

'Blanket of silence' around elder abuse

Call to expand terms of reference

WHILE welcoming Premier Daniel Andrews' announcement of terms of reference for the Royal Commission into Family Violence, Seniors Rights Victoria says elder abuse must also be addressed.

Manager Jenny Blakey said seniors were mentioned as one group of many whose needs and experiences should be considered in the terms of reference.

"They are one of the participants rather than a separate group," she said. "Nothing in the terms of reference articulates specific elder abuse."

Ms Blakey said a high proportion of elder abuse occurs within the family, with half of elder abuse incidents perpetrated by an adult son or daughter.

She said it was important to get the issue into the open.

"There is a general lack of awareness of elder abuse as an issue in the community," she said.

"It should be given a lot more air - there is a blanket of silence around it.



CONCERN - Seniors Rights Victoria manager Jenny Blakey.

ELDER abuse is any act that causes harm to an older person and is carried out by someone they know and trust. It takes a number of forms including financial, emotional/psychological, physical and neglect.

"We need to empower older people and make them aware of their rights."

According to last year's Seniors Rights Victoria annual report, the service's helpline fielded 2236 telephone calls, with 1206 relat-

ed to elder abuse. Older people made up 39 per cent of all callers, with other calls coming from friends or relatives (38 per cent) and staff in aged care and other services (18 per cent).

Ms Blakey said there were many reasons older people did not speak up.

"It can be a case of an older person wanting to keep the peace with their family, and there's a lot of shame and guilt associated with it.

"Some older people think it's their fault they are treated as they are.

"Victims are quite vulnerable. They fear losing family ties, their self-esteem and confidence diminishes, they are heavily impacted.

"Sometimes there's the threat of 'we'll put you in a home', and they worry about losing their independence."

Seniors Rights Victoria offers legal advice and advocacy to victims of elder abuse.

■ Helpline, 1300-368-821, www.seniorsrights.org.au