STAND UP SPEAK OUT
27-29 JULY 2026

2026 AUSTRALIAN ELDER ABUSE CONFERENCE

The Barriers to Being Seen and Heard: A Family Perspective

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EAAA Elder Abuse Action Australia

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Acknowledgement of Country

I would like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Custodians of the land we meet on today, the Yugambeh people, and pay my respects to their Ancestors and Elders past and present. I extend this acknowledgement and respect to all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people here today.

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‘Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.’
Martin Luther King Jr (1965)

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Who am I?

- Melbourne based educator
- Here today due to a personal connection to elder abuse
- Experience navigating the systems that are in place to respond to elder abuse
- Interested in becoming involved in intergenerational programs

Overview

My presentation today will include the following:

- The story of my grandmother's experience of elder abuse
- The barriers to being seen and heard
- A call to action – including specific measures which could be put in place by a range of organisations
- The evidence base which supports this call to action

My Grandmother

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A story of elder abuse

The lived experience of my grandmother involved:

- A trusted family member
- Psychological abuse including threats, coercion, and isolation from loved ones
- Financial abuse including significant improper use of funds by an attorney appointed in her Enduring Power of Attorney (EPOA)
- The change of her EPOA when she lacked capacity
- No consequences for the perpetrator

The barriers to being seen and heard

The following information has been taken directly from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2026):

Data sources for measuring elder abuse:

- ABS Personal Safety Survey (PSS)
- ABS Recorded Crime – Victims
- AIFS National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study
- AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database
- AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) data collection
- ANROWS Technology-Facilitated Abuse National Survey
- Serious Incident Response Scheme

The barriers to being seen and heard

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What happened to my grandmother never appeared in the ABS Recorded Crime statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2026), because it was never reported as a crime.

Parallels

Parallels with the personal stories shared at the 2024 Australian Elder Abuse Conference:

- No consequences for the abuser or abusers
- Many missed opportunities for early intervention
- The older person experiencing the abuse has passed away
- A loved one who supported the older person who experienced abuse wanted to share their story

A call to action

A way to measure the prevalence of elder abuse is being overlooked.

I propose we begin to engage with those who have supported or advocated for loved ones experiencing elder abuse.

The more stories we hear, the more targeted and impactful our collective measures to prevent and respond to elder abuse can become.

Why us?

Cecil Camilleri is a member of the National Older Persons Reference Group.

He was interviewed for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) 2026 by the Older Persons Advocacy Network:

> *'Responsibility to recognise elder abuse is not just on the older person and others in the community must respond with 'moral outrage'.*
>
> *Cecil Camilleri*
>
> (Older Persons Advocacy Network [OPAN], 2026, para.17)

Why us?

Many of us have navigated the systems that are in place to respond to elder abuse including:

- Civil and administrative tribunals
- Financial institutions
- Legal institutions
- Public Guardian and Trustee or Office of the Public Advocate

We do not have first-hand experience of elder abuse.

However, we do have first-hand experience of the systems that respond to elder abuse.

The evidence base

This proposal aligns with priorities identified by the World Health Organisation (2022) and the National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026-2036 (Australian Government, 2026).

These include key priorities related to:

- Data
- Community engagement
- Empowering victim-survivors

Data

National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026 – 2036

(Australian Government, 2026)

Focus Area 4 – Address Gaps in the Evidence Base and Increase Collaboration.

The World Health Organisation's

'Tackling abuse of older people: five priorities for the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)'

One of the priorities is:

'More and better data to raise awareness of the problem' (WHO, 2022).

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Community engagement

Focus Area One in the National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026 – 2036 (Australian Government, 2026) is to

‘Increase whole-of-community awareness, education and engagement’.

In Better Place Australia’s submission in response to the draft National Plan, they made a call for a balanced approach inclusive of families.

Families should be seen as ‘protective partners’ and ‘crucial supporters’, not just the potential source of harm (Better Place Australia [BPA], n.d.).

Empowering victim-survivors

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The most important rationale.

