

# Margaret Young



## Tell us about some of your projects

Age Knowble, my Canadian social good enterprise, collaborates across generations and sectors to help older people achieve decent living standards and ensure they can participate equally in society. We work with older people, service providers, and students. We convene, build awareness, and recommend policies.

I am also the Immediate Past Chair of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP), a global network of more than 400 organizations working towards a new legally binding human rights instrument, the UN Convention. I conceived the "Age With Rights" campaign in 2021 to strengthen grassroots advocacy and collective impact. Since then, it has grown into a worldwide movement! This gives me hope and strengthens my resolve.



## How did you get into this work? How did you come into this leadership role?



During my travels in my twenties, I was struck by the stark disparities in older people's lives. This made me wonder what paths led these older people to where they were and, more importantly, what their futures would hold. So, during my banking career, I pursued opportunities that helped me learn about older people, knowing I would one day work with and for them.

The 2019 United Nations Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) inspired me to work on older people's rights. I was part of the Pass It On Network delegation. I saw firsthand the impact of human rights beyond laws and policies, which led me to join GAROP. I joined its Steering Group in 2020 and served as Chair from 2022 to 2024. My corporate skills and curiosity have made this experience rewarding for GAROP and me. It has been fulfilling to work alongside others who hold dear the rights of older people, and it is hopeful to see the progress possible when we are together.

## What makes your work hard?

Building a global movement and strengthening the political will needed to promote and protect the human rights of older people is like nurturing a caterpillar into a butterfly. It requires unwavering belief, the hands and hearts of many, and sustained dedication in the face of an, at times, unfriendly environment. This must happen in our communities, countries, and globally for the UN Convention to succeed. It's not a small feat.

## You have a big set of problems to contend with.

### What makes for a good day?

A good day is another step forward—steps like one more older person standing up for their rights, one more person or organization joining the movement, or one more member state declaring their support. These steps lead to critical turning points, like the August 2024 UN resolution, in which the UN Convention is one of the recommended options for closing current human rights gaps.

## What gives you hope?

The power and voices of people like you and me. Over the past five years, activism that says older people are rightsholders and should not be bound by age has grown in number and form. Chilean advocates wrote a song about older people's rights. Mauritius youth rally for their elders' rights.

Older Canadians stand up for their right to social security. Swiss climate activists sued the government for not doing enough to fight climate change, claiming it violated their right to life—and they won. At the intergovernmental level, the 2024 OEWGA saw unprecedented participation from older and younger people, civil society, and national human rights commissions. Feeling the energy as I stood in the back of the room, I was and am still convinced that the UN Convention is a matter of time.



## What keeps you awake at night?

The scale and complexity can be overwhelming. Like other human rights movements, achieving and enforcing a UN Convention requires ongoing grassroots support and resources. The shifting political landscape with changing priorities and alliances is also a constant concern. Another systemic challenge is the predominant social construct of associating older persons with vulnerability rather than potential.

## What do you see if we get this right?

A UN Convention on the rights of older persons has transformative powers—secured, dignified, and self-determined lives in old age; humanity that acknowledges older people as an integral part of our identity; and full enjoyment of human rights, like water and air, sustaining us until the last breath. Its framework and standards will be the foundation to build on as our longevity narrative evolves.

## What would you like to say to younger readers?

To younger readers: this fight is not just about the present; it's also about your future. The standards we set today will shape the world you grow old in. By engaging now, you're advocating for your elders and laying the groundwork for future generations.



## What about older readers?

To older readers: you have fought for others throughout your life. It's time you fight for yourself. Your voices matter, and your experiences are needed. I encourage you to step up, speak out, and help shape a better world for all of us.







**SPEC Elders Circle**  
Legacy-making as Elder-making

## About Elders in our Midst

The Elders in our Midst project celebrates seniors across British Columbia and Canada who have contributed meaningfully to climate action in their communities. Through youth-led interviews and Joy Hanser's hand-painted portraits, it highlights their unique efforts and inspires all generations to foster community-driven climate action.

### **Learn More and Connect**

Elders in Our Midst: [spec.bc.ca/eldersinourmidst](https://spec.bc.ca/eldersinourmidst)

Elders Circle: [spec.bc.ca/eldercircle](https://spec.bc.ca/eldercircle)

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