



Government of Western Australia
Department of Communities



WA Strategy to Respond to the Abuse of Older People (Elder Abuse) 2019 - 2029 Action Plan



Support available – elder abuse

The Government of Western Australia acknowledges that elder abuse and the content contained within this document may be distressing for those who have experienced, or are experiencing, elder abuse. If reading or hearing any of this content is distressing, please contact the WA Elder Abuse Helpline and Information Service on 1300 724 679.

A full list of elder abuse support services is provided at Appendix A.

This Action Plan covers activities for the period 2022 to 2027.





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Minister's Message

The State Government is committed to supporting people to live their best lives as they age and ensuring they do the things that are of value to them. Elder abuse has become an increasing issue for ageing populations across the world and WA is no exception. Since the November 2019 launch of the 10-year WA Elder Abuse Strategy, almost \$8 million has been committed to initiatives under the Strategy.

Elder abuse is a misunderstood and underreported form of domestic violence, often perpetrated by people in positions of trust. It is a complex social, health and human rights issue experienced and carried out by people of all backgrounds, often with devastating effects on victim-survivors and their families. The private nature of the abuse makes it difficult to know how often and to whom it is happening.

Elder abuse continues to be a scourge on society and it too often remains hidden or goes unreported. The abuse of people who have given so much, and continue to give, is completely unacceptable. The Cook Government is therefore working to help older Western Australians to be protected and feel safe by continuing to raise awareness and exploring ways to stop elder abuse.

The prevalence of elder abuse makes providing supports and resources a priority to ensure all Western Australians can age safely, healthily and with dignity.

I am pleased to see that this Action Plan covers awareness raising, improving responses, resource development, law reform, workforce training and development, improvements to arrangements for service delivery that facilitate early intervention, and research and evaluation. The actions are not all directed at Government as the community services and private sectors also collaborate to create a respectful culture in WA that values older people within our diverse community.

I urge people to be cognisant of the signs of abuse and mistreatment with an older relative or friend, and help them to seek support and take action if necessary. A list of elder abuse support services is provided in Appendix A.

Hon Don Punch MLA
Minister for Seniors and Ageing



“Older Western Australians are entitled to feel safe, secure, respected and valued.”



Introduction



Elder Abuse is everyone's business

The WA Strategy to Respond to the Abuse of Older People (Elder Abuse) 2019–2029 (the Strategy) has the goal of ensuring that all older Western Australians are safe, respected, valued and live free from elder abuse.

The Strategy sets out a whole of government plan for preventing and addressing elder abuse. It was informed by national and international evidence and best practice, as well as extensive consultation. It was launched in November 2019 and has since then underpinned a holistic and multidisciplinary approach to tackling elder abuse in Western Australia (WA).

The Strategy identified four key priority areas:



Raising awareness and early identification



Prevention and early intervention



Integrated and coordinated responses



Improving availability of data and evidence

The 2019–2021 Progress Report showed the work being done by the State Government, the community services sector and the private sector to address and prevent elder abuse.

Highlights included:

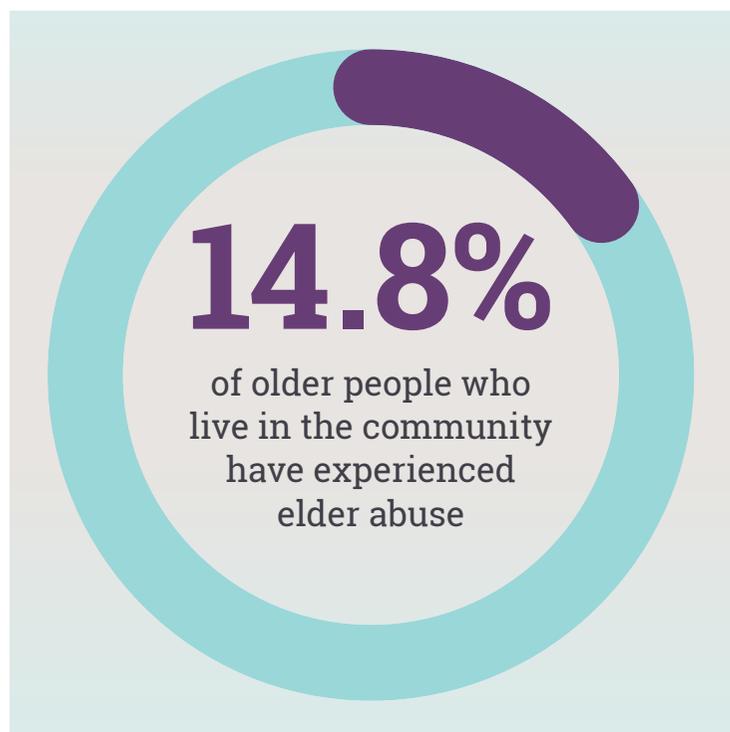
- Continuing the WA Elder Abuse Helpline and Information Service.
- Establishing the first vulnerable seniors peak in WA.
- Providing state-wide advocacy and legal services.
- Raising awareness and delivering education programs.
- Conducting research on the mistreatment of older Aboriginal people in WA.
- Conducting research into elder abuse drivers and protective factors in WA.

