



Annual Report 2015–16

// I found people I dealt with
at Seniors Rights Victoria excellent.
A big thank you. Everything has
now worked out for the best. //

CLIENT



Contents

1. What is Elder Abuse?	2
2. Seniors Rights Victoria	3
3. Manager’s Report	6
4. Leadership and Influence	8
5. Our Practice	14
6. Communication and Education	17
7. Learning and Sustainability	19
8. Partnerships	20
9. Case Studies	22

“ I am very happy with all I received from Seniors Rights Victoria. Thank you very much. ”

CLIENT



Seniors Rights Victoria acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government, Victoria Legal Aid and the Commonwealth of Australia Attorney-General's Department.

1 What is Elder Abuse?

'Elder abuse' is any act which causes harm to an older person and is carried out by someone they know and trust. While elder abuse is vastly under-reported, the World Health Organisation estimates up to 10 per cent of older people worldwide experience it. Elder abuse is a form of family violence, in that most perpetrators are family members – particularly adult children. Like other forms of family violence, elder abuse is about one person disrespecting the rights of another, and abusing power and control. Elder abuse reflects gender inequality but especially the ageism that is still endemic in our society today.

The different forms of elder abuse are:

Financial abuse

Using someone's money, property or other assets illegally or improperly. For example, through forcing them to sign documents.

Emotional or psychological abuse

Using threats, humiliation or harassment causing anguish and feelings of shame or powerlessness. This often occurs in combination with other forms of abuse.

Physical abuse

Inflicting pain or injury, for example, hitting, slapping, pushing or using restraints.

Sexual abuse

Any sexual activity for which the person has not consented.

Social abuse

Preventing contact with relatives, friends or service providers, or restricting activities.

Neglect

Failing to provide the basic necessities of life, either intentionally or unintentionally.



2 Seniors Rights Victoria

Seniors Rights Victoria is the key state-wide service dedicated to stopping elder abuse. Seniors Rights Victoria recognises the intrinsic value, skills and strengths of older Victorians, and helps them to stand up for their rights.

Mission

Seniors Rights Victoria's mission is to empower older Victorians so that each can live safely, with dignity and independence.

Vision

Seniors Rights Victoria's vision is to promote, empower, protect and enhance the rights of older people in the prevention of, and response to, elder abuse and ageism.

Services

Seniors Rights Victoria is a program of [Council on The Ageing Victoria \(COTA\)](#). The COTA Board has appointed a Seniors Rights Victoria Council to give strategic direction and support.

Seniors Rights Victoria provides information, support, advice, casework and education to help prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older people.

Our services include a Helpline, specialist legal services, short-term support and advocacy for individuals, and education. We also participate in policy development and law reform and work with organisations and groups to raise awareness of elder abuse.

We are located in the Block Arcade, 98 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne and operate Monday to Friday from 9 am to 5 pm. Our Helpline (1300 368 821) is open from 10 am to 5 pm.

In 2015–16, we also had partnerships to deliver services with:

- [Justice Connect, Seniors Law](#) – the Health Justice Partnership for an integrated legal service for older people at St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne
- [Eastern Community Legal Centre](#) – co-ordination of responses to regional elder abuse cases and issues.

Council

The Seniors Rights Victoria Council was established by the COTA Board in 2015. It is responsible for providing strategic advice and support for our organisation's direction and overall performance and contribute to the attainment of the Strategic Plan. The Council also informs our key objectives and performance measures.

The Council members for 2015/16 were:

Jenny Alvin (Chairperson)
Director and consultant, Corporate Capability

Carolyn Bond AO
Director of the Legal Services Board and Energy and Water Ombudsman Victoria Board.
Previously co-CEO of the Consumer Law Action Centre

Dr John Chesterman
Manager, Policy and Education, Office of the Public Advocate

Liz Cox
Principal Relationship Manager, VMIA

George Koulis
Director of Finance and Corporate Services, Doutta Galla Aged Care Services

Aaron Wyllie
Policy and Research Officer, Benetas.
PhD candidate, Monash University

Robert Yung
COTA Board member.



“Thank you for your help. I’m feeling a lot easier in my mind now. I shall consult a solicitor, which I should have done earlier. I feel I can get on top of the problems now.”

CLIENT

Staff

Jenny Blakey	Manager
Pam Morton	Principal Lawyer
Carol Stuart	Relief Principal Lawyer
Melanie Perkins	Community Lawyer
Tabitha O’Shea	Community Lawyer (from June 2016)
Danielle Di Carlo	Administrator
Gary Ferguson	Community Education Co-ordinator
Philippa Campbell	Advocacy Co-ordinator
Mandy Walmsley	Advocate
Stacey Van Dueren	Helpline Advocate
Jennifer Evans	Relief Advocate
Caitlin Evans	Communications Adviser
Cybele Stockley	Project Worker (April 2015–May 2016)

Partners

Eastern Community Legal Centre

Kaz McKay	Partnerships Co-ordinator
-----------	---------------------------

Justice Connect: Seniors Law

Lauren Gordon	Lawyer, Health Justice Partnership at St Vincent’s Hospital.
---------------	--

Financial statements

Audited financial reports for the relevant financial year are available on our website: seniorsrights.org.au/about-us/annual-reports. COTA audited financial statements may be found on the COTA website: cotavic.org.au/about/annual-reports-and-financial-statements.



Acknowledgments

Thank you to our funders, supporters and consultants who make our work possible.

