

Portfolio summary: Elder abuse

What is the issue?

Elder abuse is a serious and growing form of family violence and harm affecting older people across Australia. It is estimated that around 1 in 6 older Australians experience some form of elder abuse each year.

Elder abuse can include psychological, financial, physical, neglect, sexual, and social harm. While family members are most commonly responsible, abuse can also occur in informal care, community, institutional, and service settings.

Ageism is a key driver of elder abuse. Negative attitudes towards ageing, combined with social isolation, financial stress, disability, poor health, and unequal power dynamics can increase vulnerability to abuse and reduce help-seeking. These risks can be compounded for older people experiencing other forms of disadvantage or discrimination.

Despite growing awareness and important reforms across family violence, ageing, and safeguarding systems, responses to elder abuse remain fragmented and inconsistent. Many older people do not seek help until abuse has escalated significantly, while specialist services continue to face increasing demand and limited capacity for early intervention and prevention.

As Victoria's population ages, stronger and more coordinated responses are needed across prevention, early intervention, crisis response, and recovery.

Key facts

- Around 14.8% of Australians aged 65 and over experience elder abuse each year. This rapidly increased to 23% of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and 21-27% amongst the older LGBTQIA+ people.
- Family members are responsible for most reported abuse, although abuse also occurs outside traditional family relationships.
- Many victim-survivors do not seek formal support until abuse becomes severe.
- Key risk factors include disability, social isolation, financial stress, insecure housing, and carer or family dependency dynamics.
- Ageism contributes to lower recognition and acceptance of abuse at individual and societal levels.
- Evidence suggests older people experiencing intersecting forms of disadvantage may face higher risks of abuse, although significant gaps remain in the evidence base.

Our advocacy agenda

COTA Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria advocates for a more visible, integrated and preventative response to elder abuse across Victoria.

We advocate for:

- sustained investment in specialist elder abuse services and early intervention;
- stronger integration between elder abuse, family violence, health, aged care and safeguarding systems;
- improved legal, regulatory and safeguarding protections for older people;
- greater investment in research, data collection and evidence-informed reform;
- stronger action to address ageism and improve community awareness of elder abuse; and
- culturally safe and accessible responses for all older people, particularly those experiencing intersecting disadvantage.

Recent COTA Victoria documents

To support systemic reform and sector development, COTA Victoria and Seniors Rights Victoria regularly contribute to government consultations, policy development, research, and sector capacity building.

Recent examples include:

- [Reference guide on intersectionality in elder abuse](#)
- [Victorian Elder Abuse Strategic Alliance State Budget Submission 2026-27](#)
- [Submission to the Inquiry into capturing data on family violence perpetrators in Victoria](#)
- [Submission on the next stage of Victoria's work to end family violence](#)
- [Identifying and addressing elder abuse: A guide for Commonwealth Home Support Program providers](#)
- [Submission to the Inquiry into the relationship between domestic, family and sexual violence, and suicide](#)
- [Submission on the National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2024-2034](#)
- [Victorian Elder Abuse Strategic Alliance Victorian State Budget Submission 2025/26](#)

Through leadership of the Victorian Elder Abuse Strategic Alliance (VEASA), we collaborate with specialist elder abuse services, family violence organisations, legal and safeguarding bodies, community-led organisations, and state and local government to advance coordinated reform and system improvement across Victoria.

Feedback on any issue raised in this briefing can be provided through our policy advocacy survey tool accessible at: [COTA Victoria Policy Advocacy - Feedback on Publications – Fill out form.](#)

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