Since the launch of the Strategy, much work has been achieved by State Government. The Strategy's Action Plan (the Plan) was developed by the Department of Communities in collaboration with other State Government departments and relevant non-government organisations. It lists the projects and actions delivered by all these agencies, both ongoing and new. The Plan is informed by a human rights-based approach that focuses on the inherent dignity and autonomy of the older person.

Elder abuse is defined as ‘... a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, that occurs in a relationship with an older person where there is an expectation of trust and where that action causes harm or distress to the older person’ (World Health Organization, 2008). ABS population projections indicate that over the next 25 years, the number of older people (aged 65 years and over) will double to around nine million Australians. Research¹ shows that 14.8% of older people aged 65 years and over who live in the community (rather than in a residential care setting) have experienced elder abuse. Elder abuse can take the form of financial, psychological/emotional, physical, neglect, sexual and social abuse. An older person may experience multiple forms of elder abuse at the same time.

Perpetrators of elder abuse are often family members, mostly adult children, but they can also be friends, neighbours and acquaintances. Sometimes both the victim-survivor and the perpetrator do not recognise that what is occurring is abuse. People with poor physical or psychological health and higher levels of social isolation are more likely to experience elder abuse. Two-thirds of older people do not seek help when they are abused because of the guilt and shame they feel from suffering at the hands of someone they trust. Abuse affects both men and women, and affects people from all walks of life, all cultures and all levels of society.

¹ National elder abuse prevalence study: summary report, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2021



For older Aboriginal Australians in WA:

- The driving forces of mistreatment are poverty and insecurity of housing and food.
- Financial abuse, or ‘humbugging’ is the most prevalent form of mistreatment, followed by neglect.
- Cultural obligations and kinship care affect older Aboriginal people more than older non-Aboriginal Australians².

The Strategy and Action Plan aligns with the United Nations declaration that 2021–2030 is the Decade of Healthy Ageing and the Cook Government’s:

- An Age-Friendly WA: State Seniors Strategy 2023-2033: The first State Seniors Strategy to support ‘Western Australian seniors feel valued, safe, and empowered to lead happy and fulfilling lives in age-friendly communities’.
- Path to Safety: Western Australia’s strategy to reduce family and domestic violence 2020–2030, a long-term plan for a WA where all people live free from abuse:
 - We will work with Aboriginal people to strengthen Aboriginal family safety.
 - Act now to keep people safe and hold perpetrators to account.
 - Grow primary prevention to stop family and domestic violence.
 - Reform systems to prioritise safety, accountability and collaboration.

² Research into the mistreatment of older Aboriginal Australians 2022 Report



Raise awareness and early identification



Strategies

- 1.1 Build and enhance awareness and understanding of elder abuse and its causes.
- 1.2 Improve early detection, self-identification and self-protection.
- 1.3 Co-design targeted early detection, self-identification and awareness raising initiatives for diverse groups.
- 1.4 Provide and promote avenues for inquiring about or reporting elder abuse.
- 1.5 Advertise a clear and simple pathway for anyone wanting information or help.

