STAND UP SPEAK OUT
27-29 JULY 2026

2026 AUSTRALIAN ELDER ABUSE CONFERENCE

Safeguarding services for older people in SA and NSW – seven years in

EAAA Elder Abuse Action Australia
caxton COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE
ADAAustralia Your Aged and Disability Advocates

Introduction of today's presenters

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Belinda Lake

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Adult Safeguarding Unit, South Australia

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NSW Ageing and Disability Commissioner

NSW Ageing and Disability Commission

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Our plan for today

STAND UP SPEAK OUT 27-29 JULY 2026

1: Background

- Setting the context
- What are we seeing

2: Analysis

- What is working well
- What isn't working well

3: The Way Forward

- What is needed

Part 1

Setting the context

- Legislative framework
- Functions
- Powers

What are we seeing

- The data
- Trends
- Case Studies

Legislative framework

Common elements include:

- purpose of providing a dedicated safeguarding response for adults at risk of/experiencing, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- response to community concern, inquiries and/or law reform processes
- rights-based legislation and principles (will & preferences)
- legislative reviews have led to improvements

Legislative framework

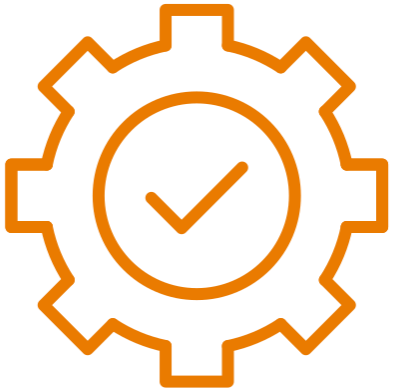
Points of difference include:

- Approach to drafting
- Focus populations
- Decision-making capacity
- Nature of office
- Includes other elements

Functions

Common elements include:

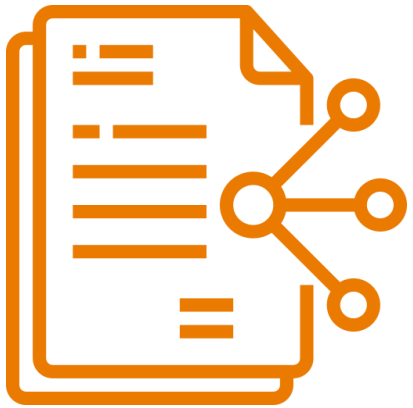
- Both jurisdictions include safeguarding
- Explicit referral and investigative functions
- Provide information and advice
- Receive reports



Powers

Common elements include:

- Bypassing consent in limited circumstances
- Referral powers to other agencies
- Protections for those who report
- Information sharing and gathering



Powers

Points of difference include:

- SA has broader powers
- Compulsory attendance at meetings
- Public inquiries

A comparative summary

	SA ADULT SAFEGUARDING UNIT	NSW AGEING AND DISABILITY COMMISSION
Cohorts	Adults 18+ who may be vulnerable to abuse	Adults with disability (18+) and older people (65+, or 50+ Aboriginal people)
Reports	Where a person has a suspicion that a relevant adult is at risk of abuse	Where a person has reasonable grounds to believe the adult is subject to, or at risk of, abuse, neglect or exploitation
Guiding approach	Explicit safeguarding principles (self determination and consent, dignity of risk, will and preference, prevention, least intrusive, involves whole of community)	Person-centred, rights-based safeguarding approach
Abuse scope	Focus on abuse occurring in a relationship of trust, dependency, or power imbalance. Excludes self-neglect.	Abuse, neglect and exploitation, including self-neglect.
Responses	Information, advice, support, safeguarding responses, referrals, investigations	Information, advice, referrals, support, case coordination, investigations and further actions
Investigation powers	Requirement to provide information, documents or answers to questions; enter/inspect premises, give directions. Penalties.	Compulsory attendance at meetings and/or production of documents/other things; search warrants. Penalties.
Consent	Not required to assess or refer. Strong emphasis on consent for safeguarding responses.	Focused on investigations. Otherwise, must have regard to the wishes of the adult.
Multi-agency response	Can coordinate short-term multi-agency safeguarding responses	Extensive use of referrals, collaborative case coordination, and agency partnerships
Systemic role	Report on systemic issues and advise government	Inquire into and report on systemic issues and advise government
Prevention role	Education and awareness re safeguarding	Community education, research, prevention projects and sector capability-building

