

Elder Abuse Referral Guide

FOR PROFESSIONALS WORKING WITH OLDER PEOPLE

This referral pathway has been developed for community workers who are supporting older people and might suspect elder abuse. It is to be used as a guide only. If you suspect elder abuse you should report to your supervisor. Always adhere to the policies and procedures surrounding capacity, consent, and duty of care at your place of employment.

SUSPECT ELDER ABUSE? IF THERE IS IMMEDIATE THREAT OF DANGER OR HARM CALL 000

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 such as a family member or friend.

Both men and women experience elder abuse, however women are at greater risk due to the intersection of ageism and gender inequality. The risk can be heightened for older people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and those with a disability.

Elder abuse can be:

- **Financial** such as coercing someone into giving money to a relative/ friend, forcing someone to change their Will, not giving a person access to their own funds, taking money as compensation for caring for an older person.
- **Psychological/ Emotional** such as using threats, harassment, or humiliation. These can provoke feelings of stress, shame or powerlessness. Emotional abuse often occurs alongside other forms of elder abuse.
- **Social** such as discouraging visitors or social outings, restricting access to support networks such as family friends and help services, opening or screening mail and phone calls.
- **Physical/ Sexual** such as hitting, pushing, using restraints, forced or unwanted sexual activity and taking advantage of someone unable to give consent.
- **Neglect** such as failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical and dental care, using medication incorrectly and keeping older people in a state of poor hygiene.

Elder Abuse Risk Factors

There are a number of factors that can put older people at risk of experiencing elder abuse. While these factors do not always mean that person is experiencing elder abuse, they can increase the possibility of it occurring.

Is the person socially isolated?

Do they rely on someone else to provide care for them?

Is there a history of family violence?

Has there been a decline in the person's physical or mental health?

Is the person on a guardianship order?

Do they have adequate food, access to their finances, shelter?

Support services

STATE WIDE FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES

- Call Victoria Police on **000** in an emergency
- 1800 Respect (24/7) **1800 737 732**
- Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre (24/7) **1800 015 188**
- Sexual Assault Crisis Line **1800 806 292**
- WithRespect 1800 LGBTIQ (**1800 542 847**)

BARWON REGION FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT SERVICES

- The Orange Door, Barwon **1800 312 820**
- The Orange Door, Colac **03 5232 5500**
- Sexual Assault and Family Violence Centre - Geelong **03 5222 4318**

ELDER ABUSE SUPPORT AND SERVICE ACCESS FOR OLDER PEOPLE

- Better Place Australia **1800 639 523**
- Access & Support Diversitat (**03**) **5222 7275**

LEGAL AND ADVOCACY SUPPORT

- Barwon Community Legal Service **1300 430 599**
- Seniors Rights Victoria **1300 368 821**
- Victoria Legal Aid **1300 792 387**
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service **1800 064 865**
- Djirra Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Services **1800 105 303**
- Elders Rights Advocacy **1800 700 600**
- Office of the Public Advocate **1300 309 337**
- Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) **1300 01 8228**

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Support &
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If you are concerned about an older person and suspect something, here are some useful questions:

- Is anyone treating you badly?
- Do you feel safe?
- Do you feel respected?
- Is there anything I can do?
- Are you getting enough help at home with the things that you need?
- I've noticed you... have lost weight/ seem anxious/ haven't been paying bills...

In the event of a disclosure of elder abuse some suggested responses are:

- Sometimes people can feel that it is their fault, or they somehow caused the anger and abuse. Family violence is the other person's responsibility – not yours.
- I'm glad you trusted me enough to talk to me about this.
- What can I do to help you feel safe?
- What you have just described to me is family violence and that is against the law.

Remember to always:

- Respond with kindness, actively listen while being empathetic and non-judgmental.
- Believe what the person is telling you and be willing to listen.
- Let the person know that help and support is available, and that family violence of any form is not ok.
- Reassure the person that it is not their fault in a way that does not judge the perpetrator or the situation.
- Acknowledge the complexity of family violence and that it can be difficult to disclose this information to somebody.

Remember to never:

- Be uninterested or short if someone is sharing their experience.
- Act hurried or uninterested in what the person is telling you.
- Provide personal opinions or advice regarding the person's situation.
- Compare it to your own experiences.
- Confront the suspected perpetrator.
- Contact support services without the consent of the person unless required to do so by law or there is a significant risk to the person's safety/wellbeing.
- Presume you know what the person is experiencing or feeling.

FINANCIAL COUNSELLORS IN BARWON REGION

- Better Place Australia 1800 639 523
- Diversitat 1800 512 341
- The Salvation Army 03 5223 9200
- Bethany Community Support 03 5278 8122

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

- Lifeline (24/7) 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue (24/7) 1300 22 4636
- Gambler's Help (24/7) 1800 858 858
- Qlife 1800 184 527
- Directline Alcohol and Drug Counselling (24/7) 1800 888 236
- Barwon Aged Persons Mental Health Services (03) 5226 7410

AGED CARE AND CARER SUPPORT

- My Aged Care 1800 200 422
- Carer Gateway 1800 422 737
- Barwon Regional Aged Care Assessment (03) 4215 5610
- Barwon Health Carer Support Group 1800 052 222

HOUSING SUPPORT

- Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) Aged Action Group (03) 9654 7389
- SalvoConnect Barwon South West Region (03) 5223 5400
- Wintringham (03) 9034 4824

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Please contact a Liaison Officer closest to your catchment area:

A free secondary consultation for professionals working with older people and their carers or family is available from an Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Liaison Officer at one of five health service locations as part of a trail of an Integrated Model of Care for Responding to Suspected Elder Abuse.

Elder Abuse Prevention and Liaison Officers (Barwon Area)

- Western Health **0423 842 103**
- Melbourne Health **0400 544 530**

Barwon Elder Abuse Primary Prevention (BEAPP) Network

Since 2019, Barwon Community Legal Service have convened the Barwon Elder Abuse Primary Prevention (BEAPP) Network.

This project supports a network of organisations across the legal, local government, health, aged care and community safety sector to work together to raise awareness and increase capacity to address elder abuse in our region.

BEAPP Network Aims to:

- Strengthen a network of community and professional representatives motivated to prevent elder abuse.
- Explore the causes of elder abuse and work on inclusive activities aimed to change social attitudes to prevent elder abuse and violence against older people conduct activities with older people in order to raise awareness of elder abuse and where to get help.
- Build capacity of service providers to identify and respond to suspected elder abuse including developing referral pathways.

To find out more information about the BEAPP Network

Head to: www.barwoncommunitylegal.org.au or contact Barwon Community Legal Service at education@barwoncls.org.au

List of Other Useful Resources

- Concerned About an Older Person? A guide to understanding elder abuse for friends, family and concerned others, Seniors Rights Victoria Seniors Rights Victoria
- Working with Older People – A service provider's guide to welfare checks and suspected abuse Victoria Police
- Compass Elder abuse support services throughout Australia

SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Barwon Health Social Supports Program
- Dementia Australia 1800 100 500
- Diversitat Commonwealth Home Support Programme and Home and Community Care (03) 5260 6000
- City of Greater Geelong Commonwealth Home Support Program (03) 5272 5272
- Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative (03) 5277 0044
- Geelong Rainbow
- Geelong Community Support Register (03) 5275 1607