



Elder Abuse Action Australia

Diedre Timms

**CEO Advocare and Co-Chair Elder Abuse Action Australia speech
at the launch of the
*National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians***

"I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we meet on today the Whajuk people of the Noongar nation and pay my respects to their elders past and present and to community members here today.

I also acknowledge the Attorney general, the Hon Christian Porter MP, Dr Kay Patterson, Age Discrimination Commissioner, guests and colleagues

I thank and commend the Attorney General for the initiative to develop the first National Plan to respond to the abuse of older Australians.

It is heartening to see engagement across Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments - the elimination of the abuse of older Australians will require bipartisan support and indeed the support of us all.

We will need to change minds and attitudes, we will need to address ageism wherever it occurs, and we will all need to act and to stand up.

Indeed, the abuse of older Australians is everybody's business:

- it's mine and it's yours, how do you respect the older people in your life, this is what it will take;
- we need to remember that older people are the ones who have built what we enjoy today;
- we need government support to make the wellbeing of older people front and centre when they make decisions about policy, about government expenditure; and
- we all have a part to play, and we must not shy away from this task because it is too complex or too difficult.

As outlined in the plan we are 20 years behind responses to child abuse and family violence; but you know it is so important for older people to have the life of their choice; there is urgency to this work because many older people will die before we get this right, and that is a tragedy.

I look forward to the unfolding of the work and initiatives outlined in the plan.

I commend the 5 priority areas of work:

Enhancing our understanding

It is important to know the prevalence of abuse; but surely the abuse of one older person is not acceptable. I support knowing the "science of the numbers" if we can be assured that we will then get better outcomes for support and prevention.

Improving community awareness and access to information

Is paramount: At Advocare we staff the WA Elder Abuse helpline and every time there is an increase in community awareness about the abuse of older people, we have a spike in calls to our line.



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- Last financial year we had 650 calls to the line, the year before 525 and this year based on work to date we will have 1000 calls or more, and people are reluctant to call.
- Interestingly when we had an article in the West Australian on this matter one caller kept that article for 6 months before she had the courage to call us, and she said I think I am experiencing elder abuse what can you do to help me?
- There is some good work going on around the country, and I am pleased to see the support for the development of the knowledge hub – this will facilitate the sharing of best practice and provide information and resources for all to access.

Strengthening service responses

I look forward to the further development of front-line service responses across the country.

I believe at Advocare we only see the tip of the iceberg in our work and as we all know there is so much more to an iceberg that is unseen.

Planning for future decision making

Not only is the harmonization of the powers of attorney important across the country but also a thorough understanding of what that power means.

We have numerous calls from older people and family members where a trusted person has abused that power and used their funds inappropriately, it can sometimes mean the older person has lost everything, their money and their home.

Strengthening safeguards for vulnerable older Australians

We watch with much interest as South Australia establishes their new Adult Safeguarding Unit. It will be important for this work to guide the increase of safeguards for older people across Australia. Older people should be safe to live out their final years with their will, preferences and rights respected.

With the release of a four-year plan today I think we can all see that the real work of protecting older Australians has only just began and for older people this is a matter of urgency.

I commend the government for that start and remind others that this is a shared responsibility and we all need to do our bit to make older Australians safe, whether they are at home in the community or in residential care.

Older Australians need to know they are not alone.

Thank you.”