



**ACT**  
Government

# RESPECTING OUR ELDERS

PROTECTING THE ACT'S  
ELDERLY FROM ABUSE



# WHAT IS **ELDER ABUSE**?

For the purpose of this publication elder abuse is defined as the mistreatment or exploitation of an older person by someone that they know and trust.

## TYPES OF **ELDER ABUSE**

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**FINANCIAL ABUSE** involves the illegal or improper use of an older person's finances or property. It can include:

- > stealing or misappropriating money
  - > forcing changes to a will or other legal documents
  - > denying access to personal funds, forging signatures or misusing Power of Attorney.
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**PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE** is the infliction of mental anguish involving actions that cause fear of violence, isolation or deprivation and feelings of shame, indignity or powerlessness. It can include:

- > verbal intimidation and shouting
  - > humiliation or embarrassment
  - > threats of physical harm
  - > withholding of affection
  - > threats of institutionalisation
  - > removal of decision-making powers.
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**PHYSICAL ABUSE** is the infliction of physical pain, injury or physical coercion. It can include:

- > hitting, slapping, pushing, punching, kicking, beating, biting, scratching, shaking, arm twisting, dragging or burning
- > inappropriate restraint or medicating
- > locking a person in a room.

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**SEXUAL ABUSE** or exploitation can include:

- > rape (sexual intercourse against the wishes of an individual)
- > indecent assault (inappropriate sexual handling or touching)
- > sexual harassment (inappropriate comments or labelling about general appearance, attitude and behaviour).

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**SOCIAL ABUSE** involves preventing a person from having social contact, or access to social activities. It can include preventing independence with threats, manipulation and control as well as:

- > isolating a person from the support of family or friends
- > monitoring a person's calls or not allowing them to use the telephone
- > preventing a person from socialising or meeting neighbours.

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**NEGLECT** is the failure of a carer to provide the necessities of life to a person for whom they are caring. It can be intentional or unintentional, and include:

- > inadequate or inappropriate food or drink, supervision, clothing or accommodation
- > lack of mental, physical, social or cultural contact and/or stimulation
- > failure to meet physical needs or provide medical treatment.



## WHO IS AT RISK?

Abuse of older people crosses gender, socio-economic, religious and cultural boundaries.

Abuse is most likely to be inflicted by family members, especially an older person's adult children. Older people are at increased risk of abuse when they:

- > have a disability or poor health
- > are living with mental health issues
- > are in dependent caring relationships, particularly where a carer is experiencing carer burden or carer stress
- > are isolated and/or without personal supports
- > have a past history of violence or conflict within the family
- > exhibit particularly difficult and/or inappropriate behaviour, and/or confusion or memory loss
- > are persons from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds
- > are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- > exhibit signs and symptoms of cognitive impairment including dementia.

## PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO **ELDER ABUSE IN THE ACT**

In the ACT the Elder Abuse Prevention Program is coordinated by the Community Services Directorate's Community Participation Group. The Elder Abuse Prevention Working Group and the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing provide advice about this program as required.

# PREVENTION PATHWAYS

## FIRST RESPONSE QUESTIONS

### Financial abuse

- > Does the person require medical assistance?
- > Is the person in danger or a victim of a crime?
- > What if I don't know who to call?

### Psychological abuse

- > Does the person need assistance with decision-making?

### Social abuse

- > Is the issue or concern about a health service or service for older people?

### Neglect

- > Is the issue or concern about a Commonwealth-funded service?

## FINDING HELP AND ADVICE

There are a range of organisations and services who provide information, advice and referral.

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### Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT)

An Aboriginal community organisation assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, women and children with court representation, advice and information, and referral to further support services.

[www.alsnswact.org.au](http://www.alsnswact.org.au) | 6249 8488

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### ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal

Guardianship and management of property orders.

[www.acat.act.gov.au](http://www.acat.act.gov.au) | 6207 1740

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## **ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service**

ADACAS provides free, independent advocacy and information for people with disabilities, older people and their carers in the ACT.

**[www.adacas.org.au](http://www.adacas.org.au) | 6242 5060**

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## **ACT Human Rights Commission**

Deals with complaints about discrimination, health services and services for older people and their carers.

**[www.hrc.act.gov.au](http://www.hrc.act.gov.au) | 6205 2222**

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## **ACT Policing**

24-hour emergency response	<b>000</b>
24-hour assistance line	<b>131 444</b>
Crime Stoppers	<b>1800 333 000</b>
General enquiries	<b>6256 7777</b>

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## **Aged Care Complaints Commissioner**

Provides a free service for anyone to raise their concerns about the quality of care or services being delivered to people receiving aged care services subsidised by the Australian Government.

**[www.agedcarecomplaints.gov.au](http://www.agedcarecomplaints.gov.au) | 1800 550 552**

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## **Canberra Community Law**

A community legal centre providing legal services to people on low incomes or facing other disadvantage in Canberra and its region.

**[www.canberracommunitylaw.org.au](http://www.canberracommunitylaw.org.au) | 6218 7900**

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## **Care Inc**

A community organisation set up to ensure low income consumers are treated fairly and have support to overcome debt. **[www.carefcs.org](http://www.carefcs.org) | 1800 007 007**

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## **Council on the Ageing – ACT**

COTA ACT is the peak non-government organisation concerned with all issues related to ageing in the ACT.

**[www.cotaact.org.au](http://www.cotaact.org.au) | 6282 3777**

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## Health Services Commissioner

The Commissioner's mandate is to consider complaints about the provision of health services and services for older people, and complaints about contraventions of the *Health Records (Privacy and Access) Act 1997*.

[www.hrc.act.gov.au/health](http://www.hrc.act.gov.au/health) | 6205 2222

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## Legal Aid ACT

Helps people, especially those who are socially and economically disadvantaged, in the ACT with their legal problems.

[www.legallaidact.org.au](http://www.legallaidact.org.au) | 1300 654 314

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## Public Trustee and Guardian

Help and advice with will-making and with asset services under Enduring Power of Attorney.

[www.ptg.act.gov.au](http://www.ptg.act.gov.au) | 6207 9800

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## Victims of Crime Coordinator

[www.victimsupport.act.gov.au](http://www.victimsupport.act.gov.au) | 1800 822 272

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## Women's Legal Centre

A community legal centre for women in Canberra and the surrounding area. The centre is run by women and aims to improve women's access to justice.

[www.womenslegalact.org](http://www.womenslegalact.org) | 6257 4499



# NEED HELP OR MORE **INFORMATION?**

Visit [www.ageing.act.gov.au](http://www.ageing.act.gov.au) or contact the Abuse Prevention Referral and Information Line (APRIL) on **6205 3535** or email [communityparticipation@act.gov.au](mailto:communityparticipation@act.gov.au)

A confidential telephone service for callers who are seeking advice on elder abuse.

## ACCESSIBILITY

ACT Government is committed to making information, services, events and venues accessible to as many people as possible.

- > If you have **difficulty reading a standard printed document** and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format (such as **large print** or **audio**) please telephone **6205 0282**.
- > If **English is not your first language** and you require the **translating and interpreting service**, please telephone **13 14 50**.
- > If you are **deaf or hearing impaired** and require the **TTY typewriter service**, please telephone **133 677 then ask for 133 427**.
- > ACT Interpreter Service **for the deaf and blind**, please telephone **6287 4391**.