For elder abuse response and prevention:

Department of Health and Human Services, Senior Programs and Participation, Ageing and Aged Care Branch	\$649,419
Victoria Legal Aid	\$597,599
Federal Attorney-General	\$86,177

For the Elder Abuse Outcome Research Project (Elder Abuse in Intergenerational Relationships – with the National Ageing Research Institute):

Lord Mayor’s Charitable Foundation	\$50,000
------------------------------------	----------

For the 4th National Elder Abuse Conference:

Ian Potter Foundation for assisting international speakers’ participation	\$12,620
---	----------

For the National Conference Working Meeting of elder abuse services:

State Trustees	\$6,100
----------------	---------

Our major sponsors for the 4th National Elder Abuse Conference:

The Office of the Public Advocate, DPS Publishing and Family Mediation and Counselling Victoria

Arinex, the professional conference organiser

Clayton Utz and Maddocks law firms for pro-bono assistance with cases

Cocoon Consulting and Jackie Moden Consulting for working with our Council and staff on our 2016–19 Strategic Plan and the 2016/17 Operational Plan

Seniors Rights Victoria 2

Changesmith Consulting for reviewing our state-wide model of service delivery

Human Resource Consulting for HR support

Jacqui Morse for external debriefing of case staff

Lander and Rogers law firm for assistance with the Working Meeting at the 4th National Elder Abuse Conference and our major WEAAD event

Dr John Chesterman, the Office of the Public Advocate and Deborah Di Natale, Justice Connect, for their contributions as members of the National Conference Organising Group

Law Institute of Victoria for the venue for the Elder Abuse Roundtable meetings

In 2015–16, Seniors Rights Victoria also appreciated the support of:

Our community education volunteers:

Jennifer Evans
Ken Humphries
Alison O’Keefe
Sue Lane
Deirdre Penhale

COTA volunteers:

Vivienne Lowe
Alison O’Keefe
Wilma Marmur
Mary Walsh

3 Manager's Report

The past year has seen amazing growth in both awareness of and interest in elder abuse from the public. This greater focus on older people and their rights helps prevent elder abuse.

To begin with, the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence provided Seniors Rights Victoria with a fantastic opportunity to highlight the abuse of older people, which is most often perpetrated by family members. The Commission's report set out a new, broader definition of family violence which included older people experiencing intergenerational

which helped keep the issue of elder abuse before key stakeholders. I also want to thank Carol Stuart for filling in as a relief Community Lawyer and as our Acting Principal Lawyer at critical times.

Another major contributor to the growing interest in elder abuse was the 4th National Elder Abuse Conference held in Melbourne in February 2016. Seniors Rights Victoria hosted this event, the culmination of 18 month's work – a truly amazing feat for such a small service. I thank our staff: Gary Ferguson, Philippa

government intends to develop a national plan on elder abuse, along with other initiatives, and to work with key stakeholders including Seniors Rights Victoria in this process.

Another important activity for Seniors Rights Victoria in terms of influence was the research report, 'The Older Person's Experience: Outcomes of Interventions into Elder Abuse', produced in partnership with NARI (the National Ageing Research Institute). We learned directly from older people who had experienced elder abuse what outcomes came from our involvement and what was successful for them – useful information for older people, the elder abuse sector and policy-makers alike.

Greater awareness of elder abuse has led to more demands on Seniors Rights Victoria's advocacy and legal services and our professional education program, and more requests to partner with others on elder abuse initiatives. All stretching our human resources significantly. Seniors Rights Victoria's work has increased in complexity over the years, but our knowledge and skills have also grown. Informed by older people, our highly competent staff (of only 10 on average) have delivered a quality service in all activity areas, and have truly made an impact.

Thanks to older people who share their lives with us, we have a very solid foundation to draw upon when advocating for our clients, building community capacity to respond to elder abuse and contributing to government reforms. Seniors Rights Victoria is indeed 'the little engine that could'.

Jenny Blakey

Manager,
Seniors Rights Victoria



“Seniors Rights Victoria helped us realise our son had been bullying us and left us with very little money for the rest of our lives.”

CLIENT



Seniors Rights Victoria Manager Jenny Blakey, Professor Mick Dodson, Frank Vincent AO QC, Libbi Gorr at the 4th National Elder Abuse Conference



abuse within their families. The issue of elder abuse then attracted much attention in the media and within the family violence reform work undertaken by the Victorian Government. Elder abuse is now being considered by the State-wide Family Violence Steering Committee and in the work of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of Cybele Stockley, our project worker, who prepared Seniors Rights Victoria's input into the Commission hearings, supported the development of the Elder Abuse Roundtable, and advanced advocacy and policy initiatives

Campbell, Danielle Di Carlo, and former COTA CEO, Sue Hendy, for their membership of the Organising Group, as well as the Arinex team: Sarah Weatherby and Dominika Howard.

The Conference again obtained wide coverage in both seniors and mainstream media. In his opening address, Senator George Brandis committed the Federal Government to an inquiry by the Australian Law Reform Commission into elder abuse in Australia. This was followed up by an election policy announcement on 15 June 2016 (World Elder Abuse Awareness Day) about 'Protecting the Rights of Older Australians'. The Federal

4 Leadership and Influence

In 2015–16, Seniors Rights Victoria cemented its reputation as the key state-wide service dedicated to stopping elder abuse by demonstrating leadership and influence in four key areas:

4th National Elder Abuse Conference

From 23–25 February 2016, we hosted the 4th National Elder Abuse Conference in Melbourne, with the ABC's Libbi Gorr as the MC. It took 18 months of preparation with the professional conference organiser, Arinex. 345 delegates registered and attended and feedback was generally very positive.



Sponsorship targets were met, with major sponsors including the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Public Advocate, DPS Publishing and Family Mediation and Counselling Victoria.

The theme of the conference was Ageism, Rights and Innovations and its aims were to:

- Showcase new knowledge to use in practice
- Raise awareness of elder abuse more broadly
- Influence system change
- Strengthen connections across the sector and state.

The Federal Attorney General, the Hon. George Brandis, helped put elder abuse squarely on the national agenda at the start of the Conference by announcing that the Australian Law Reform Commission would launch an Inquiry into

[‘Protecting the Rights of Older Australians from Abuse’](#). It will report in May 2017.