Outcomes

- People are aware that elder abuse is a serious problem affecting our community and requires collective action.
- Older people from all backgrounds are empowered to protect themselves from abuse.
- Our community will be able to recognise the signs of elder abuse and respond in ways that protect the rights of the older person.

No.	Activity/Initiative	Action Area	Lead Organisation	Partners	Timing ³
1i	Conduct a review into the quantum of elder abuse funding to examine which agencies and community organisations are funded to raise awareness and provide elder abuse education.	2, 3	Communities	Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse WA (APEA WA)	Medium
1ii	Deliver community education initiatives to community members and relevant service providers regarding planning-for-the-future documents, the guardianship and administration system, and who to contact about elder abuse concerns.	1, 2, 4, 5	Office of the Public Advocate (OPA)	Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre (NSCLC), Legal Aid WA, Health, Disability, Financial and Aged Care sector providers	Ongoing
1iii	Continue to provide accessible online information on elder abuse to promote community awareness and safety.	1, 2, 4, 5	Communities	WA Police, Advocare, Council on the Ageing WA (COTA WA), Legal Aid WA, NSCLC, OPA, Public Trustee, APEA WA, Department of Health, Western Australian Local Government Association	Ongoing
1iv	Continue to promote and fund initiatives for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) to raise awareness about elder abuse and address ageism.	1, 3, 4, 5	Communities	Advocare, COTA WA, Legal Aid WA, NSCLC, APEA WA, local governments, Community Sector (including Bankwest)	Ongoing
1v	Raise awareness of what constitutes mistreatment of older Aboriginal people and where to access support through localised initiatives in regional areas.	1, 2	Communities	Funded elder abuse services	Medium
1vi	Support the building of a National Knowledge Hub (to consolidate information and resources about abuse of older people in one online location, including for diverse groups of older people) by contributing appropriate resources.	4, 5	Communities	APEA WA	Medium

³ **Short:** activities/initiatives to commence within the next one – two years.

Medium: activities/initiatives to commence within the next three – five years.

Ongoing: activities/initiatives which are currently underway and/or will be continuously undertaken.

Prevention and early intervention



Strategies

- 2.1** Promote positive views of ageing, and counter ageism in all its forms.
- 2.2** Recognise and celebrate older peoples' contributions to the community.
- 2.3** Support older people to remain active and included in their community.
- 2.4** Encourage and support the building of age-friendly and inclusive communities, through the use of the World Health Organisation Age-friendly Cities Framework.
- 2.5** Ensure older people from all backgrounds can easily access information and support services.
- 2.6** Ensure family members, carers and professionals have access to information about elder abuse.
- 2.7** Work with carers organisations to co-design responses to address carer stress as a risk factor in the occurrence of elder abuse.
- 2.8** Work with sectors and professional organisations in frequent contact with older people, their families and carers to recognise the signs of elder abuse and respond appropriately.
- 2.9** Work with relevant sectors, industries and agencies to plan and build socially and physically inclusive communities.

Outcomes

- Older people are respected, valued and socially included.
- Older people are informed and supported.
- Carers of older people are informed and supported.

No.	Activity/Initiative	Action Area	Lead Organisation	Partners	Timing
2i	Continue to deliver and promote the WA Elder Abuse Helpline.	1, 5, 6, 8	Communities	Advocare	Ongoing
2ii	Produce and distribute elder abuse awareness resources for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CaLD), including material translated into other languages. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. people who are deaf or hearing-impaired, i.e. an Auslan video on Department of Communities website. 	5, 6	Communities	Communities to liaise with relevant stakeholders. Local governments, public libraries, community resources centres and other appropriate organisations to distribute resources.	Short
2iii	Fund the Age-friendly Communities grants program.	1, 2, 3, 4, 9	Communities	Local governments Community organisations	Short
2iv	Participate in and support the work of the LG Professionals WA (LG Pro WA) Age-friendly Communities Local Government Network to promote the creation of age-friendly communities.	1, 2, 3, 4, 9	LG Pro WA	Communities Local governments	Ongoing
2v	Participate in the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities.	1, 2, 3, 4, 9	Communities	WHO	Ongoing
2vi	Continue to raise awareness of elder abuse through funding and supporting Seniors Week and the WA Seniors Awards.	1, 2, 3, 7	Communities	Funded elder abuse services	Ongoing
2vii	Continue to ensure elder abuse is identified and officer awareness is improved through police recruit training.	1, 8	WA Police	Advocare, Departments of Communities and Health, Legal Aid WA, NSCLC, OPA, Public Trustee, Western Australian Local Government Association	Ongoing
2viii	Establish regular meetings with Carers WA to collaborate on targeted early detection, self-identification and awareness raising of elder abuse, as carer stress and burnout is a risk factor for elder abuse.	6, 7, 8, 9	Communities	Carers WA	Short
2ix	Promote awareness about the mistreatment of older Aboriginal people – connect with Community Resource Centres, other locations which are accessible to older Aboriginal people, and places where they already frequent, to promote awareness.	5, 8, 9	Communities	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, APEA WA in advisory capacity	Short
2x	Support service providers to assist isolated older people to socially connect with the broader community.	1, 3, 4, 9	Communities	APEA WA	Ongoing
2xi	Develop a Strategic Plan to guide the direction of APEA WA.	9	APEA WA	APEA WA members	Short

