

EAAA Member Profile



Organisation: Darwin Community Legal Centre

Website: <https://www.dcls.org.au>

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The Darwin Community Legal Service provides vital support to older people in the Northern Territory. They provide high-quality legal advice and advocacy services as well as identifying issues and advocating for law reform. Importantly, they promote an understanding of a person's rights and how to assert them.

What services does your organisation provide to respond to the abuse and mistreatment of older people?

Legal and advocacy support

Why is the work your organisation does so important to the people in your community?

DCLS is a community-based organisation committed to legal and social justice and the protection of human rights in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory has the fastest-growing population of seniors when compared to other states and territories.

The senior population not only live in urban settings but also in remote areas which comes with its own challenges such as limited access to services such as advocacy and legal support. Darwin Community Legal Services regularly provides outreach services to more than 8 communities in the top end region.

What are the outcomes your organisation is seeing as a result of its work?

- We are receiving a high number of referrals from service providers and stakeholders situated in both remote and urban locations
- Enhanced rapport with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) populations and associated groups where DCLS advocates are providing regular workshops on aged care rights, standards, and the problems of elder abuse
- Members of the senior demographic are proactively reaching out to advocates to discuss their concerns and seek advocacy support
- DCLS has established robust partnerships with distant stakeholders, including community councils and health centres, who in return are maintaining regular contact with our advocacy and legal team to engage in discussions and devise solutions for various concerns
- DCLS has established itself as a proactive advocacy and legal organisation that not only works on 1:1 cases but also provides advocacy support on systemic matters.

An example of our advocacy work was the establishment of the Strong and Functional Program, developed with the Council of the Ageing, Northern Territory (COTA NT).

We were approached by a group of seniors who expressed their concern about the absence of an affordable weight training program for seniors in the Darwin Region. Despite clear community support for it, neither the City of Darwin nor other stakeholders expressed interest in creating such a program.

Both COTA Darwin and the SDRS team worked together to establish a subsidised program that not only included weight training but also provided free transportation for seniors who participated in the program.

In March 2022, the program's official launch took place at the Evergreen Seniors Group in Nightcliff and the Senior Men's Group in Northlakes.

The Seniors Weight Training Program - Strong and Functional, in partnership with the Council of The Aged NT (COTA NT), holds significant importance for our advocates as it's dedicated to the well-being of seniors. In a society where ageism and misconceptions about ageing persist, this program was developed to challenge

stereotypes and empower individuals aged 50 and above. DCLS advocates recognise the need to confront these issues.

This program addresses the specific muscle strength needs of seniors while emphasising inclusivity and social interaction. It's not just a fitness routine; it's a way to build community and combat loneliness among our older population.

What makes this initiative stand out is its pioneering nature as it's the first of its kind in the Northern Territory. DCLS believes in leading by example and breaking new ground to inspire positive change.

The Seniors Weight Training Program represents a core focus for DCLS advocates – it challenges stereotypes, fosters social inclusion, pioneers innovative approaches, and empowers seniors to live their lives to the fullest.

What are some of the areas that are still being overlooked but which could make a big difference in the elder abuse space?

- Data collection and research - more research is needed to understand the scope and nature of elder abuse in Australia. Research should focus on seniors facing abuse both in remote and urban settings. We don't have comprehensive data on elder abuse which could help to identify trends, risk factors and effective interventions
- Need for legal reforms and review of current legislation – reviewing and updating legislation related to elder abuse will help ensure that adequate protections and proper laws are in place to protect our older community members
- Lack of awareness and training particularly for the specific needs and concerns of LGBTQIA+ residents in aged care facilities. Lack of awareness and training is leading to misunderstanding and insensitivity causing neglect and social abuse of LGBTQIA+ residents. Training and education programs are needed to educate staff members about the unique challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ seniors including respect for their gender identity and sexual orientation.

What challenges are common across a range of services when it comes to supporting older people?

- Seniors residing in remote areas of the Northern Territory face challenges in accessing specialised services typically located in urban areas, primarily due to

limited accessibility. A prime example is the absence of passenger lifts at remote airports, a significant barrier for seniors in these regions. Seniors are unable to access services in accordance with their choice and feel that services are exclusive rather than being inclusive.

- Elderly individuals often hesitate to openly address their concerns, fearing potential negative repercussions and societal perceptions. This apprehension contributes to a reluctance to seek appropriate support or engage in necessary conversations regarding their well-being.
- A considerable hurdle lies in the complexity of the system and the scarcity of senior-focused resources available in First Nations Languages, particularly impacting remote communities in the Top End region. The Northern Territory has witnessed a notable increase in the number of First Nations seniors who want resources and information in their native language. Unfortunately, not many services and departments are able to cater to this request.

Why did your organisation choose to be a member of EAAA?

DCLS firmly believes that substantial transformations and pro-active advocacy is required to challenge issues relating to Elder Abuse in Australia. Thus, by standing together with EAAA and its members, DCLS would like gain and draw support for initiatives dedicated to reshaping legislation, policies, and practices at both state and national level.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about your organisation's work in the area of abuse of older people?

DCLS is committed to making the legal system more accessible to all members of our community. Community Legal Education (CLE) plays a major part in demystifying the law and provides an opportunity to talk to the broader community about the rights of disadvantaged people. DCLS provides CLE to groups that want to know more about legal rights and responsibilities.

Topics include:

- Human rights
- Disability discrimination and rights
- Social security (Centrelink) debts, income management and appeals
- Aged care rights
- Tenancy – your rights and responsibilities under the Residential Tenancies Act

- Adult guardianship
- Advocacy
- Duty of care and negligence
- Employment law
- Credit and debt
- LGBTIQ+ rights
- General legal issues

DCLS can provide CLE sessions for community groups, schools, clubs etc.

We also operate the **Elder Abuse Information Line** to assist elderly people suffering from abuse, making referrals to support organisations and providing legal information to people wanting to make informed choices about their situation.

The Elder Abuse Information Line (1800 037 072) is available from 9 am – 5 pm Monday to Friday and is free to call from landlines and public phones.

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About Elder Abuse Action Australia

<https://eaaa.org.au/>

The Elder Abuse Action Australia (EAAA) is the national advocate for eliminating elder abuse. Funded by the Attorney General's office, EAAA aims to address elder abuse and protect the rights of older Australians at both the grassroots and macro level.

EAAA believes in the rights of older Australians and our actions seek to eliminate elder abuse. Our campaigns, advocacy and policy development positively impact the lives of older Australians and their families, our communities and broader society.

We work with State and Territory bodies and authorities, sharing and co-ordinating information to develop a national understanding, framework and response for elder abuse.

Our mission: Be a national voice for action that eliminates elder abuse

Our vision: A society that respects and values older Australians, and is free from elder abuse

Our commitment

- Social justice and the rights of older people
- Respect for difference and inclusion
- Community collaboration to eliminate elder abuse
- Accountability and integrity
- Evidence-based practice and research
- Innovation and forward thinking

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

EAAA is committed to ensuring equitable and inclusive responses to end elder abuse for people with diverse characteristics and life experiences.