The Conference program included content with a high level of innovative research and practice. Through the Conference Grants Program of the Ian Potter Foundation, we were able to bring out two highly regarded international speakers: Professor Marie Beaulieu from Sherbrooke University, Canada, and Dr Jackie Berman, Director of Research, Department for Ageing, New York City. Professor Beaulieu spoke about Quebec's plan to counter elder abuse, which includes the establishment of the world's first and only elder abuse research chair; creation of a network of regional elder abuse coordinators; a broad public awareness campaign to inform people of the nature of elder abuse; and innovative outreach programs such as police door-knocking of local older populations.

Dr Berman spoke about the relationship between elder abuse and mental health, showing how routine screening for depression and anxiety increases rates of diagnosis and treatment and accordingly improves outcomes for people who have experienced elder abuse.

Professor Mick Dodson from the Centre for Indigenous Studies at ANU delivered a keynote address condemning the scourge of men's violence towards women and children of all ages, and asserting that culture or a history of oppression is no excuse.

Ms. Robyn Scott, the CEO of Age Concern NZ, provided an overview of the regional responses to elder abuse in New Zealand, including an Elder Abuse and Neglect Prevention Service Model. Other people spoke about elder abuse in regional and culturally diverse communities, the invisibility of sexual assault of older people, and the importance of processes such as

At the 4th National Elder Abuse Conference



Prof. Marie Beaulieu



Participants



Life Activities stall



Jenny Blakey and Senator the Hon George Brandis QC



Prof. Mick Dodson



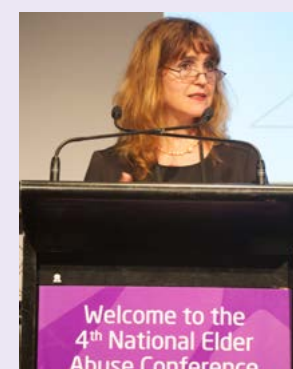
Delegates from Hong Kong



Interstate elder abuse organisations



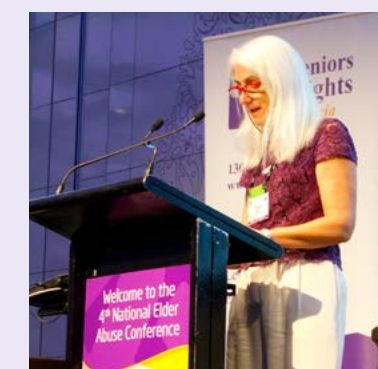
Participants



Dr Jackie Berman



Cross sector collaboration meeting



Jenny Blakey

4 Leadership and Influence

seniors' mediation to help older people resolve family disputes.

Elder abuse as a form of family violence was frequently discussed, as were the challenges of redress in cases of financial abuse. Other themes throughout the Conference included prevention through awareness-raising (by media and community development actions), response models and legal and health collaboration. There were calls for better data, a national strategy to deal with social change and law reform, better training for the police and other service providers, and more collaboration with other professionals.

Seniors Rights Victoria included three side events in the Conference:

1. A free half-day Seniors Forum for older people with three speakers, including Professor Beaulieu – attended by 50 people.
2. A half-day meeting with approximately 30 participants from 13 elder abuse organisations from across Australia. There was great enthusiasm to formalise working nationally for the first time and a steering group was established for this end.
3. A Cross Sector Collaboration Conversation on regional efforts to respond to elder abuse. The international speakers briefed some 20 participants from various sectors in Victoria.

The Conference received extensive media coverage, both in Victoria and nationally – 25 media items in all, including in The Age, Channel 9 and across the ABC. New technologies were also utilized, with the Conference program available in app form and Seniors Rights Victoria staff tweeting throughout the various sessions. All staff assisted with the Conference, hosting sessions and otherwise helping as needed.

Photos from the Conference, and links to the program and various speeches may be found at: seniorsrights.org.au/4th-national-elder-abuse-conference.



Family violence

[The Royal Commission into Family Violence](#) (RCFV) report, tabled in Parliament on 30 March 2016, broadened the definition of family violence from intimate partner violence and gave elder abuse the recognition it deserves. Some principles and three recommendations are specific to older people, but many of the other 227 recommendations are also inclusive of their needs.

Jenny Blakey, Manager of Seniors Rights Victoria, gave evidence to the Commission from our [submission](#) to the Inquiry at two days of public hearings, and attended a Ministerial Advisory Roundtable. Our partners, the Eastern Community Legal Centre and Justice Connect, made complementary submissions. We also engaged with the NSW Elder Abuse Inquiry by submitting and sharing work with NSW services.

Adopting the advice in Seniors Rights Victoria's submission, the RCFV report specifically recommended more information on elder abuse for older people, better training of aged care service providers, the trialling of a Victoria Police elder abuse response team and more funding for Seniors Rights Victoria to provide expert training to the broader family violence sector.

Elsewhere, the report emphasised the importance of developing a restorative justice

pilot program which will benefit older people and ensuring public awareness campaigns, behaviour change programs and respectful relationships curricula in schools to address inter-generational violence and ageism. The report also advocated reviewing the Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF), improving accommodation options for survivors, rolling out St Vincent's Hospital's elder abuse model of care state-wide in other hospitals and including elder abuse data in the proposed Victorian Family Violence Index. All these proposals will be of great benefit for people who may or do experience elder abuse.

We have already commenced working with the Government on the implementation of this report – significantly, the Manager has been invited to sit on the leading Family Violence Steering Committee, and an older person connected with Seniors Rights Victoria on the Victim Survivors Advisory Council.

Seniors Rights Victoria was highlighted in 22 media stories on the RCFV and our submission was also widely promoted to the community via the service's website, e-news and social media.

In addition, in 2015, Seniors Rights Victoria established the Elder Abuse Roundtable (EAR) of experts, coordinated by our RCFV Project Worker, to be a voice for people who experience elder abuse. Many of the members of the roundtable also made submissions to the RCFV, and sent joint messages to the government and community highlighting priorities at a critical time. EAR's purpose is to raise political, professional and societal awareness of elder abuse as a serious social and public health problem, an expression of ageism and a form of family violence. EAR will advocate for change at all levels in order for older Victorians to live free from abuse, neglect and exploitation.



