

EXAMINATION OF THE EXTENT OF ELDER ABUSE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

*A Qualitative and Quantitative Investigation of Existing Agency
Policy, Service Responses and Recorded Data*

Summary



This summary brings together the findings and key recommendations of a collaborative research study between Advocare Inc. and the Crime Research Centre at the University of Western Australia funded by LotteryWest.

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As the size of our older population continues to increase, elder abuse becomes an increasingly significant issue.

The challenge for government and welfare agencies is to ensure that there are adequate resources available to respond to it effectively.

So what is elder abuse?

Any act which causes harm to an older person and occurs within an informal relationship of trust, such as family or friends. These can include: Financial or Material abuse, Emotional or Psychological abuse, Physical abuse, Sexual abuse, Social abuse or Neglect.
(Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse: Western Australia – [APEA: WA])

The researchers made a number of findings and twenty-six recommendations some of which are provided here (for comprehensive lists please see the full report):

Key Findings of the Report:

- Issues with the definition of elder abuse – different definitions used nationally, internationally and between different APEA: WA organisations. The definition of ‘elder’ is also contested.
- Financial abuse is the most frequently recorded type of abuse with the misuse of Enduring Powers of Attorney being the most frequently mentioned financial abuse issue.
- Data suggests an overall trend for an increasing volume of cases of elder abuse in WA but as there is no uniformity in the way statistics are gathered it is difficult to get an accurate estimate of the extent of elder abuse in WA.
- No evident cohesive approach to elder abuse across government and non-government organisations.
- In terms of public awareness, elder abuse lags far behind issues such as child abuse and domestic violence.



Key Recommendations:

➤ **Review of the Concept of Elder Abuse**

- Organise a community debate to determine an accurate definition of elder abuse.
- Convene a national conference in Perth where visiting speakers focus critical academic and professional attention on the issue.
- Arrange a series of community seminars involving child protection and domestic violence services to explore commonalities and differences with elder abuse policy and practice.
- Funding needs to be sought for an ongoing public education campaign.

➤ **Financial Abuse, Fraud, Enduring Powers of Attorney Legislation and Banks**

- Banks to develop policies, practices, educational programs and regulatory measures to reduce the risk and incidence of financial abuse of older people.
- Uniform federal legislation on Enduring Powers of Attorney to be developed and a national system for registering and auditing to be implemented.
- Research to be undertaken on the effectiveness of current and alternative methods of resolving elder abuse.

➤ **Statutory Authority and Responses to Elder Abuse**

- Develop a risk-assessment process to ensure the most vulnerable are not falling through the gaps.
- A lead government agency to be identified and given the responsibility of developing and coordinating responses to elder abuse across WA.
- Explore a pilot program of the Case Management inter-agency model involving Advocare, the Health Department of WA, the WA Police and other service-providing agencies.
- A review of Elder Law be undertaken, with specific regard to Enduring Power of Attorney, Guardianship and the registration of wills.

➤ **Towards Integrated Policy and Practice**

- Advocare to seek funding to provide sector-wide training to service provider agencies on elder abuse.
- A review of the current network of service agencies responding to allegations of different types of elder abuse.
- The development of elder abuse protocols for all agencies responding to the issue, and a referral guide for service providers.
- Explore the design and implementation options for a statewide inter-agency electronic data register.

It is hoped that the results of this research will inform elder abuse prevention practices for many local agencies and allow key agencies working with elder abuse to improve their responses and address perceived gaps in current processes.

Details of the report:

Title: EXAMINATION OF THE EXTENT OF ELDER ABUSE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA - A Qualitative and Quantitative Investigation of Existing Agency Policy, Service Responses and Recorded Data

Researchers: Professor Mike Clare, Dr Barbara Black Blundell and Dr Joseph Clare

To receive an electronic copy of the report *Examination of the Extent of Elder Abuse in Western Australia* please contact rights@advocare.org.au.

For more information about elder abuse, please contact Advocare Inc.:

Tel: (08) 9479 7566

Country callers: 1800 655 566

Email: rights@advocare.org.au

Web: www.advocare.org.au

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in the report are those of the researchers, and not necessarily of Advocare, APEA: WA or the agencies that participated in the study.

