

Recommendations for the application of intersectionality in elder abuse prevention and response

About us

[Council on the Ageing \(COTA\) Victoria](#) is the leading not-for-profit organisation representing the interests and rights of people aged over 50 in Victoria. Celebrating 75 years of service in 2026, we have led government, corporate and community thinking about the positive aspects of ageing in the state.

Today, our focus is on promoting opportunities for and protecting the rights of people 50+. We value ageing and embrace its opportunities for personal growth, contribution, and self-expression. This belief brings benefits to the nation and its states alongside communities, families, and individuals.

[Seniors Rights Victoria \(SRV\)](#) is the key state-wide service dedicated to advancing the rights of older people and the early intervention into, or prevention of, elder abuse in our community.

SRV has a team of experienced advocates, lawyers, and social workers who provide free information, advice, referrals, legal advice, legal casework, and support to older people who are either at risk of or are experiencing elder abuse. SRV supports and empowers older people through the provision of legal advice directly to the older person.

Purpose

In 2025-2026, we committed to the development of a multi-part research guide on intersectionality in elder abuse. The *Intersectionality in Elder Abuse Reference Guides* (IRG) considered how overlapping characteristics and experiences of marginalisation affect the risk, presentation of, and the effectiveness of responses to, elder abuse across Victorian communities.

Informed by the case work of SRV, members of the Victorian Elder Abuse Strategic Alliance, and numerous other ageing and family violence-based organisations, the IRG paints a picture of the experiences of, and opportunities to mitigate the risks faced by, those who have or continue to experience discrimination beyond ageism.

Drawing on the findings of our IRG, this briefing provides nine recommendations to the Victorian Government, to support prevention and response initiatives to meet the demand within communities who face overlapping types of risk.

Why an intersectional approach?

Older people are not a homogenous group, and their needs, preferences, and experiences are not always immediately visible. Experiences of ageing, safety, care, service access, and elder abuse are shaped by the interaction between relationships, systems and services, and factors such as gender, disability, geography, cultural background, sexuality, social connection, and economic security.

Within this context, the risk of elder abuse increases, and opportunities for early intervention are reduced when systems are inaccessible, fragmented, culturally unsafe, overly reliant on digital access, or based on false assumptions about older people.

State agencies play a significant role in shaping who is reached, who is missed, and whether support is available before abuse escalates. Through policy settings, funding models, data systems, workforce expectations, complaints and referral pathways, and program design, government has an opportunity to reduce barriers to access, safety, and early intervention.

The IRG identifies several factors that can increase the risk, duration, and invisibility of elder abuse, particularly when they intersect. For more detailed cohort-specific analysis and practice guidance, refer to the IRG, several key insights include:

- ageism can minimise or normalise harm against older people, especially where it intersects with sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or economic disadvantage; and,
- lifelong disadvantage shapes an older person's vulnerability to abuse, exploitation, and dependence on family members, and should be considered when assessing risk and support; and,
- abuse may be missed by professionals when it is perceived as family conflict, carer stress, or routine care. Testing these explanations requires attention to the older person's lived experience and identity, and how this affects their relationship with services and systems.

Recommendations for state agencies

Drawing on the research and lived experience underpinning the development of the IRG, we recommend the adoption of the following recommendations within the relevant Victorian departments and programs.

Recommendation	Department(s)	Relevant plans
Ensure any future Victorian Elder Abuse Prevention Strategy or Plan includes specific actions, outcomes, and accountability measures to address the experiences of older people with intersecting identities who are at increased risk of elder abuse.	Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, Victorian Department of Health (DoH), Victorian Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS), Victoria Police	National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People
Develop practical guidance to support Victorian Government departments and funded organisations to apply an intersectional lens when designing, implementing, and evaluating elder abuse policies, programs, and services.	DFFH, DoH, DJCS, Department of Government Services (DGS)	<i>Everybody Matters</i> ; National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People

Recommendation	Department(s)	Relevant plans
Develop and embed consistent guidance, referral pathways, and workforce training for housing and homelessness services to identify and respond to elder abuse, including where abuse contributes to housing insecurity or homelessness.	Homes Victoria, DFFH, Victoria Legal Aid, community legal centres, housing and homelessness services	National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children; National Plan to End the Abuse of Older People 2025-35; <i>Everybody Matters</i>
Fund training and resources for healthcare, aged care, and family violence professionals, on the application of Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) for elder abuse cases.	Family Safety Victoria (FSV), DFFH, prescribed workforces	Third Rolling Action Plan; MARAM; <i>Everybody Matters</i>
Review the implementation of the Family Violence Data Collection Framework to identify opportunities to improve the consistent identification, recording, and reporting of elder abuse across funded services.	DFFH, FSV, DoH, Homes Victoria, Victoria Police	<i>Everybody Matters</i> ; Third Rolling Action Plan; National Plan to End the Abuse of Older People
Fund a cross-sector scoping project to examine options for a Victorian adult safeguarding system, including governance, legislative, service, and workforce implications, with particular attention to diverse communities.	DFFH, DJCS, DoH, Office of the Public Advocate, Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department	National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People; Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031; Ageing Well Action Plan
Fund a pilot program, that places elder abuse Consultation and Liaison Officers positions within select Orange Door services, to support demand alongside the ongoing rollout of elder abuse capability training taking place within Victoria family violence services.	FSV, DFFH, The Orange Door, SRV	Third Rolling Action Plan; <i>Everybody Matters</i> ; National Plan to End the Abuse of Older People
Support the co-design and delivery of behaviour change campaigns that address ageism and elder abuse within diverse communities, while ensuring specialist support and legal services are appropriately resourced to respond to increased help-seeking.	Respect Victoria, FSV, DFFH, Equality portfolio, community-led organisations	<i>Respecting and Valuing Older People</i> ; Free from Violence; Third Rolling Action Plan; National Plan to End the Abuse of Older People