World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2016

On 15 June 2016, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), Seniors Rights Victoria hosted a catered lunchtime event for 90 people at Lander & Rogers law firm in the Melbourne CBD.

The Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, the Hon. Fiona Richardson MP, spoke about the Government's actions on elder abuse, and announced some new funding for us to help more local service providers and community groups prevent elder abuse. Jennifer Evans, a long-time volunteer speaker, presented one woman's story of elder abuse, which was followed by a community education video developed with the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria. Freda Vratsidis, of the National Ageing Research Institute, then launched the new NARI/Seniors Rights Victoria report: 'The Older Person's Experience – Outcomes of Interventions into Elder Abuse'. Several people took copies home, as well as Seniors Rights Victoria's WEAAD themed merchandise.

Brigid O'Donnell from the Herald Sun published an exclusive article called 'Silent Shame' on 15 June about the new NARI/Seniors Rights Victoria research. Jenny Blakey was also a guest on prime time radio – an elder abuse talkback forum on the ABC's Conversation Hour with Jon Faine.

Helped by volunteers from COTA, we also hosted an information table in the historic Block Arcade in Melbourne for the day. Staff and volunteers engaged with over 200 people, handing out WEAAD merchandise, and having many important conversations about elder abuse.

Seniors Rights Victoria's WEAAD website (elderabuseawarenessday.org.au/) was updated for 2016. As well as being a place to register and showcase local activities, it offered WEAAD

4 Leadership and Influence

merchandise including a newly designed brand mark and online images pack. Website views for the month of June 2016 were 6495, up from 3891 in May and 1161 in April. This is consistent with the 'spike' we had for WEAAD in June 2015.

increase substantially the number of community events and professional education sessions held throughout June to mark WEAAD. Of the 18 community education sessions delivered to 507 participants there were many highlights:

key speakers was Karingal Regional Director, Kathy Day, who utilised 16 years of experience in elder abuse prevention in her presentation. Sapphire Care continued their commitment to raising awareness of elder abuse amongst service

Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, the Hon Fiona Richardson MP, with Seniors Rights Victoria Manager Jenny Blakey on WEAAD.



A [WEAAD Toolkit](#) created by Seniors Rights Victoria was available on the website and also distributed widely to organisations in order to ignite community activity. Some paid advertising of the Toolkit also took place through Neighbourhood Houses Victoria and The Senior newspaper.

Councils in the north-east region of Victoria with high numbers of older people and connections to Seniors Rights Victoria were the target of extra efforts by our Communications Adviser. In the end a total of 45 WEAAD activities were registered on the website, up from 29 last year. At Knox Civic Centre for example, there was a morning tea with 500 purple themed biscuits and a 'best dressed in purple' award. There was also theatre in Hampton Park, window displays in Castlemaine, a knit, chat'n chew afternoon in Footscray and many more workshops, forums and afternoon teas.

Relationship building by our Community Education Co-ordinator over several years helped

- a presentation as part of the WEAAD Inaugural Mini Film Competition organised by Frankston City Council
- a co-ordinated program of education sessions across the Alpine Shire organised by Kate Duff from Alpine Health
- presentations at well-attended WEAAD morning teas hosted by Banyule City Council in Greensborough and Knox City Council in Bayswater
- involvement with several awareness raising activities in Mornington Shire, including the McCrae Lions' illumination of the McCrae Lighthouse in purple for a week
- a forum hosted by East Melbourne Library
- a series of presentations over a week to seniors attending Planned Activity Groups in the City of Greater Dandenong.

A WEAAD Forum was also organised by the Barwon Elder Abuse Network and attracted 60 staff, workers and aged care students from various service providers in the area. One of the

providers by hosting a breakfast seminar for 60 staff and workers from the Bass Coast region: our Community Education Co-ordinator presented on elder abuse, indicators and responses.

Mental Health

In 2015, Seniors Rights Victoria also made a submission on Victoria's next 10 year mental health plan, drawing upon the experiences and ideas of our case work team, including our advocates and lawyers.

Elder abuse interacts with mental health and wellbeing in a number of ways that affect both victims and perpetrators, and was important to bring to the attention of the Victorian Government. Creating the plan involved almost 1000 Victorians and the result will guide investment and drive better mental health outcomes for the state.

“Without your help I would not be in the safe place that I am today. I no longer live in a violent relationship. Everything went very smoothly with the help of several other people and organisations. My health is improving and I have more confidence to do things. I would like many more women to get the same help that I did. Thank you.”

CLIENT



5 Our Practice

The Helpline 1300 368 821

The Seniors Rights Victoria Helpline is staffed by our helpline advocate who provides telephone information, assistance, support and referral. It is open weekdays 10 am to 5 pm (excluding public holidays and one week between Christmas and New Year's Day). This year we received 2696 calls (2246 last year), of which, 2,436 were related to elder abuse or associated issues.

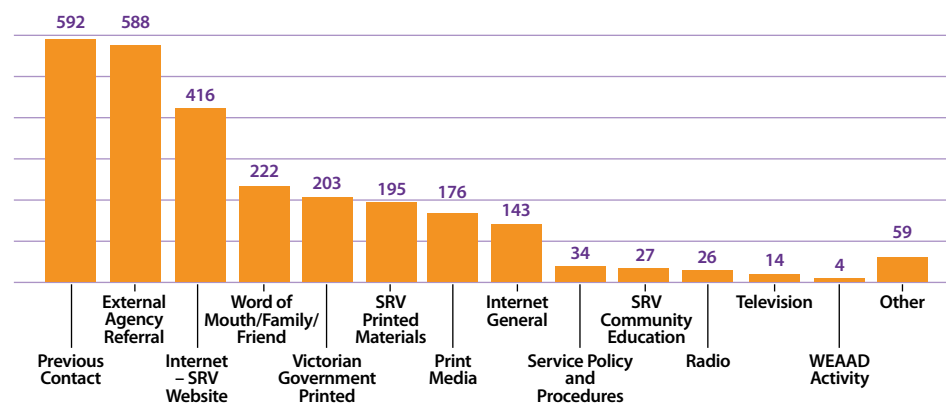
Calls to our service concerning elder abuse continued to be predominantly from women, who made up 75 per cent of all callers. However, at 24.9 per cent, calls from men were a considerable proportion. We recognise that elder abuse affects both men and women, and cater to both.

