, hippie days. And the grayness? I've worked hard for that. I'm proud of my years and I've earned my elderhood!

CM: *Let's go a little deeper with this. When it comes to your own aging process, what frightens you?*

KD: I think what frightens me most is suffering. I watched my dad go blind from macular degeneration a decade before he died at 93. I watched my dear mom be decimated by Alzheimer's disease for 12 years. I've seen people put into institutions and treated in horrible, demeaning, degrading ways. So, I'm not keen on suffering.

On the other hand, I had the benefit of knowing and collaborating with Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in the 1970s. Since then, I've been around death and I accept it as a natural part of life. I was with my dad and then my mom when they died, and I've also experienced the deaths of my father-in-law and my mother-in-law. I'm at peace with the idea that there is an endpoint to this life. I also believe one enters another zone following bodily death, and I'm curious to see what that's all about. [Ed. The late Dr. Kübler-Ross was a psychiatrist, hospice pioneer and author of more than 20 books, including the groundbreaking *On Death and Dying* in 1969.¹]

CM: *Ken, as COVID-19 disrupts our lives, how do you see the different generations handling this public health crisis?*

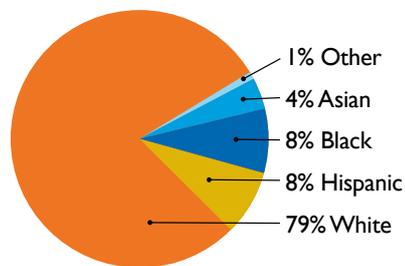
KD: Like most people, I've pieced my views together from the news. I've also pored through many, many reports, polls and studies, and learned from countless intense conversations I've had with experts from many sectors.

A major study of 9,000 Americans and Canadians from five generations,² which my company Age Wave has just completed in partnership with financial services provider Edward Jones, showed that retirees are the least distressed by what's taking place right now. It's true that older people are feeling vulnerable because of the likelihood of contagion and its serious consequences, and that's pretty darn scary. Because so many elders live alone and do not have as much comfort interacting through digital technology as their children and grandchildren, this difficult combination can lead to harmful isolation and its effects. And for those individuals who are the most physically and cognitively vulnerable, many of whom live in nursing homes and similar situations, it's been a terrible nightmare—for them and for their families.

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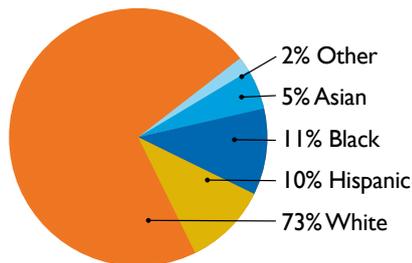
Racial diversity in five generations in the United States

Silent Generation Racial Diversity



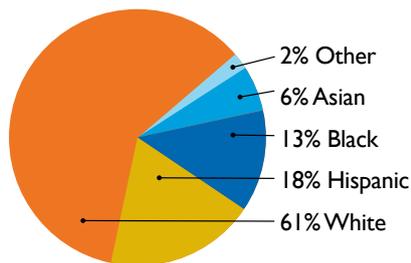
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018

Boomers Racial Diversity



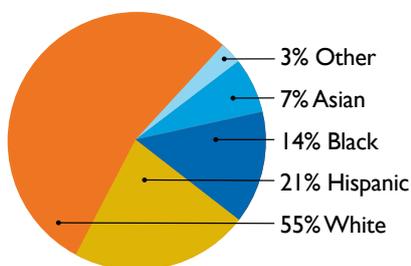
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018

Gen X Racial Diversity



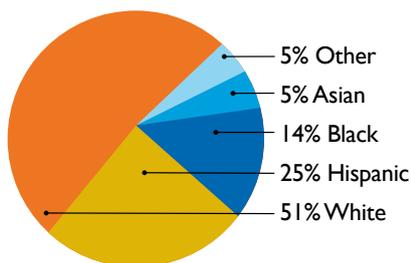
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018

Millennials Racial Diversity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018

Generation Z Racial Diversity



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018

Figure 1. Racial diversity in five generations in the United States. **Source:** Age Wave calculation from 2018 US Census Bureau Population Estimates. Courtesy of Age Wave

In addition, this new research also surprisingly revealed that when it comes to mental health, older Americans are actually coping better in the pandemic overall.² (A full copy of the study report can be downloaded at www.edwardjones.com/preparing-for-your-future/retirement/four-pillars.html.) Thirty-nine percent of the Silent Generation (adults over 75) and one-third of Boomers say they are coping “very well,” while only 26% of Millennials and 21% of Gen Zers say the same. On the other end

of the continuum, an alarming 24% of the younger generations report that they are doing “not well,” while less than half that percentage of the older generations are sounding that alarm.²

From a financial security point of view, in the United States, the average older person receives USD\$18,000 a year from Social Security, while the average couple receives \$31,000 a year.² On top of Social Security, the market value of a Medicare policy each

year is \$12,000.² So, for an older couple, that’s about a \$50,000 safety net. Thank goodness for that!

