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## Elder abuse

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### Summary

- Elder abuse can be physical, psychological, sexual, social or financial. It may include mistreatment and neglect.
  - Elder abuse is usually caused by a family member but it may also be caused by a friend or neighbour.
  - The most common forms of elder abuse are psychological and financial.
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Elder abuse occurs when someone an older person knows and trusts causes them harm. It is usually done by a family member.

Elder abuse occurs regardless of gender, race, cultural values, religion or socioeconomic factors. Some forms of elder abuse might be more serious or have greater impact than others, but all forms of abuse are unacceptable.

Research from Australia and overseas shows that up to 14 per cent of older people may be experiencing elder abuse. The real number may be higher because many people feel they cannot speak up. While older women are two to three times more likely to experience abuse than older men, the proportion of older men who experience abuse is higher than for younger men.

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

For community information, factsheets and resources on elder abuse, visit [Seniors Online](#).

### What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse is any act which causes harm to an older person and is carried out by someone they know and trust, usually a family member. The abuse may be physical, social, financial, psychological or sexual and can include mistreatment and neglect.

Elder abuse is a form of **family violence**.

Different types of elder abuse include:

- physical abuse – such as kicking, hitting, locking in a room, use of restraints
- emotional or psychological abuse – such as pressuring, intimidating, bullying, name-calling, degrading, humiliating
- sexual abuse – forcing the older person to engage in unwanted sexual behaviours or viewing obscene videos in the presence of an older person without their consent
- neglect – failure to provide necessities such as adequate food, accommodation or medication
- social abuse – preventing contact with family and friends and involvement in social activities; restricting movement in the home
- financial abuse – taking advantage of powers of attorney, stealing the older person's money, forcing them to transfer property titles, or preventing them from accessing their own money.

### Elder abuse – how to find help in Victoria

If you are experiencing elder abuse, or think you might be, call [Seniors Rights Victoria](#) on **1300 368 821** for information, advice and support. The service is confidential and is staffed by qualified and experienced people. Services include:

- a free helpline
- legal services
- short-term support and advocacy
- community education.

You can also call the Seniors Rights Victoria Helpline if you think that a client or someone you know may be experiencing elder abuse.

Never feel ashamed to ask for help. If you are being physically abused, bullied or pressured to do things by someone you know; or if someone you rely on is neglecting you, threatening you or failing to look after you as they promised, let someone know. This could be a trusted neighbour, friend, GP, nurse or pharmacist.

**If you are in an unsafe or life threatening situation, or know someone who is, call the police on triple zero (000).**

'Where to get help', at the bottom of this fact sheet, provides a list of other ways to find help if you are experiencing elder abuse, or if you just need some advice and support.

### **Abuse and neglect in aged care facilities**

Older people are also at risk of abuse or neglect in long-term care institutions such as nursing homes or assisted living facilities. In Victoria this form of abuse falls under the **Aged Care Act 1997** (Commonwealth). If you think that someone you know who is living in an aged care facility may be experiencing abuse or neglect, contact the **Aged Care Complaints Commissioner** (Tel. **1800 951 822**).

### **Elder abuse – how to find help in other parts of Australia**

Services are available in each state and territory of Australia to help people experiencing elder abuse. See the 'Where to get help' section at the bottom of this fact sheet for information about elder abuse support services in your state or territory.

### **People experiencing elder abuse do not always seek help**

Some older people experiencing elder abuse may not seek help because of:

- feelings of guilt and shame
- fear of retaliation
- fear of damaging family relationships
- belief that aggression and violence is a normal part of family life
- fear that seeking help will lead to living in a nursing home or institution
- lack of physical or mental capacity because of disability
- lack of knowledge about available sources of help.

If you are unsure about asking for help, remember, it is your right to feel safe. No older person should be subjected to any form of abuse, mistreatment or neglect. Elder abuse is a form of family violence, and it is unacceptable.

### **Signs of elder abuse**

Signs that an older person may be abused include:

- malnutrition and dehydration
- poor personal hygiene or dirty clothes
- untreated medical problems
- fearful, anxious, withdrawn or cowed behaviour
- unexplained and frequent injuries such as black eyes and broken bones
- unexplained bruises or cuts on the genitals or anus
- unexplained sexually transmitted infections
- unexpected and sudden changes in financial status.

If you think someone you know is showing signs of elder abuse and you are in need of advice, you can call **Seniors Rights Victoria** on **1300 368 821** for free, confidential information, support and assistance.

### **Risk factors for elder abuse**

Known risk factors for elder abuse within a family home may include:

- the older person is dependent on someone else for care
- the carer or family member:
  - finds it stressful looking after the older person
  - resents having to look after the older person
  - is experiencing other types of stress, such as financial troubles
  - does not have enough support or respite
- a history of family violence within the family
- the carer or family member and the older person have different cultural values
- the older person was an abusive parent towards their adult child
- the carer or family member or the older person (or both) has a mental health condition
- the carer or family member or the older person (or both) has a substance abuse (alcohol or other drugs) problem.

If you are a carer and you need support, contact **Carers Australia Victoria** on **1800 242 636**. They can help you find the practical, financial and emotional support you need.

### **Elder abuse and CALD communities**

Elder abuse can affect people from all cultural backgrounds. While there is no evidence to suggest that there is a higher prevalence of elder abuse in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, it may be more hidden due to shame and stigma, added language barriers, or lack of awareness about elder abuse and the options available to people experiencing it.

The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria has produced a short film about elder abuse, '**Within my Walls**' – available in several community languages, to spread awareness of elder abuse to people in CALD communities.

### **Where to get help**

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Police Tel. 000
- **Seniors Rights Victoria** helpline Tel. **1300 368 821**
- **MyAgedCare** for Australia wide elder abuse contacts
- National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline Tel. **1800 880 052**
- **1800 RESPECT** National Sexual Assault, Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service Tel. **1800 737 732**
- **Elder Abuse Information Line for the Territory** (NT) Tel. **1800 037 072**
- **NSW Elder Abuse Helpline and Resource Unit** Tel. **1800 628 221**
- **Elder Abuse Prevention Unit Queensland** Tel. **1300 651 192**
- **South Australian elder abuse prevention phone line** Tel. **1800 372 310**
- **Tasmanian Elder Abuse Helpline** Tel. **1800 441 169** or **(03) 6237 0047**
- **Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse Western Australia** Tel. **(08) 9479 7566**

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