A significant number of our callers were from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. In the past year we gave advice 303 times to clients whose birth country was not Australia, and they represented 46 different countries of origin.

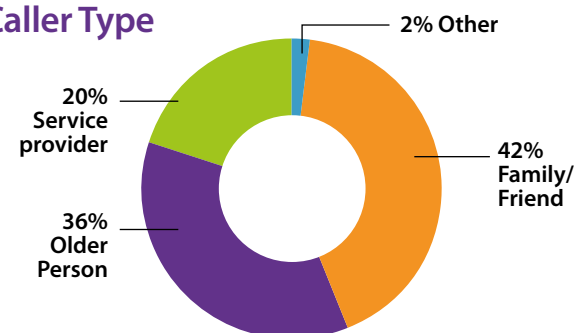
Overall, we provided 3429 instances of information, 631 advices (legal and advocacy) and 144 secondary consultations to other organisations.

How did caller hear about us?

Previous contact and external agency referral remain the most common ways callers learn about Seniors Rights Victoria's services.

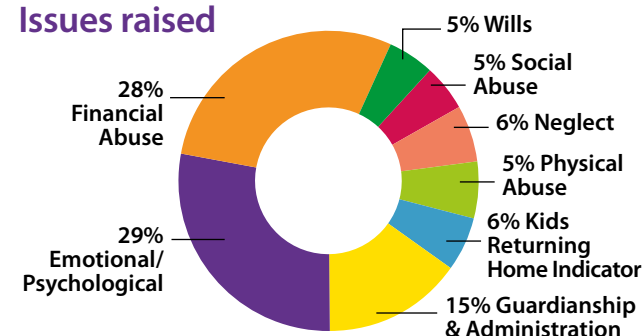


Caller Type



Older people calling Seniors Rights Victoria made up 36 per cent of callers, up from 33 per cent last year. Approximately 20 per cent of callers to the service were from staff in aged care, health and other services, down from 26 per cent last year. Friends or relatives calling with concerns about an older person constituted 42 per cent.

Issues raised

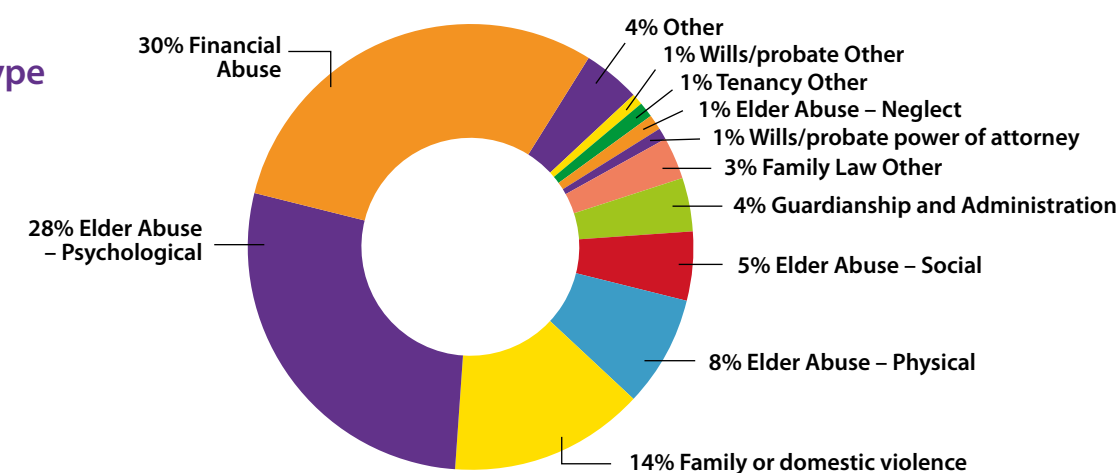


The chart depicts the main types of issues discussed during a Helpline call. The most prevalent topics were financial abuse at 28 per cent (down from 33 per cent last year) and emotional/psychological abuse at 29 per cent (31 per cent last year) followed by guardianship and administration (15 per cent). Very often a client experiences more than one type of abuse.

Advice to clients

An 'advice' is given by staff when a caller requires a more personalised response to their concerns, rather than just information:

Advices by Problem Type



The advocacy and legal service provided 631 advices to 373 clients, both on the telephone and in person. Of these, 68.8 per cent (434) were to older women and 31.2 per cent (197) to men. Financial abuse accounted for 30 per cent of advices and emotional/psychological abuse 28 per cent, making them the

373 older people received advice from the integrated advocacy and legal service this year. This is consistent with Seniors Rights Victoria's ethos of empowering older people through direct practice, not third parties.

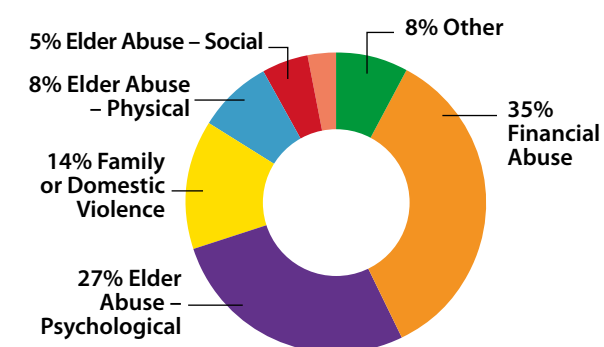
most prevalent types of abuse. Last year, they were 30 and 26 per cent of advices respectively. Family violence, physical abuse, social abuse and issues related to family law, wills, probate guardianship and tenancy were also the subject of advices.