Maybe it’s because they have some protection with their financial safety nets or because they’re not worried about losing their job or helping their schoolkids cope with the crisis, but older adults have something else going for them. Having experienced so many of life’s ups and downs, they simply have more resilience and perspective about difficult challenges than younger people.

I see that men and women who are a bit younger, 50-to-64 years old, are getting the wind knocked out of them right now. These are the people who are saying, “I was going to keep working a little bit longer, but I don’t know if I’m going to have a job now. My kids have moved back home, and at the same time, my mom is sick and although she needs my help, I am unable to travel to her.” These folks are sandwiched from every direction.

Then you have people in their 30s and 40s. Some have dreamed their whole lives of building a company. Maybe that dream just imploded. They’re worried about their parents, and now they can’t see them. Their young kids are freaking out because they can’t play with their friends. Their mortgage payments are high, plus many still have college debt and credit cards to pay off. I think people in their 30s and 40s are hurting—far more than retirees.

I have also dived into COVID-related research regarding Gen Z members, and in some ways, the situation is even more disturbing for them. [Ed. Pew Research defines Generation Z as born after 1996, making Gen Zers 23 years or younger in 2020.³] Through the Gen Z lens, it is, “Wait a minute, what happened to my future? I was going to go to college and get out on my own. I was hoping to have fun. I was hoping to fall in love. Why is this happening?” For a lot of these young people, the traditional reliance on parents and grandparents to know the answers is frac-

tured right now. Most parents and grandparents don't really know or understand what's going on—or when it's going to get better, or whom to trust for smart answers.

CM: *In light of what's happening with the Black Lives Matter movement right now, do you see any intersection between your studies of generations and the different experiences of white people and people of color, particularly black people, in America?*

KD: This is very sensitive territory, so I'm going to try to just tell my truth. And I understand that it's my truth as a white man in America who—although I grew up with very modest resources in Newark—has definitely benefited throughout my life from a lot of privilege. I am learning a lot by trying to open-mindedly pay a great deal of attention to the Black Lives Matter protests.

If you look at Gen Z in US Census Bureau information,⁴ you'll notice that it's very racially diverse [Ed. Figure 1 on page 24 shows pie charts for racial diversity in five generations]. In fact, Gen Z is only 50% white and is right on the cusp of becoming a minority majority. So, if you're a young person today, you most likely have friends, relatives, teachers and coaches of every color—that's just what it is to be a young person. Their understanding of and their comfort with racial differences and diversity is natural. It's the water in which they swim. And the diversity doesn't end there. Some of these young Americans are straight, some are gay or bisexual or pansexual or fluid, and they feel safer to live life openly as who they are than other generations at earlier times in history.

However, the American population over age 70 is nearly 80% white.⁴ So, if you're an older person in this country—an older white person—you principally grew up in a white world. Most of your friends, teachers, relatives and authorities were white people. When I was growing up, we used to watch *Leave It to Beaver* on television. There were no black people on that TV show, or on most shows, and if they had a role at all, it was the domestic worker. Not only that,

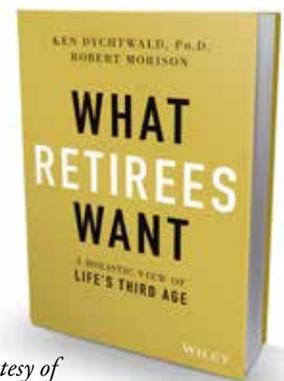
your parents most likely had some racist attitudes shaped by the earlier era in which they grew up. Theirs was an era where there were black and “colored” water fountains in some areas and segregation was commonplace.

What's important to realize is that members of each generation not only have embedded in them their favorite music from their era. For me, for example, that would be Jimi Hendrix and The Temptations. But each of us also has embedded certain values and beliefs and ideas from an earlier era. So even though we're all living in 2020, many older people have, swirling around inside them, a lot of thoughts and a lot of programming that are, in some cases, very biased, prejudiced and just plain wrong. I'm not talking about political parties. I'm talking about what it's like to grow up in different periods of history with different predominant values.

From my personal point of view, America has a history of disrespect to people who are different than the core population, which was white. We haven't come nearly far enough from this intentional, man-made construct of systemic racism. Yet despite the history and experience of Americans over 70, elders must play a role in learning and growing and positive change.

So, among my generation and even more so among those older than the Boomers, we're not necessarily tuned in to what's going on with the new, more diverse America. In fact, many wish things would go back to the way they were when they were young. But that's not going to happen because, due to demographic shifts, the United States is emerging as the great melting pot dream that we've been talking about for centuries. Coming out of all this, I think what's really needed is a much higher level of empathy and cross-generational understanding—and we need this now more than we've ever needed it before. How unfortunate that rather than actively being part of the much-

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*Image courtesy of
John Wiley & Sons, Inc.*

Resources

Internet

Age Wave
www.agewave.com

International Council on Active Aging (ICAA)
www.icaa.cc

ICAA COVID-19 Response Center
www.icaa.cc/covid19response/overview.htm

ICAA COVID-19 Senior Living Task Force
www.icaa.cc/covid19response/task_force.htm

Print

Dychtwald, K., & Morrison, R. (2020). *What Retirees Want: A Holistic View of Life's Third Age*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Available at www.amazon.com/What-Retirees-Want-Holistic-Lifes-dp-1119648084/dp/1119648084/ref=mt_other?_encoding=UTF8&me=&qid=1595622841

Edward Jones, Age Wave, & Harris Poll. (2020). *The Four Pillars of the New Retirement*. Available at <https://www.edwardjones.com/preparing-for-your-future/retirement/four-pillars.html>

Aging in the time of COVID-19, part one: An ICAA interview with Age Wave's Ken Dychtwald *Continued from page 25*

needed solution, too many of our elected officials inflame the problem.

