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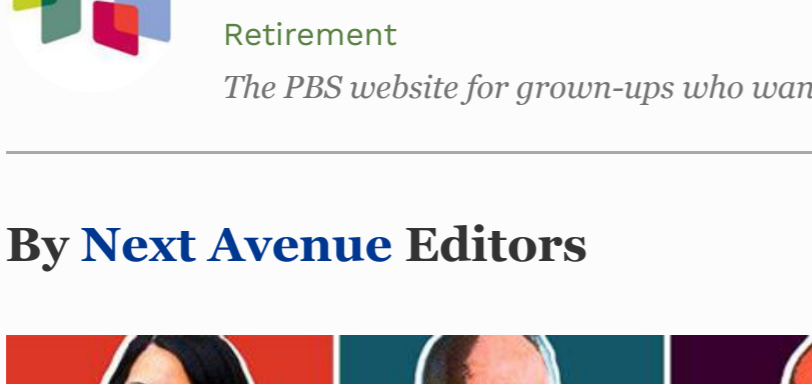
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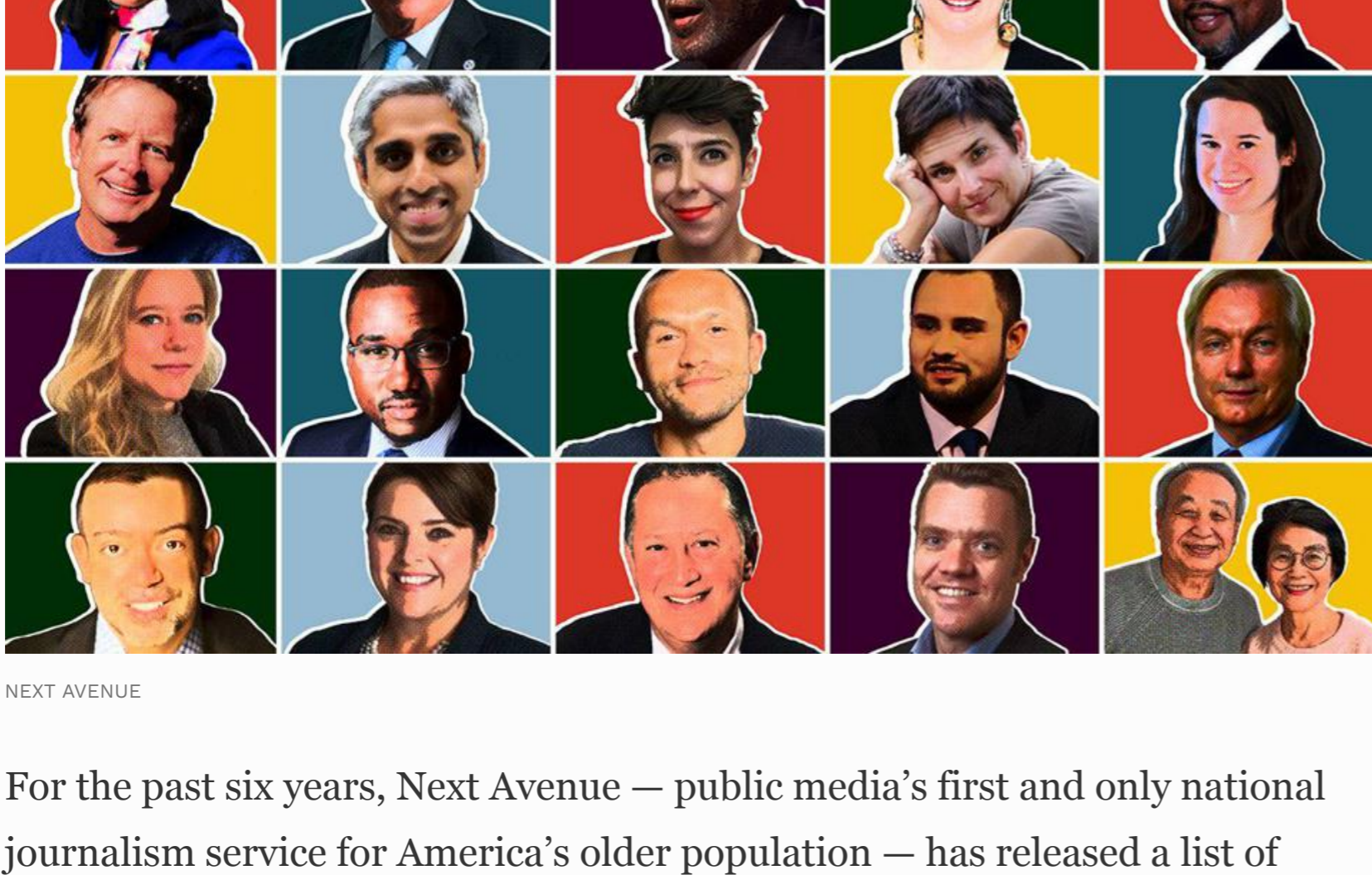
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Next Avenue's 2020 'Influencers In Aging' Fight Covid-19, Loneliness And Ageism