Casework

If a client requires further assistance after receiving advice, then a case is opened. In 2015-16, casework was delivered by both advocacy and legal services.

During 2015-16 Seniors Rights Victoria opened a total of 156 new cases and closed 154.

Cases by Problem Type



Cases involving financial abuse were again the most common, constituting 35 per cent of problem types, followed by psychological abuse at 27 per cent - both percentages are the same as last year. In our experience, psychological abuse is a major component of the financial abuse experienced by many older people.

5 Our Practice

Justice Connect Seniors Law Health Justice Partnership

In 2015–16, Justice Connect Seniors Law commenced an exciting new [Health Justice Partnership](#) (HJP) with St Vincent's Hospital, supported by Seniors Rights Victoria. A part time Seniors Law lawyer is embedded within the Social Work team at St Vincent's Hospital. The purpose of the HJP is to improve health outcomes for older patients by focussing on the prevention of, and response to, elder abuse. The HJP model of service delivery is based on the United States' Medical-Legal Partnership – an understanding that the social, economic and political context of an individual's circumstances impact upon their health. This HJP builds on the excellent work already undertaken by the Social Work team and the Vulnerable Older Persons Coordination and Response Group (VOPC & RG) at St Vincent's to help identify and address the legal needs of patients.

The HJP formally commenced in January 2016 and undertook a comprehensive orientation program.

The partners:

- Held a planning session to consider the aims and objectives of the partnership, governance and evaluation arrangements and key priorities for the initial phase
- Helped develop relationships between Seniors Law staff and key staff in the social work team
- Finalised governance arrangements, including the establishment of the executive group which meets monthly
- Identified and met with a proposed external evaluator
- Developed legal practice policies and procedures

- Developed and delivered a training session with 20 attendees
- Attended complex case meetings to identify legal issues
- Provided support for caseworkers
- Provided clients with information, advice and casework.

Strategic litigation

Seniors Rights Victoria had a number of Family Violence Intervention Order matters over the past 12 months that demonstrate Magistrates are now more prepared to grant Orders based on 'economic abuse'. In previous years, despite the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* defining 'family violence' broadly, it was difficult in practice to obtain Orders that were based predominantly on financial abuse.

Elder abuse based on financial abuse is one of the most common areas considered by our legal team, frequently occurring when an adult child (often in their 50s) returns to live with an older parent. This situation is often preceded by significant problems in the adult child's life, including loss of employment, relationship or family breakdowns, substance abuse or mental health issues. Problems inevitably occur for the older parent – in many cases, the adult child makes no financial contribution towards increased living costs and becomes abusive to their parent.

In several instances, Intervention Orders with an exclusion order granted for the removal of the respondent from the older person's home have been implemented. These orders have provided the older person with the ability to regain control of their own lives and financial situation.

6 Communication and Education

Communication

The four Seniors Rights Victoria websites, quarterly e-newsletters and social media continue to be implemented, reviewed and improved. Our publications have also been updated to accord with new Victorian Government branding requirements

Seniors Rights Victoria's main website ([seniorsrights.org.au](#)) received 68,938 views in 2015–16, up from 37,803 during October 2014–June 2015 (the time period in which statistics started to be recorded for the re-designed site). Our World Elder Abuse Awareness Day ([WEAAD](#)) website received 6495 views in the month of June 2016, up from 3891 in May and 1161 in April. This is consistent with the 'spike' we had for WEAAD in June 2015 (3861 views) but the increase in numbers indicates that awareness of Seniors Rights Victoria and WEAAD is growing.



Seniors Rights Victoria's media strategy has been successful, with a total of 68 stories referring to the service published in 2015–16. This is up from 42 in 2014–15 and 14 in 2012–14. Two articles appeared in The Senior on Seniors

Rights Victoria and elder abuse, including one authored by our Communications Adviser.

Seniors Rights Victoria's social media, established in October 2014, has grown steadily to have 285 Twitter followers (up from 64 last year), 530 Facebook page likes (up from 327 last year) and 17,778 Google + views (up from 964 last year).

Seniors Rights Victoria's e-news was distributed at the start of each quarter and has an updated design. The last e-news (May 2016) had 1443 recipients, similar to previous years.

Two help sheets were also produced for older people on 'Adult Children at Home' and 'Decision making and your rights'.

Education

Seniors Rights Victoria's community education program is underpinned by empowerment and prevention frameworks. It raises awareness of abuse, builds the capacity of the community to respond to abuse and enables older people to take action. The program is delivered by the Community Education Coordinator with peer educators, as this model is one of the most powerful and effective.

Through the community education program, Seniors Rights Victoria provides informative, accessible workshops and presentations to older people, family members, carers, community groups and service providers, and develops and distributes printed resources. Community education sessions include information about:

- Ageism
- Types of abuse
- Risks
- Prevention
- Support and assistance
- Enduring Powers of Attorney



“I wish to thank Seniors Rights Victoria for preparing and clarifying my Will for me. Many thanks on the advised options regarding my daughter...if she does not make an effort to improve living conditions here, then I will contact you again.”

CLIENT



Seniors Rights Victoria also provides professional education for management, staff and workers in areas such as aged and community care, health services, local government and legal services. These sessions are designed to improve workers' understanding and awareness of the indicators of elder abuse, appropriate responses, legal issues and assistance available through Seniors Rights Victoria – including referrals and secondary consultations.

In 2015–16, Seniors Rights Victoria delivered:

- 84 community education sessions to 2313 participants, of which 14 were to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) groups (431 participants) and 28 in regional/rural Victoria (780 participants). The reported satisfaction rate was 90%–100%
- 45 professional education presentations to 1368 participants, of which 6 were to CALD organisations (98 participants) and 15 were in regional/rural Victoria (466 participants). Reported satisfaction was 90%
- 3 sessions as part of the annual Law Week program auspiced by the Victorian Law Foundation (53 participants)
- 2 Legal Matters for Older Fellas sessions, including one to a men's group in Melton
- 2 day-training for bi-lingual educators as part of the Elder Abuse Project at the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
- In partnership with the Peninsula Community Legal Centre, several community education sessions and a professional education forum in the City of Kingston.

