STAND UP SPEAK OUT
27-29 JULY 2026

2026 AUSTRALIAN ELDER ABUSE CONFERENCE

Better understanding and preventing neglect of older people

Cecilia Cox

Ageing and Disability Commission

EAAA Elder Abuse Action Australia

caxton COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

ADAAustralia Your Aged and Disability Advocates

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge we are meeting today on Aboriginal land and pay my respect to their elders past and present. I recognise the care and respect Aboriginal people have shown to elders across time and beyond memory.

I want to also acknowledge the lived experience in this room of victim survivors of domestic violence, abuse and neglect and recognise your strength and resilience.

STAND UP SPEAK OUT
27-29 JULY 2026

Neglect is a failure to meet a person's basic needs.

Elder Abuse Action Australia

caxton COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

ADAAustralia Your Aged and Disability Advocates

Research project

- Ageing and Disability Commission is an independent NSW Government Commission.
- The ADC has a tiered response to reports from advice and assistance to investigation.
- We engaged UNSW Social Policy Research Centre to undertake research into neglect of older people and adults with disability.
- The research sample focused on 474 reports to the ADC involving neglect which were referred to the CSI unit.

STAND UP SPEAK OUT 27-29 JULY 2026

EAAA Elder Abuse Action Australia

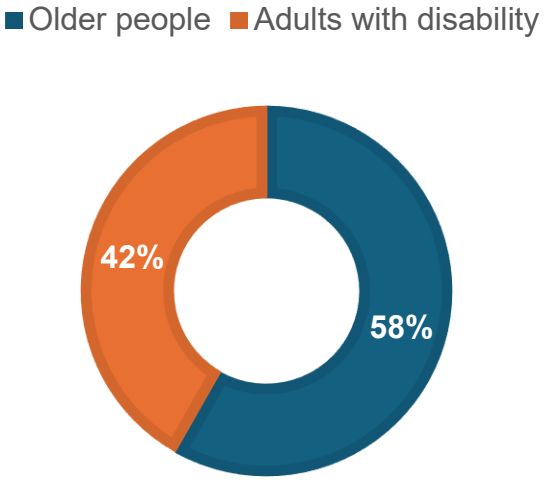
caxton COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

