

What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse prevention

Factsheet

Introduction

The Victorian Government is committed to protecting older people from abuse and exploitation through a comprehensive program of priorities and actions outlined in the Department of Health's *Elder abuse prevention and response guidelines for action 2012–14*. A copy of the guidelines is available at www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/downloads/pdf/eap_guidelines.pdf.

The following provides a brief overview of elder abuse and sources of information and support.

What is elder abuse?

Older Victorians have the right, as do people of all ages, to live safely free from harm, abuse and exploitation. 'Elder abuse' is an act that causes harm to an older person and that is carried out by someone they know and should be able to trust, such as a close relative. Some forms of elder abuse might be more serious or have greater impact than others but all forms of abuse are unacceptable.

Challenging the decisions and behaviours of a close relative or friend can be difficult for older people. It is important that older people have support and are able to talk to someone they know and trust and seek independent legal and financial advice, particularly before signing legal documents such as contracts, so that they can make confident, informed decisions.

How common is elder abuse?

Australian and international research indicates that between one and five per cent of older people may experience elder abuse. However, elder abuse may be more common in the community than it appears because older people may have difficulty in talking about the issue. Elder abuse can affect any older person irrespective of means and background. Both men and women can be affected. As the number of older people in the community increases, the likelihood of elder abuse may increase.



The information in this fact sheet is for general information only; you should not rely on it as it is not legal advice that applies to your particular circumstances. If you have any questions or need advice, contact the agencies listed in this factsheet.

Here is an example of elder abuse:

Margaret's story

Mary knew that her 80 year old grandmother Margaret had some gold jewellery that she never wore and it might be quite valuable. She knew it had sentimental value to her grandmother but it would probably be hers one day so she may as well have it now. Mary regularly put pressure on Margaret to give her money as well as the jewellery. She said Margaret didn't wear the jewellery and it wasn't safe for her to keep it as she might be burgled or could lose it somewhere.

Margaret reluctantly gave her jewellery to Mary on condition that it was not to be sold without her consent. A few weeks later Mary sold the jewellery and used the money to pay for a holiday for herself and her boyfriend. She did not let her grandmother know until she returned from her holiday. Margaret was hurt and became more upset when Mary continued to pressure her for money as the holiday had cost more than she had expected. Asking for money had been part of Mary's behaviour towards her grandmother for a few years and Margaret didn't know what she could do about it. She gave Mary money and the other valuables she wanted for peace of mind.

Support for older Victorians

It may be difficult for older people to challenge behaviours or decisions when a close relative such as a son, daughter or grandchild is involved. Older Victorians can access advice and assistance from:

- **Seniors Rights Victoria** – this is a free helpline, legal, advocacy and referral service funded by the government. This confidential service is staffed by qualified and experienced people and can be contacted on **1300 368 821** 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday. Further information, including help sheets and a safety plan, is available at <www.seniorsrights.org.au>.
- **SeniorsOnline** <www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au> – this is a website developed by the Department of Health for Victorian seniors. The 'Your Rights' section has a range of contact details for older people as well as fact sheets on elder abuse.

If someone feels unsafe or threatened, they should contact Victoria Police on 000.

Support for professionals

The Victorian Government has developed practice guidelines to help professionals respond to and prevent elder abuse. The guidelines are available at <www.health.vic.gov.au/agedcare/publications/respect/>.

Professional education resources have been developed including workshops, manuals and DVDs. Further details are available at <www.eapsatvu.org.au>.

'Elder abuse' is "any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust, which results in harm to an older person. Abuse may be physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social and/or neglect." (Australian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (ANPEA) 1999)

The World Health Organization describes elder abuse as a violation of human rights and a significant cause of illness, loss of productivity, isolation and despair (WHO 2002 Active Ageing Policy Framework).

To receive this document in an accessible format phone 9096 7389. (Ageing and Aged Care Branch)

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