7 Learning and Sustainability

In partnership with the [National Ageing Research Institute](#) (NARI), Seniors Rights Victoria completed the Elder Abuse Outcomes Project. The research was presented at both the 4th National Elder Abuse Conference and the International Federation of Ageing Conference in 2016. The report – ‘[The Older Person's Experience – Outcomes of Interventions into Elder Abuse](#)’ – was launched on WEAAD 2016.

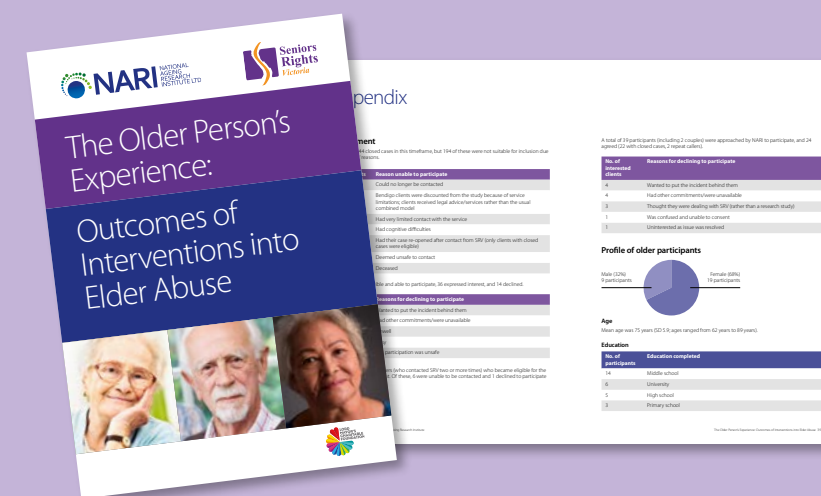
The research with NARI aims to better understand the older person's experience of elder abuse, the interventions used to address elder abuse and the outcome of the interventions for ex-clients of Seniors Rights Victoria. The report also contains recommendations, formed from the advice of the courageous participants, which will be of great use to both older people and policy-makers alike. It is the only Australian study we know of that looks at elder abuse from older peoples' perspective.

Seniors Rights Victoria's partner, Justice Connect's Seniors Law, held five training

sessions for pro bono lawyers during 2015–16 on restraint of assets in family law proceedings, Centrelink and granny flat interests, capacity, powers of attorney and caveats. These sessions are essential for increasing the legal profession's capacity to address elder abuse in Victoria.

The Seniors Rights Victoria Council, established in 2015, has met monthly and currently has seven members (one of which is from the COTA Board). Together with staff, it reviewed our service model and engaged in strategic planning (including a full day meeting with two consultants). Consultants assisted with documenting practice into policy and procedures, including COTA governance policies to reflect Seniors Rights Victoria's status as an accredited community legal centre.

Work continues to secure ongoing funding to sustain current work and service provision. This involves identifying projects to seek resources for, and exploring funding outside of government grants.



8 Partnership

In 2015–16, Seniors Rights Victoria continued to develop strategic alliances and work in partnership with key local organisations.

We supported the Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) to undertake local community collaboration around elder abuse and raise awareness. In 2015–16, the ECLC Elder Abuse Partnerships Co-ordinator, Kaz McKay, organised bi-monthly Eastern Elder Abuse Network (EEAN) meetings. EEAN has an active local membership of just over 100 individuals and organisations. The commitment of local police to act upon elder abuse and the range of awareness activities undertaken in the region for WEAAD have been particularly noteworthy. In conjunction with Inner East Primary Care Partnership, the ECLC also obtained funds to create and distribute the video [Behind the Curtain](#) to raise awareness about elder abuse amongst GPs.

Seniors Rights Victoria continued its productive and valuable collaboration with the Elder Abuse Project of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria. Fiona York, who had been the Project Officer for nearly three years, left the position of Project Officer in February, after making a significant contribution to progress the work with several communities. The Project worked with the Polish and Croatian communities during the year.

In alphabetical order, other partnerships and alliances in 2015–16 included:

Elder Rights Advocacy

- liaison, collaboration and referrals on elder abuse

Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria

- Seniors Rights Victoria is a member of the Steering Committee and Reference Group for the Elder Abuse Prevention Project

Family Mediation & Counselling Victoria

- liaison, collaboration and referrals on elder abuse

Federation of Community Legal Centres

- liaison on elder abuse policy and advocacy

Frankston City Council

- assistance with the Positive Ageing Program

Justice Connect

- supplier of the Seniors Law Health Justice Partnership services

Lander & Rogers law firm

- hosts of Seniors Rights Victoria's World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event on 15 June 2016

Law Institute of Victoria

- Seniors Rights Victoria is on the elder law committee

Mornington Peninsula Shire Advisory Committee of Elders (PACE)

- partnership to develop and deliver community education and information to seniors' groups and networks

Municipal Association of Victoria

- liaison re the Elder Abuse Prevention Project and with councils re World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

National Ageing Research Institute (NARI)

- research partnership

Neighbourhood Houses Victoria

- organising and advertising events for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Office of the Public Advocate

- liaison regarding elder abuse policy and law reform

Older Persons Legal Services Network

- co-convenors of the network to share knowledge, practice and a policy agenda

Peninsula Community Legal Centre

- partnership to develop and deliver community education to seniors' groups and networks in Peninsula CLC's region

Safe Steps

- liaison, collaboration and referrals on elder abuse

St Vincent's Hospital

- collaboration on elder abuse strategies in response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

Victoria Police

- Seniors Rights Victoria is a member of the Seniors Portfolio Reference Group, which is working to create awareness of elder abuse and ageism within the police force

Various councils, neighbourhood houses, libraries and organisations connected to elder abuse

- collaboration on activities for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.



