

WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY (WEAAD) 2021

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) is annually recognized on 15 June. Advocare, WA's home and residential aged care advocacy service, provides free, confidential support to older West Australians at risk of, or experiencing elder abuse through the WA Elder Abuse Helpline. Advocare asks all West Australians in the community, including those working in the health, aged care or finance sectors to be more aware and responsive to incidents of elder abuse. In the past quarter, Advocare received 413 calls to the WA Elder Abuse Helpline, plus a further 3,100 calls to their general information line. The rising number of calls each year is accompanied by heartbreaking stories of harm from the minority of older people able to reach out for help.

Advocare CEO, Ms Etta Palumbo, said "elder abuse is often unseen and unheard. Many older people are experiencing one or more forms of elder abuse without realizing it. Elder abuse can be financial, psychological, emotional, neglect, physical, sexual and social. It often starts with small things, such as carer frustration building to angry outbursts or Enduring Powers of Attorney escalating from paying bills to attorney's helping themselves to bank accounts and other assets justifying it as payment or early inheritance. Often the person being harmed is trapped because of dependence on or fear of the perpetrator. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is about increasing everyone's understanding of elder abuse, being aware of safeguards that can be put in place and where to go for help. If you have a neighbour, a friend, a family member or a client who is older and at risk of social isolation or elder abuse, check in on them regularly."

Elder abuse should be on everyone's radar and can happen to any older person anywhere including residential aged care, in the home or in the community by family, friends and carers. If people see behaviours toward an older person that concern them or don't feel quite right, it is important to take action – intervene if safe to do so, talk to the older person and/or report concerns to the appropriate person or authority, such as trusted family member, police, care provider, doctor, bank or the State Administrative Tribunal if mental capacity is an issue. Advocare also strongly encourages older people to protect themselves by reducing their risk of vulnerability, planning for future security, being informed of their rights and being aware that rights don't diminish with age. Advocare has many resources to help older people including free, confidential phone telephone support, online resources, a community visitors scheme to help isolated people stay connected and free rights-based education programs to interested community groups and health and aged care workers across WA.

Ms Palumbo said, "It's important that all Western Australians are informed of the planning tools available to them to communicate and document their wishes for later life, including preparing a Will, Estate Plan, Enduring Powers of Attorney and Guardianship, applications for State Administrative Tribunal Orders of Guardianship and Administration, Advanced Health Directives and Advanced Care Plans. Most importantly, it's important to maintain connections with multiple people you trust and to have honest and open conversations with loved ones and caregivers about dealing with future decline in health and potential incapacity to ensure they understand your preferences and expectations around care, accommodation and finances. That way, families can iron out any potential differences in opinions well before a health crisis occurs."

People can show support for World Elder Abuse Awareness Day by wearing a purple ribbon. Perth CBD landmarks will be lit up in purple on 15 June to remind everyone to be aware of elder abuse.

If you or someone you know is experiencing or at risk of elder abuse, call the WA Elder Abuse Helpline: 1300 724 679, Monday to Friday from 8:30am – 4:30pm or visit www.advocare.org.au.

Media contact: Gina Cumberland, telephone 0413 122 260

10th June 2021