Data highlights

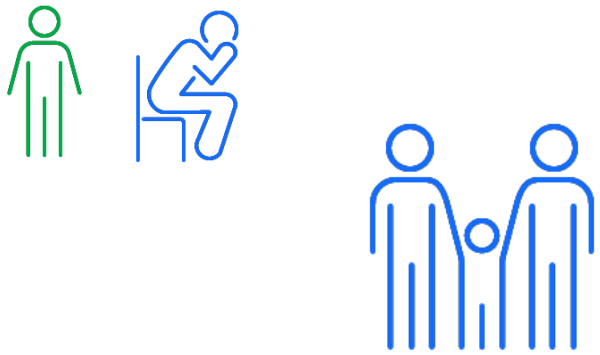
Increase in demand

Psychological abuse, neglect and financial abuse are the main types of abuse seen in reports

Main reporters are paid workers and then relatives

Women feature prominently

First Nation and CALD reports and engagement limited



Mostly older people, and especially 80-84 years

The data

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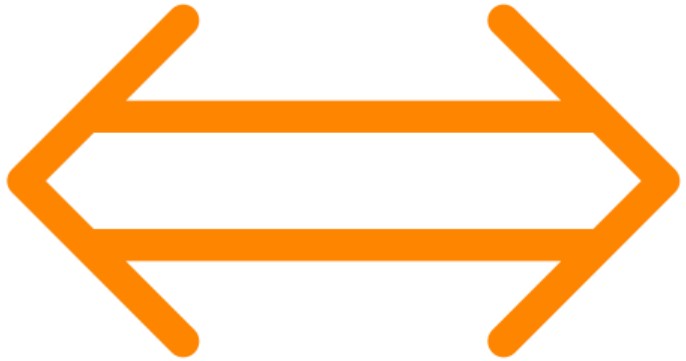
Points of difference include:

- Greater volume of calls and reports in NSW
- Greater proportion of rural and regional calls in NSW

Trends



Common elements include:

- Much of our work is:
  - domestic and family violence
  - coercive control
- Inheritance impatience and inheritance conservation is often at the centre of what we do
- High levels of neglect

Case Study: ageism and enabling abuse

Case Study: using legislative powers to safeguard

Part 2: Analysis

- What is working well?
- What isn't working well?

What is working well?

- Early intervention and resolution wherever possible
- Risk assessment/triage processes
- Strong stakeholder engagement, relationships and referral pathways
- Clear information gathering and sharing arrangements
- Ability to investigate when required, supported by effective powers
- Outcomes for people who have ‘slipped through the cracks’
- Growing public awareness
- Use of data
- Learning from each other

What isn't working well?

- Demand is greater than capacity
- Increasingly complex and/or high-risk cases
- Balancing autonomy, will and preference, and protection from harm
- Information-sharing barriers across agencies and sectors
- Limited service options, especially in regional, rural and remote areas
- Resource-intensive financial abuse matters and investigations
- Navigating multiple service systems and the impact of service system constraints
- Ensuring an appropriate focus on prevention activities when the volume of reports and unmet demand dominates
- Legislative gaps (including dealing with cross border / inter-jurisdictional issues)
- Enforcement of penalties for non-compliance
- Managing community expectations can be challenging

Part 3: The Way Forward

- **What is needed?**

What is needed?

- A comprehensive adult safeguarding framework
- Supported decision-making frameworks and legislation
- Improved responses to financial abuse, including Powers of Attorney misuse
- Better information sharing provisions
- Increased community awareness and workforce capability
- Increased regional and frontline safeguarding capacity
- Data linkages
- EPOA register
- Case management options