CM: *What are some tips for how young and old can be more empathetic and helpful to each other?*

KD: As elders we need to stand up tall and be loving and concerned for all people in the world who are grappling with fear, loss, trauma, poverty and inequality in their communities—especially during COVID-19. I think we can teach perspective and we can be society's "steady-ers." For example, last fall I spoke at a conference at which actor Harrison Ford was also a presenter. During his session, Ford, an outspoken environmental activist, stimulated the audience by proclaiming that young people all over the world should plant millions of trees to help save the planet. As it turned out, I had a private one-on-one meeting with him afterward. I suggested that maybe the world's older adults should plant one billion trees. To see older men and women planting trees in whose shade they would never sit would make an entirely different statement. Or even better, maybe old and young people should plant trees together. We both smiled when he responded, "Ken, I had never thought of that. What a great idea!"

On the other hand, since young people are far more likely to be multiracial and multiethnic, and to have different views on sexuality, work and even family, I would love to see the young generations teach the older generations to be less rigid and more open-minded.

Young people also need to reach out and teach us how the new technologies work. Why? Because according to a recent study from the Pew Foundation, among the Silent Generation—so just older than the Boomers—only 62% use the Internet and only 28% use any social media.⁵ That's a potentially deadly digital divide. Today's older adults rely on digital technology not just for friendship, shopping and socialization, but also for their own health as, accelerated by COVID-19, we just instantly became a

telehealth world. This digital divide is a serious problem and a lot of older people are in a digital ditch. Young people could help create the much-needed bridge out. Generational generosity is best when it's a two-way street. 🌿

Part two of this interview will appear in the Journal on Active Aging this fall. In that article, Dr. Dychtwald will share his insights on "age wave" challenges facing the healthcare system, wellness and self-care, the impact of COVID-19 on the senior living experience, and what he means by the "third age" of life.

Colin Milner, CEO of the International Council on Active Aging, is founder of the active-aging industry in North America and a leading authority on the health and well-being of the older adult. The World Economic Forum (WEF) has recognized Milner as one of the world's "most innovative and influential minds" on aging-related topics. An award-winning writer, Milner has authored more than 300 articles. He has been published in such journals as Global Policy and the Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics. He also contributed a chapter to the WEF book Global Population Ageing: Peril or Promise? coauthored with the Journal on Active Aging's Jenifer Milner and ICAA Advisory Board Member Kay

Van Norman. Efforts by the ICAA CEO have inspired a broad spectrum of groups to seek his counsel, including the World Health Organization, WEF's Global Agenda Council on Aging, US Department of Health and Human Services, and Canadian Special Senate Committee on Aging.

References

1. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation. (n.d.). EKR Biography. Retrieved August 8, 2020, from <https://www.ekrfoundation.org/Elisabeth-kubler-ross/biography/>.
2. Edward Jones, Age Wave, & Harris Poll. (2020). The Four Pillars of the New Retirement. <https://www.edwardjones.com/preparing-for-your-future/retirement/four-pillars.html>
3. Dimock, M. (2019, January 17). Fact Tank. Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins. Pew Research Center. Retrieved August 8, 2020, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/whwere-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.
4. Age Wave calculation from 2018 US Census Bureau Population Estimates.
5. Vogels, E. A. (2019, September 9). Fact Tank. Millennials stand out for their technology use, but older generations also embrace digital life. Pew Research Center. Retrieved August 8, 2020, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/09/09/us-generations-technology-use/>.

Mark your calendar

Interested in hearing more? Plan today to attend Dr. Ken Dychtwald's keynote presentation, "The new age of aging: A holistic view of life's Third Age," as part of the ICAA Virtual Conference, Leadership Summit and Expo 2020 this fall.

A special briefing for ICAA members, this General Session will feature new, cutting-edge ideas and forecasts from Dychtwald, Age Wave CEO and author of *What Retirees Want: A Holistic View of Life's Third Age*. Learn compelling insights from Age Wave's just completed study, "The Four Pillars of the New Retirement," sponsored by finan-

cial services provider Edward Jones. This groundbreaking survey of 9,000 people across North America examines the new hopes, fears and challenges of what it means to live longer today—including the impact of COVID-19 on people's dreams and plans. Key questions will be explored and answered.

Dychtwald's presentation will take place 9–10 a.m. Pacific/12–1 p.m. Eastern on Tuesday, October 27. You can participate live online on the day and/or access this session later on-demand. For information and to register, go to www.icaa.cc.