

**Submission
No 24**

INQUIRY INTO INQUIRY INTO ELDER ABUSE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Northern NSW Abuse of Older People Collaborative (Northern Rivers Social Development Council)

Date received: 13/11/2015

**NSW Parliament, Legislative Council - General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Inquiry into Elder Abuse**

Submitted by Northern Rivers Social Development Council

On behalf of Northern NSW Abuse of Older People Collaborative.

Northern NSW Abuse of Older People Collaborative consist of 15 members including, although not limited to, aged care service providers, community legal service, health services and older persons advocates. The Northern Rivers consists of 7 Local Government Areas with 20% of its population over 65 years or older compared with 15% the NSW average. 4.2% of our population are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders with the NSW average 2.5%. There are fewer aged care places per thousand than the NSW average, which has the potential to create an environment where family members are having to care for ageing community members placing unrealistic burden upon them, resulting in an increase in elder abuse.

The collaborative meets bi monthly and has provided training to aged care staff through its Elder Abuse Prevention & Response Project, developed resources for service providers and more recently have developed and distributed The Older Persons Wellbeing Checklist, which is an awareness raising regional campaign targeting older peoples knowledge of abuse.

Relating to inquiry item:

5 - Identify any constraints to elder abuse being reported and best practice strategies to address such constraints:

It is assumed (due to underreporting and anecdotes) people living in residential aged care facilities are concerned about potential ramifications of reporting abuse, that the care they received may be reduced or withdrawn, or suggestions of finding another residential aged care facility if they complain or report.

Recommendation

It is suggested that all complaints relating to abuse or neglect in residential aged care facilities, be mandated to be reported and managed in a similar way to that of the NSW Ombudsman (NSW) 'Reportable Incidents In Disability Supported Group Accommodation' model and/or mandated to be lodged with the Aged Care Complaints Scheme with an independent advocate assigned to each complaint.

6 – Identify any strength based initiative which empower older persons to better protect themselves from risks of abuse as they age:

Northern NSW Abuse of Older People Collaborative developed a 'My Wellbeing Checklist' card and poster that was distributed throughout Northern NSW by collaborative members and (previously) North Coast Medicare Local to general practice clinics, pharmacies, local business & service providers, as part of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2015. The cards ask a series of questions e.g.: 'I know my bank balance?', 'I feel comfortable and safe in my own home', these questions start the person reflecting on their responses.

Recommendation

It is suggested that regional, state and national media campaigns targeting older people to raise their and the broader community's awareness of elder abuse. Public awareness campaigns work well when they are targeting at behaviour that is easy to understand and easy to detect (NSW Government's 'One Punch' & 'Plan B – Don't Drink & Drive' campaigns are good examples of this). Although elder abuse (domestic violence) often happens in people's homes and the general public may not be fully aware of what elder abuse is.

Suggestion: strengthen network marketing and awareness raising done at local levels by state or nationally funded media campaigns, by depicting older people as victims of abuse in those campaigns.

7 – The effectiveness of NSW laws, policies, services and strategies, including the 2014 Interagency Policy *Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Older People*, in safeguarding older persons from abuse.

Anecdotal evidence indicates the 2014 Policy *Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Older People* is underutilised by service providers therefore not safeguarding older people.

Recommendation

Expand the parameters of this policy to include Abuse of Older People in the broader Domestic & Family Violence platform at a regional, state and national level, in the same way that child protection is prioritised in responding to Domestic & Family violence.

As previously commented (Item 5) mandatory reporting for older people (without decision making capacity) may be considered for legislation.

8 – The possible development of long-term systems and proactive measures to respond to the increasing numbers of older persons, including consideration of cultural diversity among older persons, so as to prevent abuse.

Outgoing Social Service Minister Fifield states one of five priorities for the new Minister is audit of government-funded workforce programs. Senator Fifield confirmed the audit would inform the development of an aged care workforce development strategy to "inform future funding priorities." The audit will also be critical to determining the future of the Aged Care Workforce Fund, which provides \$220 million over four years to support a range of measures including fully-funded VET training for aged care workers, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Employment Program, Dementia Care Essentials training and the Aged Care Education and Training Incentive Program.

Recommendation

It is suggested that part of this investment be focused on providing adequate and appropriate training for the workforce in identifying abuse and neglect, communication, complaint handling and professional boundaries at entry level study.

It is also suggested that peak organisations supporting culturally and Linguistically Diverse, Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Veterans & people living with dementia be directly consulted by government.