Integrated and coordinated response



Strategies

- 3.1** Work with the Commonwealth and other Australian jurisdictions to implement the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians.
- 3.2** Monitor and progress findings and recommendations arising from relevant State and Commonwealth Parliamentary Committees.
- 3.3** Monitor and respond to findings and recommendations arising from relevant Royal Commissions and other relevant State and Commonwealth inquiries.
- 3.4** Improve legal and justice responses to elder abuse.
- 3.5** Enact amendments to the Guardianship and Administration Act 1990.
- 3.6** Ensure services are culturally safe, responsive, physically accessible, person centred and consistent with best practice.
- 3.7** Investigate the development of perpetrator behaviour change programs and support services.
- 3.8** Explore options to develop a common framework for information sharing and risk assessment for relevant government agencies and community organisations, that includes measures to ensure confidentiality.

Outcomes

- Older people are protected and can recover from abuse.
- Services and responses are accessible and appropriate to people from all backgrounds.
- Alleged perpetrators change their behaviour.
- The service and response systems are integrated.

No.	Activity/Initiative	Action Area	Lead Organisation	Partners	Timing
3i	Deliver a metro-wide Older People's Rights Service (OPRS) delivered by Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre, including state-wide Purple Road initiatives.	4, 6	Communities	Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre	Ongoing
3ii	Deliver the Elder Rights WA (ERWA) service.	4, 6	Communities	Legal Aid WA	Ongoing
3iii	Work with the banking sector to develop and implement measures to reduce the risk of financial elder abuse.	8	Communities	Bankwest	Ongoing
3iv	Maintain funding for a Vulnerable Seniors Peak until June 2024.	6, 8	Communities	COTA WA	Ongoing
3v	Participate in advisory groups and national intergovernmental forums related to the implementation of the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians 2019–2023 (and future National Plans) and advocate on issues of Commonwealth responsibility.	1, 2, 3	Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department	State and Territory Government departments, Community Sector, APEA WA	Ongoing
3vi	Enact recommended amendments to the <i>Guardianship and Administration Act 1990</i> arising from the 2015 Statutory Review to improve safeguarding provisions.	5	Justice	OPA, State Administrative Tribunal, Public Trustee, Department of Health	Ongoing
3vii	Investigate restraining order options applicable to an older person in a position to apply for / respond to a family violence restraining order.	4	Justice	WA Police Force, Court and Tribunal Services, Legal Aid WA, NSCLC	Ongoing
3viii	Investigate complaints and allegations that an adult with a decision-making disability may be at risk of abuse, exploitation or neglect and may require a guardian or administrator or is under an inappropriate guardianship order.	4	Department of Justice – Office of Public Advocate		Ongoing
3ix	Explore the introduction of vulnerable older adults safeguarding options to ensure that their health and wellbeing are always put first.	1, 2, 3, 4	Communities	Communities will consult with relevant stakeholders	Medium

Integrated and coordinated response (continued)



