

# SENIORS RIGHTS VICTORIA: ELDER ABUSE AND COVID-19

Seniors Rights Victoria provides a helpline and an advice service to prevent and respond to elder abuse.

We have analysed data from these services to better understand how the lockdown restrictions in Victoria affected the clients – and potential clients – of our service.

## Calls to the helpline

There were marginally fewer calls to the helpline in 2020 compared to 2019. This was mainly due to a decrease in calls during the periods of lockdown. As soon as restrictions were lifted, the calls increased – beyond 2019 levels.

As emergency department, police and ambulance data suggest, elder abuse increased during the lockdown periods. Therefore, a decrease in calls to the SRV helpline suggests the lockdowns meant fewer family, friends and professionals were witnessing potentially abusive behaviours and calling SRV for advice and information. It may also mean that fewer older people were seeking help, possibly because the perpetrator was present.



Compared to 2019, in 2020 there was an **increase** in calls about:

	2019	2020
<b>40%</b> Physical abuse	<b>131</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>32%</b> Psychological abuse	<b>567</b>	<b>748</b>
<b>21%</b> Social abuse	<b>141</b>	<b>170</b>

## Callers to SRV helpline in 2020



- Family member calling about an older person (1368)
- Older person query (1008)
- Professional/organisation (615)
- Older person experiencing abuse (375)
- Other (17)



Compared to 2019, in 2020 there was a **decrease** in calls about:

	2019	2020
<b>49%</b> Guardianship and administration	<b>514</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>32%</b> Financial abuse	<b>1030</b>	<b>703</b>

## Advice call service

It appears that the COVID-19 pandemic, and particularly the lockdowns, acted as a hindrance to older people accessing the Seniors Rights Victoria advice service. There was a 20% decrease in advice calls from 2019 levels. Clients reconnected with the service as soon as lockdowns were finished.



There was a **decrease** in requests for the advice call service:

	2019	2020
<b>20%</b> Advice call service	<b>467</b>	<b>375</b>

## Geographical location

The decrease in advice calls was mainly due to fewer metropolitan callers, likely due to the lockdowns. Calls for regional callers was one category that increased in 2020, indicating regional callers were more likely to engage with the advice service than in previous years.

## Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

There was a 30% decrease in advice calls for clients born overseas, and those who required an interpreter (38% decrease). This is particularly concerning as CALD clients may already be less engaged with services such as SRV.

## Living arrangements

The lockdowns may have intensified family conflict that was linked to people's living arrangements.

- Overall, 2020 saw a higher proportion of clients experiencing abuse from a perpetrator who lived with them than in the previous year.
- In 2020, an adult child returning home was more likely to be a catalyst for abuse than in 2019.

## Disability indicator

A higher number of clients reported a disability in 2020 than in 2019. The most common disability reported in both years was a physical one.



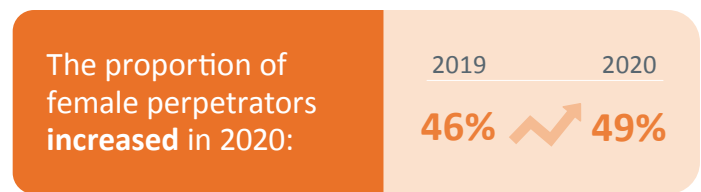
## Relationship of perpetrator

- In both years, adult children were the most common perpetrators of abuse against their ageing parents.
- In 2019, sons, daughters, and sons- and daughters-in-law, were responsible for 66% of elder abuse discussed in advice calls. In 2020, this increased to 73%, despite the overall number of incidents being lower.
- There was a disproportionate decrease in the number of clients seeking help for intimate partner violence in 2020 (5%) compared to 2019 (9%).

## Perpetrator characteristics



- There was only a very slight increase in the proportion of perpetrators experiencing drug, alcohol, and gambling problems (19% in 2020).



- There was a small increase in the proportion of perpetrators experiencing mental health concerns (26% in 2020), most significantly in the last 3 months of the year.

## Types of abuse

While there were fewer clients reporting abuse in 2020 compared to 2019, there was an increase in the proportion of clients reporting financial, psychological, and social abuse, and a decrease in physical abuse.