ADAAustralia Your Aged and Disability Advocates

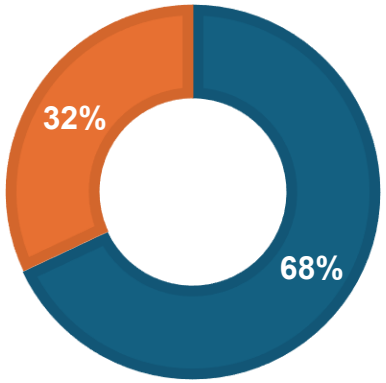
Sample characteristics

STAND UP SPEAK OUT 27-29 JULY 2026

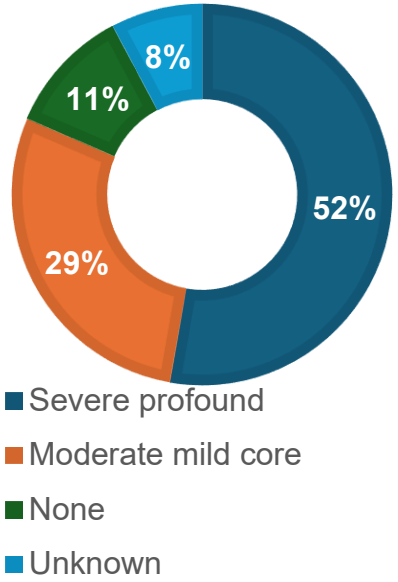
CATEGORY



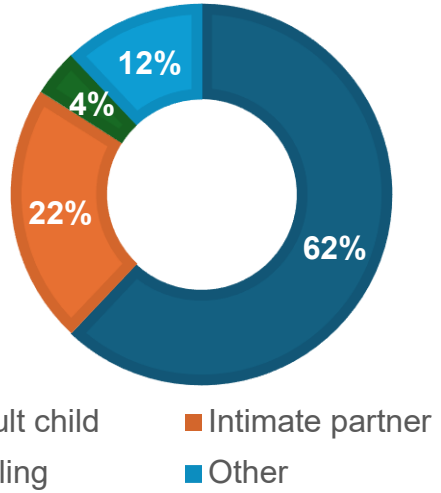
GENDER



ACTIVITY LIMITATION



PSOA

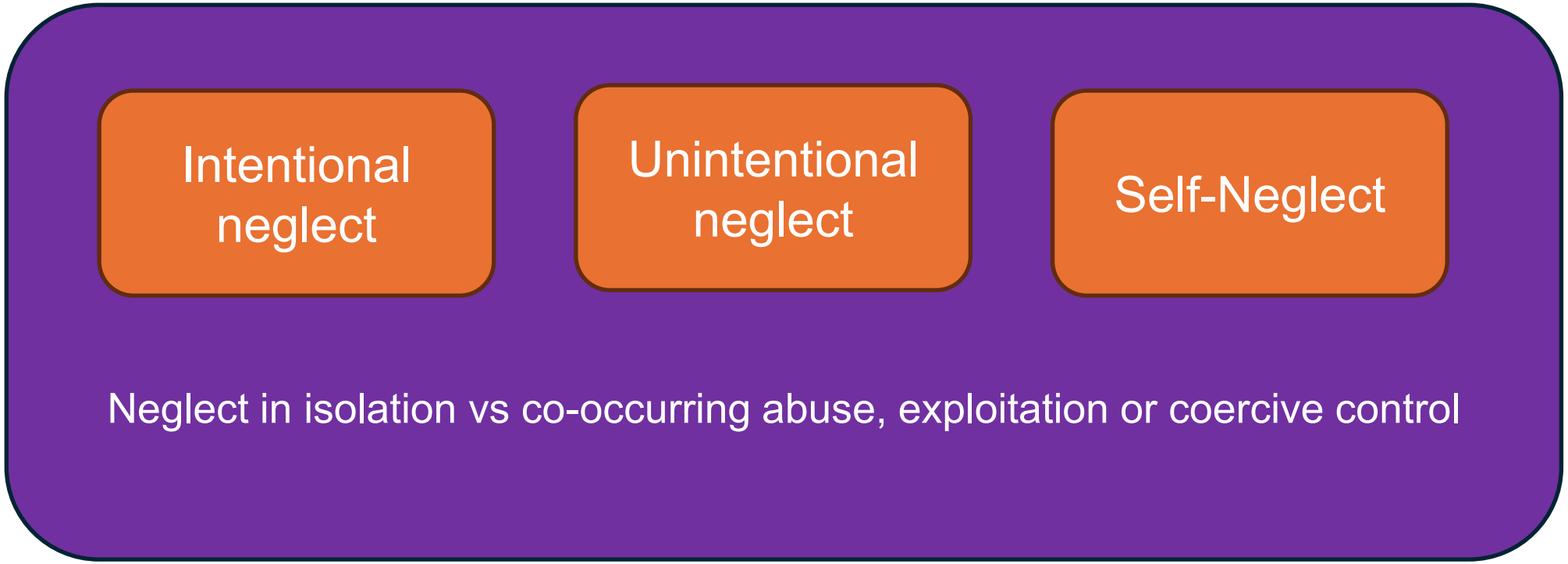


ELAA Elder Abuse Action Australia

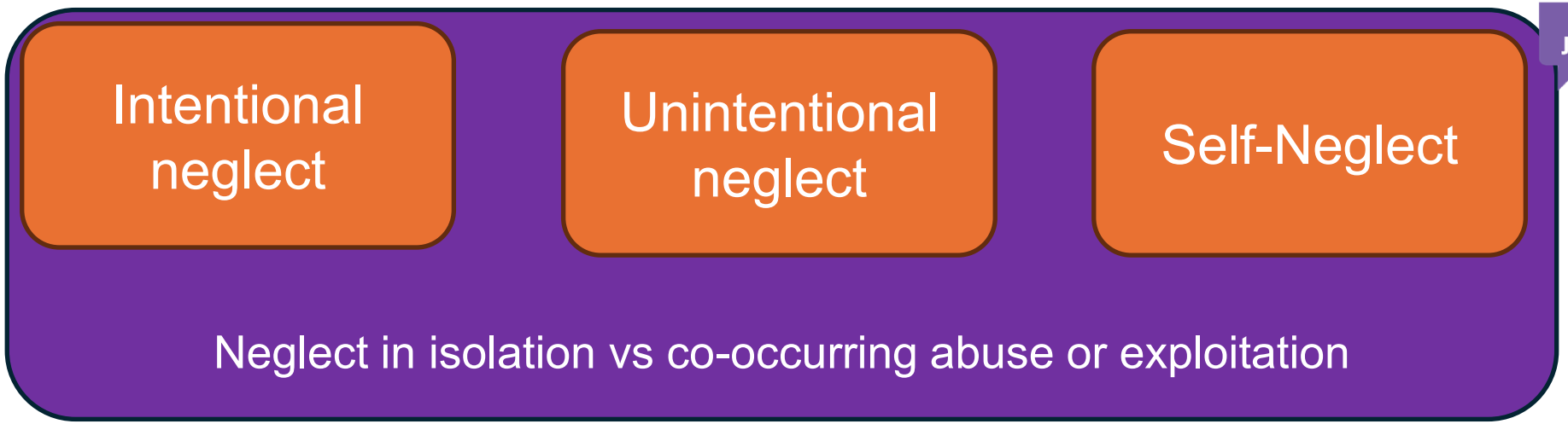
caxton COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

