

Empowering Older Victorians: A Tiered Response to Elder Abuse

Problem Identification: Elder abuse is a complex issue that requires timely and coordinated responses. Current systems in Victoria are fragmented and reactive.

Without coordinated frameworks, prevention measures fall short, safeguards can feel disproportionate, and legal pathways are often the only option – even when too extreme for older people.

Context: [Research](#) shows that older Victorians face complex and unique circumstances when experiencing abuse, especially within families. Many may hesitate to seek help due to shame, fear, or the desire to preserve relationships. Legal action can feel punitive and unsafe.

Policy responses recognise older people's right to autonomy and dignity of risk. But service systems often struggle to balance these rights with protective responses.

Discussion Paper Overview: The Centre for Better Relationships outlines two complimentary models to strengthen elder abuse policy:

The **Applied Ecological Bi-Focal Intergenerational Model** (Figure 1) identifies risk and protective factors across four levels, keeping both the older person and the person using harm in simultaneous focus. It helps government and services understand the drivers of abuse.

Better Place Australia's **Elder Abuse Tiered Response System Model** (Figure 2) describes how responses to elder abuse can be tailored across levels of complexity, escalating only when necessary. The model highlights that older people could access supports across several tiers simultaneously and how early intervention reduces both individual and systemic costs.

A tiered approach provides multiple pathways to safety. It coordinates services in a way that supports older people's rights.

Without a tiered framework, elder abuse responses default to crisis and legal pathways. The model promotes early, proportionate support that safeguards autonomy and directs older Victorians to the right help sooner.

A bi-focal lens is essential. Without it, outcomes for older Victorians cannot be fully effective or sustained.

Together these models create a more coordinated system that strengthens prevention and improve service intake and engagement.

Recommendations: Government policy must:

- 1. Systemic reform:** adopt a structured, multi-level framework to guide how justice and service systems understand and respond to elder abuse.
- 2. Relational approaches:** ensure policies and practice acknowledge the intergenerational and relational dynamics of abuse addressing the needs of both older Victorians and their families.
- 3. Early intervention:** invest in person-centred intervention approaches, providing accessible supports for older Victorians and families, reducing the need for legal escalation.
- 4. Research and evidence:** apply an ecological perspective addressing both individual vulnerabilities and systemic enablers of abuse, to inform policy, practice, and service delivery



Figure 1: Applied Ecological Bi-Focal Intergenerational Model adapted from Gillbard & Leggatt-Cook (2022)

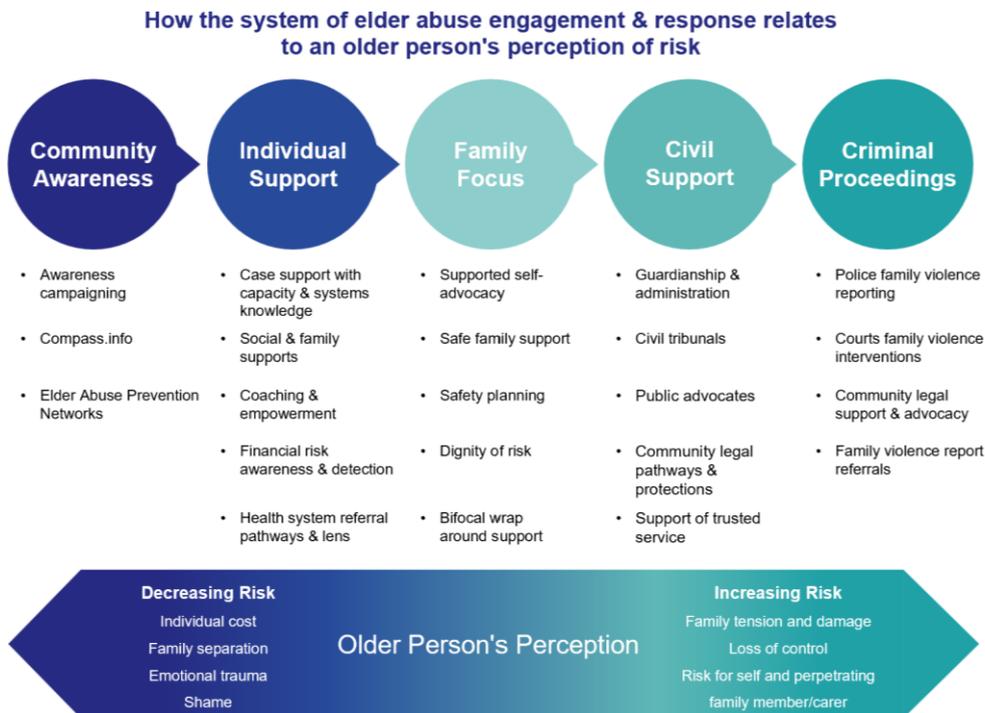


Figure 2: Better Place Australia's Elder Abuse Tiered Response System Model