



Elder Abuse Action Australia

CALL TO ACTION ON THE NATIONAL PLAN TO RESPOND TO ABUSE OF OLDER AUSTRALIANS

In committing to a National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (2019–2023), the Meeting of Attorneys-General has demonstrated it understands the importance of addressing elder abuse.

The National Plan provides a framework for action to respond to the abuse of older people, acknowledging this is not just a responsibility of the government but must encompass many sectors of the community. EAAA commends the government on this first National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians and notes the importance of building on this initiative to create a continuing program of support for older people.

EAAA is now calling on the Australian Government to ensure that the initiatives, as identified in the National Plan as short to medium-term goals, are actioned, and the outcomes are not delayed despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The increased social isolation of many older people throughout the pandemic, along with the challenges faced by those older people with increased vulnerabilities (including financial disadvantage, living remotely, care support needs and digital exclusion) has brought additional urgency to address elder abuse in the community.

We call on the Government to communicate the National Plan's outcomes to date and begin the preparations of a more substantial second National Plan to respond to, and end, abuse of Older Australians, with older people at the centre of the plan.

Older Australians have a right to live a life free of abuse. This includes being able to participate in one's community, have access to justice and the legal system, and to live a life of autonomy and independence. The National Plan, and the work it encompasses, is an integral part of ensuring that the human rights of older Australians are protected and supported.

Release the data in the national prevalence study

One of the most significant, and foundational, commitments of the Australian Government was to undertake a national prevalence study on the abuse of older people. This important project has been completed, bringing together the views of approximately 7,000 people aged over 65, examining the experience of abuse among this population. It also surveyed approximately 3,500 people aged 18-64 about their knowledge of elder abuse, attitudes to older people, and extent of their assistance to older people.



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EAAA calls on the Australian Government to release the findings from the national prevalence survey. The data from this study is imperative to shape the design and delivery of elder abuse services, ensuring that communities of greatest need are supported. It is also necessary to provide the evidence base for further research, as it will assist in identifying gaps in our knowledge and direct resources accordingly.

EAAA also calls for a commitment from the Australian Government to discharge its duty towards older Australians to protect and promote their rights by addressing the issues or challenges identified by the prevalence study. This may include funding service responses for specific cohorts or communities, or seeking further research as indicated by need.

Commit to ongoing funding for elder abuse services

The National Plan directed the establishment and evaluation of front-line support services for older people experiencing abuse. The Australian Government committed to this initiative by providing funding for specialist elder abuse units; health-justice partnerships; and case management and mediation services. This funding included an element of evaluation, designed to build the evidence base around successful intervention and response models.

As the funding for these important services comes to a close in June 2022, EAAA calls on the Australian Government to commit to the ongoing funding, and potential expansion of these services so that all older Australians have equitable access to help. If these services were to be defunded, the impact on thousands of older people, their families, supporters and referring partner organisations, cannot be overestimated. This is particularly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and response, which has increased the challenges for older people accessing health and community services.

The provision of specialist elder abuse services in a variety of settings recognises the many barriers older people face when attempting to address elder abuse, and the need for specialist whole-of-person responses to help navigate the different service sectors. These services work through formal and informal partnerships with hospital and health services, government and community organisations, as part of an embedded systems response. This would not be easily unpicked without considerable detriment to the older person who is being supported through the maze of service provision, and considerable damage to formal service partnerships. Without a commitment to ongoing funding for existing and additional services, older people will be entering the service system at a much later point, with more complex needs and with less opportunity for positive resolutions. Retention of skilled staff, longer term planning and continuous improvement are at risk without funding certainty.

EAAA supports the consistent approach to front-line services as indicated in the National Plan, and believes it is essential to properly supporting older people experiencing abuse.

EAAA also calls for the government to publicly share the evaluation findings of these services so that all organisations assisting older people can benefit from the learnings about effective responses in a range of settings.

Clarity on further implementation of the National Plan

EAAA is calling for transparency and accountability to the public around its implementation, clarity on how and when the remaining initiatives in the National Plan will be actioned and an opportunity for stakeholders to participate in the development of a common understanding of the issues, including the gaps in the current Plan, as well as initiatives that

can be included in the next national strategy. There is a concern that without this, there will be a return to fragmentary responses and uneven service provision to older people experiencing abuse.

There also needs to be further support for the various elder abuse helplines to pool and align their data, to properly contribute to the national data picture on elder abuse and service response.

Many of the projects in the Implementation Plan are state-based activities, however, there is currently no mechanism for sharing or replicating those activities with potential for wider application at a national level. A shared evidence base and national consistency in service responses adapted to local conditions is key to addressing the abuse of older people.

On behalf of its members and stakeholders, EAAA calls for government to indicate progress on the current Plan's implementation and invest in the development and implementation of a substantial 10-year strategy that will achieve equitable access to elder abuse services for every older Australian. EAAA is keen to work with government and utilise our networks of expertise and experience to achieve these goals.

Russell Westacott and Jenny Blakey
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