By Next Avenue Editors



NEXT AVENUE

For the past six years, Next Avenue — public media's first and only national journalism service for America's older population — has released a list of "Influencers in Aging."

We've named 20 trailblazers who are each uniquely changing how we age and think about aging. This year's list includes a new and distinctive group of five honorees specifically chosen for their contributions to advance the safety and wellness of older Americans during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic changed pretty much everything in 2020 and that goes for how we chose this year's Next Avenue Influencers in Aging and why.

As we all know, the pandemic has been cataclysmic to people's lives and exposed major gaps in government and health care policies, institutions and services. Disturbingly, the pandemic has also amplified ageism and negative stereotypes of aging. These and other effects of COVID-19 will continue for months, if not years.

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Next Avenue's **2020 Influencers in Aging** are:

Jean Accius — senior vice president of AARP Global Thought Leadership. He led the AARP team to produce The Longevity Economy report documenting the enormous dollar value of Americans 50+.

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Angela Burton — founder of Feet to the Fire Writers' Workshops — a creative program that inspires adults to challenge themselves through expressive writing. Her work inspires creative action that enhances the lives of thousands of older adults.

Christina Da Costa — senior director of communications at SAGE, a national advocacy and services organization that's been looking out for LGBT elders since 1978. She led groundbreaking work that used technology to connect vulnerable adults to community leaders and allies during the pandemic.

Robert Espinoza — vice president of policy at PHI, where he oversees its national policy advocacy, research and public education division. PHI promotes and advocates for quality direct care jobs. Espinoza's work has revealed and worked to correct inequities in the direct care workforce, predominantly made up of women, people of color and immigrants.

Michael J. Fox — Canadian-born actor, author and advocate who has navigated a five-decade career in entertainment and lived with Parkinson's disease since 1991. He has become the face of millions who live with chronic degenerative diseases and a champion for funding research that advances treatment options.

Dr. Sharon Inouye — director of the Aging Brain Center at Hebrew SeniorLife and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. She has become one of the nation's leading experts during the pandemic on the need to include older adults in COVID-19 vaccine trials. Dr. Inouye is also an internationally recognized leader in aging and geriatric medicine. Her work focuses on delirium in hospitalized older patients, with more than 300 peer-reviewed original articles to date.

Charlotte Japp — The millennial founder of CIRKEL, an intergenerational platform that aims to connect younger and older workers in shared learning and networking opportunities. Her work is helping older professionals stay in the workforce longer and impart valuable mentorship to younger workers and vice versa.

Raymond Jetson — An Encore Public Voices Fellow who leads MetroMorphosis in Baton Rouge, La. and is urging older Black men to mentor younger Black adults and youth. His organization mobilizes engaged citizens in inner-city neighborhoods to design and implement sustainable solutions to persistent community challenges.