“My problem involved domestic violence and financial issues with my son. When I was requested to attend the Magistrates Court regarding an intervention order, either a lawyer or advocate from Seniors Rights Victoria met me each time at the court. Without their help, I would have felt fearful and confused by the legal system... At all times they were courteous and helpful.”

CLIENT

9 Case Studies



Adult Children at Home

John and Maria

John and Maria are an older European couple with a home in Sunshine. Their only son, Dominic, asks if he and his wife, Sue, can move in for a few weeks as their landlord is selling their rental property. Dominic is unemployed and has problems with alcohol. He moves into the garage with his three dogs, who proceed to destroy the backyard and clothesline. Sue has serious mental health issues, and takes over the older couple's bedroom, where she sleeps throughout the day. The younger couple refuse to make any financial contribution to household costs, and utility bills increase fourfold during their time of occupation. John and Maria struggle financially and also suffer from stress, depression and poor health as a result of the situation.

After more than a year of Sue and Dominic refusing to leave, John and Maria seek assistance from Seniors Rights Victoria. After various efforts to have the couple removed fail, John and Maria are supported to make an Application for an Intervention Order (IVO) on the grounds of economic and psychological abuse. An IVO is eventually granted with an exclusion order on the grounds of economic abuse, and is enforced by local police.

John and Maria hope, one day, they can rebuild their relationship with their son.



Capacity

Peter

Andrew, a 50 year old, moves into his 90 year old father's home after taking him to a lawyer to appoint him as Enduring Power of Attorney. Andrew is in considerable financial difficulty and wants to ensure he will receive an inheritance. He begins a deliberate campaign to convince his father, Peter, that he is losing his 'marbles', and therefore his capacity to manage his own affairs.

Andrew insists on taking Peter to medical appointments and manages to convince his father's GP that Peter is exhibiting signs of dementia, which lead him to be put on medication that produces a sedative like effect. Andrew then arranges a Neuropsychological Assessment and drives his father to the appointment after ensuring he has taken the 'dementia medication' earlier that day.

Unsurprisingly, Peter is deemed to lack decision making capacity. Following this assessment report, Andrew makes a successful application to VCAT to become Guardian and Administrator for his father.

However, as part of his ongoing medical review, Peter is taken off the dementia medication a few months later, and his condition improves markedly. His suspicion of his son grows, and he seeks to challenge the orders. Over the next 18 months, he endures five separate neuropsych assessments and is consistently determined to have capacity. VCAT conducts a hearing, and is about to revoke its previous orders, when Andrew applies for a rehearing to secure his control. At this point, the processes for VCAT hearings, medical testing and legal fees for representation have cost his father over \$40,000.

Peter finds out about Seniors Rights Victoria through a doctor, and its lawyers provide him with legal assistance for the Rehearing Application as he is unable to pay any further legal costs. VCAT ultimately revokes all orders and Peter is able to appoint his own trusted attorneys under a new Enduring Power of Attorney.

9 Case Studies



Assets for Care

Isla

Isla is 76 years of age. She owns a home in Frankston which she purchased with her late husband Fred many years ago. Isla has three children, all of whom she sees on a regular basis. Isla is well connected to her local community and has a few friends living close by. Although Isla loves her home she feels it is quite large to maintain on her own and she is considering downsizing. She mentions this to her son George when he comes to visit one day, and he suggests that instead she should use her sale proceeds to fund an extension to his home in Craigieburn and move in with him and his family instead. George insists it would be a good move for his mum as she would be well cared for into her old age and be in a loving family environment.

Isla finds the prospect of living with her son and his family appealing. She loves him very much and gets on well with his wife and their three children. Without discussing the matter with anyone else she accepts his offer. She does not get legal or financial advice about the proposed arrangement, as she trusts her son completely.

Some time passes before Isla's house is sold and the extension to the Craigieburn property is complete. Isla moves in with George and his family. She has her own sleeping quarters and living area, but she shares the kitchen and laundry with the rest of the family. All is travelling well for a while until cracks in the arrangement start to appear. George and his wife Mary fight all the time and Isla is often asked to care for her three grandchildren. She doesn't see her other two children all that often because they live on the other side of town and

were unhappy with Isla spending her money on improving George's property. She has not been able to make any new friends where she is living and has been unable to establish good community links, including finding a doctor like the one she had in Frankston. Isla feels very isolated in her new home and struggles to get out and about.

Over time, Isla's health needs become greater and this places more strain on her family relationships. George's wife starts ignoring Isla and George becomes increasingly more hostile towards her. Her grandchildren are also quite rude. Isla no longer has meals with the family and is given set times for using the kitchen and laundry facilities. One day, George tells Isla that she needs to find alternative accommodation, otherwise his relationship with his wife is over. Isla is devastated. Not only does she feel totally rejected by her family but she does not have enough money to purchase a new property. George is not prepared to give Isla any of the money she spent on extending his house as he sees it as a gift from mother to son.

Isla stays with a friend in Frankston for a while but needs to find alternative accommodation. As a pensioner with limited funds, she cannot afford private rental and she has been told the waiting list for public housing is 12 years. Isla does not have the money to afford a bond for aged care and her pension is not secure as she did not notify Centrelink of the sale of her home. Isla is referred by a friend to Seniors Rights Victoria for help.

Seniors Rights Victoria is able to link Isla into the appropriate housing services, which, after some months, find her community housing in an area not too far away from her original home. Seniors Rights Victoria also links Isla into

counselling and other community services, as she is very distressed about all that has happened and the many changes in her life. Once Isla is settled into her new accommodation and receiving the emotional support required, Seniors Rights Victoria is able to assist her recover some of the money she invested in her son's property. Given the complexities associated with these matters and the cost and time associated with litigation, Isla decides to settle the matter through Mediation as part of the VCAT process.

Had Isla received independent financial and legal advice prior to entering into the arrangement with her son, she would have been in a much better financial and emotional place. She is slowly rebuilding relationships with her family.

// I am most thankful
for all help given
to me by Seniors
Rights Victoria. //

CLIENT