No.	Activity/Initiative	Action Area	Lead Organisation	Partners	Timing
3x	Explore options to develop a Western Australian Charter of Rights for Older Persons. (UN Principles for Older Persons, 1991)	6, 8	Communities	APEA WA	Short
3xi	Update the Elder abuse protocol: guidelines for action.	6, 8	APEA WA	Advocare, APEA WA	Medium
3xii	Review the Responding to elder abuse policy to assist relevant health services providers to identify and respond to elder abuse and support its early detection to reduce incidences in WA.	2, 3, 6	Department of Health	APEA WA	Short
3xiii	Review the elder abuse e-learning modules in the aged care learning management system.	2, 3, 6	WA Country Health Service	Aged care providers	Medium
3xiv	Continue to provide funding to facilitate APEA WA.	1, 2, 3, 8	Department of Health	Advocare	Ongoing



Almost

\$8m

committed to initiatives
under the Strategy



Data and evidence



Strategies

- 4.1** Support and fund further research on elder abuse prevalence, drivers and experiences, including specific research and data collection on the experiences of more marginalised, vulnerable and diverse cohorts.
- 4.2** Support and fund research on carer stress and its relationship with elder abuse.
- 4.3** Improve and facilitate data collection and sharing, in accordance with existing State Government and agency policies on data confidentiality.
- 4.4** Support and contribute to the National Research Agenda on Elder Abuse.

Outcomes

- Elder abuse policies, programs and services are evidence based.
- The effectiveness of policies and programs can be measured and evaluated.

No.	Activity/Initiative	Action Area	Lead Organisation	Partners	Timing
4i	Determine which organisations and government agencies should be collecting data on elder abuse.	1, 3, 4	Communities	Commonwealth Attorney General, State and Territory Governments	Medium
4ii	Complete research into forms of mistreatment experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people and the unique challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people.	1, 4	Communities	Indigenous Professional Services (IPS) Management Consultants	Short
4iii	Complete research into elder abuse drivers and protective factors in WA.	1, 4	Communities	UWA, NSCLC and Project working group	Short
4iv	Continue to contribute to the development of an agreed set of national research priorities through participation on a national working group.	3, 4	Commonwealth Attorney General	All jurisdictions, with Communities being the WA representative	Ongoing
4v	Continue to contribute to the national data picture on elder abuse.	3, 4	Communities	Advocare, Communities will consult with other relevant stakeholders	Ongoing

Appendix A



Elder abuse support services

Council on the Ageing WA (COTA WA) is the Vulnerable Seniors Peak Body in Western Australia.

Call COTA WA on (08) 9472 0104

Advocare assists older people to understand their rights and provides free confidential information and support to older people who are at risk of or experiencing elder abuse.

Call the WA Elder Abuse Helpline and Information Service on 1300 724 679

Elder Rights WA (ERWA) is a state-wide holistic legal service delivered by Legal Aid WA. A specialised team of Lawyers provides legal advice, assistance and representation to vulnerable seniors who are experiencing certain types of legal matters. Social Workers are also available to support ERWA clients in dealing with social, physical and mental challenges which may impact their legal concerns.

Call the Legal Aid WA Infoline on 1300 650 579

Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre (NSCLC) provides the Older People's Rights Service, offering free legal advice, advocacy, peer education sessions and social support to those at risk of or experiencing elder abuse. NSCLC focuses on positive ageing.

Call NSCLC on (08) 9440 1663 or email opr@nsclegal.org.au

Office of the Public Advocate works to promote and protect the human rights of Western Australian adults with decision-making disabilities. The office can provide information about Enduring Power of Attorney and Enduring Power of Guardianship.

Call the Telephone Advisory Service on 1300 858 455

The Public Trustee offers independent trustee and asset management services. These include Will and Enduring Power of Attorney drafting, deceased estate administration, executor support, financial administration and trust management services.

Call 1300 746 212

Source: Elder abuse support services and resources (www.wa.gov.au)



Department of Communities

Postal Address: Locked Bag 5000, Fremantle WA 6959

Telephone: 1800 176 888

Email: enquiries@communities.wa.gov.au

Website: www.communities.wa.gov.au

Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)

Telephone: 13 14 50

If you are deaf, or have a hearing or speech impairment,
contact us through the National Relay Service.

For more information visit:

www.accesshub.gov.au/about-the-nrs