Heidi Johnson — director of behavioral economics at Financial Health Network. She wrote a breakthrough report on personal finance technology use and needs of lower-income older Americans. At FNN, Johnson leads work to leverage behavioral insights in the design and development of products that support consumers' financial health, including retirement planning.

Stephen Johnston — Co-founder of Aging2.0, a global innovation platform for aging that connects entrepreneurs, care providers and older adults to identify and build solutions to help people age better.

Dr. Dominic H. Mack — Professor of family medicine at Morehouse School of Medicine and co-director of The National COVID-19 Resiliency Network, which assembles local, state and national partners to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations.

Grandpa Chan and Grandma Marina — Husband and wife from South Korea, Chan Jae Lee and Kyong Ja Ahn became internationally recognized for their virtual storytelling, which began as a way to connect with their four grandchildren. The couple just published a book (*Looking Back, Life was Beautiful*), regularly delight their 400,000 Instagram followers with original stories, videos and illustrations and have been featured by *The New York Times* NYT 0.0% and BBC.

Dr. Vivek Murthy — Former Surgeon General of the United States who has focused on chronic stress and isolation as prevalent problems that have profound implications for health, productivity and happiness. His 2020 book *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* underscores the detrimental effects of loneliness and calls for resources and innovation to combat it. He is also co-chair of President-Elect Biden's COVID-19 Transition Task Force.

Dr. Jeremy Nobel — Founder and president of the Foundation of Art & Healing, and architect of the UnLonely Project that was created in response to the growing public health concern of social isolation and loneliness. The initiative broadens public awareness of the negative physical and mental health consequences of loneliness associated with a wide range of living conditions and promotes creative arts-based approaches to reduce the burden.

Michael Osterholm — Director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, where he has provided public health guidance to government agencies and media outlets during the COVID-19 pandemic. He is a former Minnesota state epidemiologist and author of the New York Times best-selling 2017 book, *Deadliest Enemy: Our War Against Killer Germs*. He is also a member of President Biden's COVID-19 Transition Task Force.

Sian-Pierre Regis — Award-winning journalist and cultural critic who directed the feature-length documentary *Duty Free* about his immigrant mother, who was abruptly fired from her job as a hotel housekeeper at the age of 75, and the economic insecurity facing her and millions in her generation.

Jason Resendez — Executive director of the Latinos Against Alzheimer's Network. He is a leader in the nation's efforts to address brain health disparities impacting Latinos. Resendez spearheads coalition building, strategic convening and patient advocacy in the Latino community.

Andrew Saul — Commissioner of the Social Security Administration, who has made customer service a top priority for Social Security beneficiaries, including adding more than 1,000 staffers to answer questions on the agency's toll-free line and improving its website so Americans can better see and understand the Social Security benefits they'll receive.

Jennifer Sheets — President and CEO of Interim Healthcare. She worked with the White House in 2020 to advocate that home care clinicians receive essential workers status.

C. Grace Whiting — President and CEO of The National Alliance for Caregiving. Whiting has been a leader in research around caregiving in America, producing the nation's first national policy study of 1,400+ rare disease caregivers with Global Genes and helped author AARP's Caregiving in the U.S. 2020 report.

When you read [our interviews with this year's winners](#) and see the video and audio clips from them in our articles, we think you'll see why the 2020 Influencers in Aging are a remarkable, spirited group with groundbreaking achievements.

Be sure to read, at the end of each interview, the Influencer in Aging's answers to two questions we asked them all:

- **If you could change one thing about aging in America, what would it be**
- **How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed your perspective on aging?**

Their responses will tell you a lot about why these insightful honorees made the cut for 2020. We could not be more excited to uplift the work of these extraordinary people who are tackling these questions and finding new ways for living longer, healthier and happier lives.

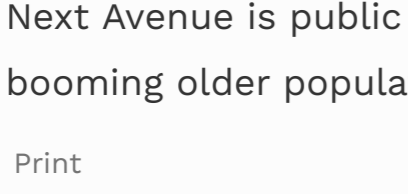
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