

OLDER, BETTER, TOGETHER:

A network approach to preventing elder abuse before it happens.

Elder abuse

Elder abuse is an issue of concern across our society. Whether that's because it's happening more, or because we're now talking about it more, there is momentum behind efforts to build understanding about elder abuse and to prevent it before it occurs.

There has been a 35% increase in the number of calls over 3 years from 2014/15 to 2017/18.

Seniors Rights Victoria Helpline data, 2017/18

During 2017 and 2018 “primary prevention networks” were established in 10 regions across Victoria, supported by Seniors Rights Victoria and Department of Health and Human Services. Five of those networks were examined as part of this action research study.

Some key terms

Elder abuse is any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust, which results in harm to an older person. Abuse may be physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social and/or neglect.

The **primary prevention** of elder abuse involves stopping it before it happens by understanding the underlying reasons for its occurrence and taking steps to eradicate or respond to them.

An elder abuse **prevention network** is a membership-based group of organisations including community groups, organisations or businesses that work with or provide services to older people and others in communities.

The reasons for elder abuse occurring are complex and varied, making the task of preventing it challenging. What is clear is that it cannot be explained by one factor. Rather it is the result of an interplay of factors relating to the individuals involved, their relationships and how our organisations, communities, institutions and society view older people.

This study found that while ageism is clearly a main driver of elder abuse, gender inequality often acts as an accompanying driver.

71.3% of older people reporting abuse were women.

Seniors Rights Victoria Helpline data, 2017/18



Other drivers of elder abuse identified in this study include:

- Perceived or real diminished capacity
- Isolation or lack of connection
- The ongoing parent-child dynamic
- Undervaluing of and lack of support for carer relationships
- Discrimination against members of LGBTI communities.

There are also a range of reinforcing factors which interact with the drivers to increase the probability, frequency or severity of elder abuse. These include:

- Lack of clarity about or planning for the future
- Issues or illness of the individual responsible for the harm
- Sharing of resources and assets within families
- Intergenerational wealth dynamics (sometimes referred to as “inheritance impatience”)
- Lack of faith in the aged care system
- Lack of understanding of what constitutes elder abuse.

About the research

- Conducted between January and October 2018.
- Primarily qualitative research drawing on the views and experiences of community members, professionals and members and lead agencies of the EAPNs.
- Conducted in five Victorian communities where the EAPNs were established. The views provided are not considered to be specific or limited to the five communities, but applicable across Victoria and Australia.
- Focused on elder abuse carried out by someone the older person knows and trusts such as a partner, family member, friend, neighbour or carer. It does not include misconduct by professionals (such as in a formal aged care setting) or abuse by strangers or other residents in aged care facilities.

About Elder Abuse Prevention Networks

The elder abuse prevention networks brought together many organisations and individuals from related disciplines within their local areas.

One of the more effective roles for networks was delivering activities at the local level to engage the community (and particularly older people) in awareness-raising and education. The networks played a significant role in mobilising their communities to address age discrimination as a driver of elder abuse. They were effective in providing professional development to local organisations to better understand and play a role in primary prevention.

Primary prevention of elder abuse requires a broad focus on all segments and settings of society. While the networks have made a strong contribution in a short time, a much broader range of activities over a sustained period of time is needed to eradicate elder abuse. Primary prevention requires a society-wide focus to shift attitudes, norms, practices and institutions that enable age discrimination. It requires long-term investment and coordinated effort.

Recommendations

It is recommended that government departments/agencies and organisations involved in the primary prevention of family violence and elder abuse invest further in the delivery of primary prevention activities and developing an evidence base for primary prevention. Specific recommendations from this study include:

Fund the continuation of the EAPNs

The investment that has been made by the Victorian Government and the network members in establishment would be most effectively utilised by providing additional funding for the networks to continue. This was recognised by the Victorian Government which extended funding for the networks in late 2018.

Expand EAPN coverage across Victoria

While it is too early to be conclusive about whether networks are the most effective means of preventing elder abuse, there is a need for a greater focus on primary prevention and the existing networks are enabling that. It is recommended that funding is provided to support the establishment of networks to cover all areas of Victoria.

Investment in evidence-based primary prevention activities

In the absence of an evidence-based suite of activities, the networks drew on their expertise and creativity to select activities. An investment in trialling and developing activities, messages and initiatives will provide a more efficient and effective approach to primary prevention for organisations to adopt, and support the consistency required to achieve societal change.

Measuring effectiveness of primary prevention activities

This research has not evaluated the effectiveness of the primary prevention activities identified. Further research and evaluation to understand the impact of primary prevention activities would be beneficial.

Primary prevention training for practitioners in elder abuse early intervention and response

The majority of the roles in elder abuse have historically focused on early intervention and response. Training is needed to support these practitioners to understand the spectrum of prevention, even if they will continue to primarily operate in an early intervention or response capacity.



Training of practitioners who are engaged in the primary prevention of violence against women

Training is needed to support practitioners with a deep understanding of the primary prevention of violence against women to understand the unique drivers and dynamics of elder abuse and working with older people.

Training for all organisations interacting with older people

Training should be provided to organisations that have significant influence in elder abuse prevention or have frequent interaction with older people, such as banking and finance organisations, community organisations, public service providers and media organisations.

Enabling shared learning

A moderated community of practice including face to face interaction between practitioners and elder abuse prevention networks could enable sharing of expertise, resources and lessons.

Reaching all segments and settings of society

The main focus of primary prevention activities to date has been on education of older people, yet there is a need for shared responsibility for the prevention of elder abuse across all segments and settings of society.

Supporting social change with an age equality campaign

Further investment is needed in a social change campaign to achieve age equality.

Explicitly addressing elder abuse in family violence frameworks and plans

It is recommended that the Victorian family violence policy framework and key programs such as the Orange Door service are reviewed to acknowledge and support the unique elements and requirements of the primary prevention of elder abuse.

Build awareness of and capability in sexual abuse primary prevention

Initiatives are recommended to specifically address the drivers of sexual abuse of older women and to build the capacity of service organisations to prevent sexual abuse.

Targeted resources for prevention of elder abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations with resources to further explore elder abuse and address the drivers of elder abuse.



More information

Download the full report at



<https://seniorsrights.org.au/>

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