

‘Elder abuse: Protecting rights, preventing harm’

TOP 10 WEBINAR QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1

I’m concerned an older person may be experiencing abuse. What steps can I take to report the abuse and what happens once a report is made?

Start by listening to the older person, providing support, and helping them consider their options. Where possible, seek their consent before taking action.

Keep a record of your concerns, including dates, observations and conversations.

Once a report is made, the service receiving the information will assess the situation and discuss available supports. Depending on the circumstances, this may include advocacy, safety planning, counselling, legal assistance, referrals or connection with health and community services.

For information, advice and referral to specialist services, contact **1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374)**. If there is immediate danger, call **000**.

For more information, visit www.elderabusehelpline.com.au.

2	How can I support an older person who may be experiencing abuse but does not want help or intervention? Respect their wishes while continuing to offer support. Older people have the right to make their own decisions, even when others disagree. You can help by: • listening without judgement • expressing concern for their wellbeing • providing information about available support services • maintaining regular contact and encouraging social connection. If there is an immediate risk to their safety, call 000. For advice or information, contact 1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374) or visit https://www.compass.info/
3	How can abuse be identified and addressed when an older person is living with dementia or cognitive impairment? Abuse can be harder to identify because changes in behaviour may be wrongly attributed to dementia. Warning signs can include fear, withdrawal, unexplained injuries, signs of neglect, or unusual financial activity. It's important not to assume a person lacks decision-making capacity. Capacity can vary, and older people should be supported to participate in decisions affecting their lives wherever possible. Speak with the person privately in a safe environment, use clear and respectful communication, and document any concerns. Consider seeking support from an advocate, health professional or specialist service.

	For information and referrals, contact 1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374). The National Dementia Helpline (1800 100 500) also provides free, confidential support, advice and expert information 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
4	What can be done if a family member, Power of Attorney, or substitute decision-maker is not respecting the older person's rights, will and preferences, or is misusing their authority? People acting under a Power of Attorney or similar authority must act in the older person's interests and, where possible, in line with their wishes and preferences. If you are concerned this is not happening, seek advice from an advocacy organisation, legal service or elder abuse specialist service. Depending on the circumstances, the actions of power of attorneys, guardians and other substitute decision-makers can be reviewed or challenged through legal and tribunal processes. Contact 1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374) or the OPAN Aged Care Advocacy Line (1800 700 600) for information about available supports.
5	What are the warning signs of financial abuse, and where can older people, their families and support networks go for help? Financial abuse often occurs within relationships of trust. Warning signs may include: • unexplained withdrawals or transfers • pressure to sign documents or hand over money • sudden changes to wills, property ownership or financial arrangements

	• unpaid bills despite adequate income • misuse of a Power of Attorney • missing money or valuables. <i>Older people, families and supporters can contact 1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374) for information and referral to local services. Older people receiving government-funded aged care can also contact the OPAN Aged Care Advocacy Line (1800 700 600) for free, independent advocacy.</i>
6	How can service providers and their staff respond to concerns about abuse while respecting an older person’s rights, choices, and independence? Responses should balance protection from harm with respect for the older person's rights, dignity and autonomy. When concerns arise, staff should: • listen and take concerns seriously • seek the older person's views and preferences • assess any immediate safety risks • provide information about support options • maintain privacy and confidentiality where appropriate • document concerns accurately. Older people should be supported to make their own decisions wherever possible. It is important to note that providers have legal obligations under the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) to identify, respond to, investigate and report certain incidents to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC).

7

What support is available when an older person is being isolated, controlled, or prevented from maintaining important relationships?

Support should focus on restoring the older person's choice, connection and control.

Trusted friends, family members, advocates, health professionals and service providers can help by listening without judgement, providing information about rights and options, and supporting the person to reconnect with important relationships and community networks.

*For support and referral, contact **1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374)**, visit <https://www.compass.info/> or contact **OPAN Aged Care Advocacy Line (1800 700 600)** if the person is receiving government-funded aged care.*

8

What advocacy, support services, and pathways are available for older people experiencing or at risk of abuse?

OPAN Aged Care Advocacy Line (1800 700 600) provides free, independent and confidential advocacy for older people who receive or are seeking government-funded aged care services.

1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374) connects callers with specialist elder abuse services in their state or territory, offering information, support and referral.

Additional assistance may be available through legal services, health professionals, financial counsellors, counselling services and family violence services, depending on an individual's circumstances.

If there is an immediate risk to safety, call **000**.

	In NSW you can also contact the NSW Ageing and Disability Commission https://ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/ and in South Australia the Adult Safe Guarding Unit https://dhs.sa.gov.au/how-we-help/ageing-well/support-for-adult-safety-and-wellbeing/about-the-adult-safeguarding-unit. Pathways vary depending on your location. Contact 1800 ELDERHelp or visit https://www.compass.info/ to find the appropriate services in your area.
9	How can Australia strengthen safeguards and protections to better prevent and respond to elder abuse? Australia can strengthen protections by ensuring aged care and safeguarding reforms remain focused on the rights, choices and dignity of older people. Key priorities include improving supported decision-making, strengthening oversight of restrictive practices, expanding access to behaviour support and dementia supports, and improving safeguards around substitute decision-making. A greater focus on prevention, early intervention, in person-centred care, and implementation of the <i>National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026-2036</i>, will help protect older people from abuse while supporting their independence and autonomy.
10	How can emotional abuse, coercive control, and neglect be recognised and addressed when they are difficult to detect or prove? Warning signs may include fear, anxiety, withdrawal, loss of confidence, social isolation, controlling behaviour by another person, poor hygiene, malnutrition, missed medications or unmet care needs.

If concerns arise, speak with the older person privately, listen without judgement and document any signs or changes. Responses should be guided by the person's wishes, rights and safety needs.

Support may include advocacy, safety planning, health or legal advice, practical assistance, or referral to specialist elder abuse services.

Older people do not need to be certain they are experiencing abuse before seeking help.

*For advice and support, contact **1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374)**.*