Although I am arguing for the voices of advocates to be heard, this is not at the expense of those with lived and living experience.

Far from it.

“Abuse is also often associated with the older person feeling shame or guilt” (Clarke & Peters, 2023)

“By opening discussion, we reduce the stigma and build awareness. Survivors are more likely to seek support. Perpetrators will find it harder to hide.” (The Grace Tame Foundation, n.d.)

A call to action

Specific measures to put this approach into action:

- The power of language
- A forum for advocates to connect
- Greater opportunities for collaboration

These measures are both cost-effective and scalable (WHO, 2022).

The power of language

‘Have you experienced elder abuse or supported a loved one experiencing elder abuse?’

or

‘Are you experiencing elder abuse or supporting a loved one experiencing elder abuse?’

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A forum for advocates to connect

I would like to propose the creation of a forum for those of us who have advocated for loved ones experiencing elder abuse to connect.

At this point, we really have no clear way of finding each other.

This would also have the following benefits:

- Provide a means to obtain data to share with relevant institutions
- Opportunity for solidarity and support
- Avenue to enhance community engagement

Collaboration

These measures complement the work that is already happening.

At the time my grandmother was experiencing elder abuse:

- The EAAA did not exist.
- OPAN had only recently been established.
- The inaugural Embolden Festival hadn't taken place.
- National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians had not been released.
- National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People had not been created.
- And Victoria's Primary Prevention of Elder Abuse Framework did not exist.

Engagement with Elder Abuse Prevention

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- Joined Elder Abuse Awareness Australia (EAAA) as an individual member in 2022
- Subscribed to Older Women's Network (OWN) in 2022
- Participated in EAAA focus group (Melbourne Community Focus Group session on Monday 21 August 2023 regarding the 2nd National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians) .
- Subscribed to COTA Victoria newsletter 2023
- Attended 2024 Australian Elder Abuse Conference virtually
- Attended Eastern Community Legal Centre Prevention COP and Response Working Group meetings 2024
- Attended Embolden Symposium 2025
- Became a member of Australian Institute for Intergenerational Practice in 2026
- Requested membership of Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG) June 2026
- Attended the launch of Victoria's Primary Prevention of Elder Abuse Framework June 15th 2026

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Collaboration - Education

Collaborating in education to combat ageism

- The Respectful Relationships Education Framework (Department of Education, 2026). This is a national, evidence-based approach to support children to develop skills to build safe, respectful, and equitable relationships.

- There is also untapped potential to build intergenerational programs into primary school settings. Intergenerational connection is an evidence-based strategy to prevent ageism which is specifically referenced in the National Plan (Australian Government, 2026).

From a whisper to a roar…

This approach is a cost-effective and scalable way to engage with people from a range of:

- Cultural and linguistic backgrounds
- Socio-economic backgrounds
- Geographic locations
- Metropolitan, regional or remote settings
- Ages
- Genders and sexualities
- Religious backgrounds

What we stand to gain

By engaging with those who have supported loved ones experiencing elder abuse we gain:

- Much needed data
- A way to enhance community engagement and awareness
- A measure to ensure no stories or experiences of elder abuse are lost
- A path to engage with community members from a wide range of backgrounds
- An opportunity to put actionable, scalable and cost-effective measures in place
- A means to empower victim-survivors to stand up and speak out

What we stand to lose

If we do not engage with those who have supported loved ones experiencing elder abuse:

- We do not capture the stories of those who have died.
- We do not capture the stories of those who have significant cognitive impairment.
- We send the message that these stories, and the people in them, do not matter.

Final thoughts

There is amazing work happening in elder abuse prevention and response.

If we broaden the conversation to include those of us who have advocated for loved ones experiencing elder abuse, this will:

- enhance what is already working well, and
- open up possibilities for improvements in elder abuse prevention and response.

I truly believe that we're heading towards greater outcomes for older people in our communities.

My Grandmother

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Please reach out

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Final thought:

Is there a way you could build the following question into your current or future work?

‘Have you experienced elder abuse or supported somebody who has?’

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