

Media Release

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Community alert on increase of elder abuse

Elder abuse is a lack of respect and violates an older person's basic right to feel safe.

Seniors Rights Victoria has issued an alert highlighting the potential increase of elder abuse in the community as a hidden impact of the COVID-19 emergency.

Research suggests that up to 14 per cent of older people may experience it in the form of physical, emotional, financial, social or sexual abuse.

Elder abuse can cause stress, anxiety and depression and lead to increased risk of ill health, hospitalisation and early death.

Seniors Rights Victoria Manager Jenny Blakey said the major stress being caused by the unprecedented and drastic changes to the social fabric of Australia could cause an increase in elder abuse.

'Elder abuse is any mistreatment of an older person by another person with whom they have a relationship of trust. Often that person is a family member or carer, but it could be a friend or neighbour on whom they depend.'

Up to 14 per cent of older people may experience it in the form of physical, emotional, financial, social or sexual abuse.

Ms Blakey said in the current economic climate with large numbers of job losses and people being unable to pay their rent or home loans, the trend to move and live with older parents or other relatives will be driven by financial necessity.

'Depending on family relationships and arrangements this may work out, however, at Seniors Rights Victoria we deal with cases that have resulted in elder abuse.'

On many occasions the problem of elder abuse is raised with Seniors Rights Victoria by a family member or a friend who has concerns for a person's welfare.

The different forms of elder abuse are ways for another person to take over or control the life or property of an older person, Ms Blakey said.

Some forms of elder abuse are criminal acts, for example, acts involving theft or fraud.

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Warning signs of elder abuse

- The older person seems fearful, worried or withdrawn.
- They seem nervous or anxious with certain people.
- Family and or friends are denied access to the person.
- They no longer go out socially or get involved in activities.
- Unexplained injuries such as bruises, broken bones, sprains, cuts etc.
- Unpaid bills, unusual activity in bank accounts or credit cards.
- Changes to a Will, title or other documents.
- Disappearance of possessions.
- Poor hygiene or personal care.
- Absence of needed health items: hearing aids, dentures, medications.
- Victoria's Ageing Population

One of the most critical demographic changes is that more Victorians are growing older than ever before. As of 30 June 2019, 30.6% of Victorians enrolled to vote were aged 60 and over – that is in excess of 1.2 million voters.

Overall, more than 20% of the Victorian population is aged over 60 and that number is increasing rapidly.

By 2031, Victorians aged over 60 living in Greater Melbourne will comprise 22% of the population, and almost a third (31%) of Victorians living in rural and regional areas will be aged over 60.

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