ADAAustralia Your Aged and Disability Advocates

Typologies of neglect



Neglect framework



Prevention and early intervention

Individual strengths and risk factors

Informal and community strengths and risk factors

System friction or enablers

Immediate and secondary response

Cybil

The ADC's Helpline received a report about an 80 year old woman named Cybil who lives with her husband, Raymond, in regional NSW.

Coercive control
Limited access to services
Verbal abuse
Access to food and water
Access to equipment

Rapid investigation

Secure medical care

Further barriers

Inquiries identify financial motive

Past missed opportunities

Social isolation

Intentional neglect

Case study | Reflection | Research | Opportunities

Reflection

How did systems enable Raymond's neglect of Cybil?

Intentional neglect

Research findings

38% of cases involved serious neglect

Where abuse was present the subject of allegation was more likely to be male

Subject of allegation blocking services in **51%** of matters

Domestic violence history was independently associated with serious neglect

47% involved current or historic domestic violence

Social Isolation at greater risk of serious neglect

Intentional neglect

Opportunities

- Prevent and address social isolation - support connected ageing
- Domestic violence and neglect form a comprehensive and holistic assessment
- Rights focused delivery of health and aged services through a safety-by-design approach
- Discharge planning identifies and addresses risk of neglect
- Greater awareness of criminal neglect and coercive control

Nancy

We received a report about Nancy, an 83 year old woman living with her son.

Nancy was taken to hospital via ambulance in response to becoming very unwell and losing consciousness

Nancy's son reported that she had a fall about 6 months prior and had not been able to mobilise since.

Nancy died from sepsis in hospital.

Unintentional neglect

Case study | Reflection | Research | Opportunities

Reflection

How could perceptions of ‘normal’ ageing shape the outcome for Nancy?

Research findings

Health literacy was more likely to be a factor in cases involving carer stress

Carer stress was more likely to be an issue in cases of social isolation

Low health literacy was linked with the subject of allegation blocking services

Less than 40% of our sample of older people were receiving support from aged care services

Opportunities

- Proactive and realistic conversations regarding future planning
- Empower individuals to make real decisions about future care
- Deeper conversations about perceived resistance to support
- Carer education, increased health literacy and support for carers
- A joined-up approach to support to prevent people falling through the cracks

Self neglect

We received a report about Joel.

Severely emaciated; he crawls through his home and has no mobility aids; he has no phone and no vita call

We arranged an urgent aged care service however they immediately withdrew due to risks to their staff

Joel was taken to hospital were he was found to be severely malnourished and dehydrated

Significant cognitive impairment, as well as unresolved grief that had impacted his will to live

Reflection

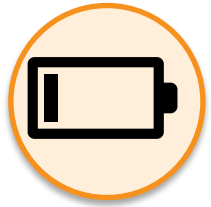
What is the impact of ageism in responding to self-neglect?

Research findings

Older people with dementia were significantly more likely to be experiencing self-neglect than those without dementia

In 46% of reports about neglect, the Person's wishes were identified as a factor impacting the response to the neglect

Older people experiencing self-neglect were significantly less likely to be receiving aged care services



Self-neglect was significantly associated with social isolation

Opportunities

- Curious and person-centered approach to addressing needs guided by the wishes of the older person.
- Earlier detection and targeted re-engagement for those at risk of being isolated from health and medical care.
- Greater sophistication in unpacking perceived resistance to support and identifying unmet mental health needs.

Four Hundred and Seventy Four

Different pathways.
A shared responsibility.

STAND UP SPEAK OUT
27-29 JULY 2026

Thank you

Access the full report and further information here

Or reach me at Cecilia.Cox@adc.nsw.gov.au

STAND UP SPEAK OUT
27-29 JULY 2026

Elder Abuse Action Australia

caxton COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE

ADA Australia
Your Aged and Disability Advocates