

Older Victorians' preferences for elder abuse services

Problem Identification: The current elder abuse response system – which prioritises legal and family violence frameworks – may not be fit for purpose.

Elder abuse [affects around 15%](#) of older adults in the Australian community. It is a significant public health and human rights issue, linked to poor health outcomes, greater healthcare use, and premature death.

Context: In Australia, federal responses to elder abuse have been guided by the [2017 ALRC Inquiry](#). This has prioritised legal and advocacy services, with limited funding for therapeutic and social supports.

In Victoria, elder abuse is addressed primarily through family violence frameworks.

In response to the [Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence](#), an Integrated Model of Care was trialled in Victoria. However, these [trials ceased in 2023](#) with no commitment from the State Government to provide ongoing funding for comprehensive specialised services.

Limited federal investment in health and social responses, combined with the Victorian Government's decision to cease funding specialised models, has left older people reliant on generalist services that may not reflect the preferences of older people.

Research Overview: Better Place Australia surveyed 539 Victorians aged 65 years or more to understand what support services they would like to engage with if they experienced elder abuse.

Key Findings: 18-27% of participants were unlikely to seek support if mistreated by a

family member or carer, with men being less likely.

Older people highly value support from friends and family before seeking professional support. While other [research](#) supports involving social networks in elder abuse responses, government policy often overlooks this.

Many older people preferred professional services that focus on resolution and empowerment through advice, emotional support, and mediation.

Legal and police pathways were described as a means of ensuring personal safety when abuse is severe or persistent.

A range of barriers to accessing support services were identified, including fear of escalation, shame, not knowing who to contact, and fear of negative consequences for themselves or the person using violence.

Recommendations: Government policy must:

1. Recognise the role of families in providing support and advice to older people.
2. Recognise the role of social services alongside legal interventions, providing a balanced approach that harmonises legal responses and robust, well-funded social supports options.
3. Ensure funding structures are appropriate for equitable access to specialist elder abuse services.
4. Increase funding for elder mediation, case management, and specialised counselling to give older people supportive, non-adversarial options for resolving conflict.

Sample quotes from respondents:

'I would probably [ask] other members of my family for help, or my GP. I would also ask my best friend for advice.'

'You would hopefully receive support from an advocate group who could host some form of mediation.'

'Support through specialised services to provide help/advice over the phone or online.'

'Afraid of what the outcome will be. Scared no-one would believe them.'

'Some people would be ashamed that a family member would be abusing them.'

'I think they would feel scared that they may be getting a loved one in trouble with the law.'

'A mediator/counsellor who would help find a solution that would be satisfactory to all concerned.'

'Support in advice and tips for resolving the situation and maintain family relationships.'

'If an older person is already being pressured there could well be the fear that it could escalate into violence or cruelty towards them if they were to make a complaint to the authorities.'

'Elder abuse hotline needs to be advertised more. I had no idea of this before doing this survey and I tried to find information online but it never came up on google.'