

Building on strong foundations: Enhancing Victoria's response to elder abuse



Problem identification: The current elder abuse response system is complex and difficult to navigate. There is no single pathway for older people to access support. Instead, they may encounter multiple entry points across family violence, health, aged care, legal, financial, and community services. While this creates opportunities for intervention, it can also create confusion about where to seek help.

The system is also under growing pressure. Specialist resources are stretched, with limited capacity to respond beyond the most severe cases. As a result, older people experiencing non-crisis forms of abuse may face delays in accessing support or disengage before receiving help.

Context: An estimated 160,000 older Victorians experience elder abuse each year.

At the same time, Victoria's population is ageing. The proportion of people aged 65 and over is expected to increase from [17% in 2021 to 21% by 2066](#). As the number of older Victorians grows, more people will need support.

This growing demand is already reflected in service data with reports of elder abuse cases increasing across key entry points.

Discussion paper overview: This discussion paper examines Victoria's current elder abuse response system, including key entry points, referral pathways, common points of disengagement, and the pressures facing frontline services.

It identifies key system gaps, including fragmented pathways, geographic inequities, limited early intervention options, and service models that do not fully reflect the relational dynamics of elder abuse. The paper also explores how current family violence

frameworks can be strengthened to provide more effective support for older people.

Drawing on current evidence, practice experience, and insights, the paper outlines opportunities to strengthen Victoria's response system and improve outcomes for older people and their families.

Recommendations:

1. **Establish a "no wrong door" elder abuse triage system**, embedding specialist elder abuse expertise, secondary consultation, specialist brokerage access, and shared risk assessment at every primary entry point.
2. **Expand specialist service models statewide** to ensure consistent and equitable access to support, regardless of where an older person lives.
3. **Implement a comprehensive training and tools package** to build elder abuse expertise across sectors. This should include updates to risk assessment frameworks to capture elder abuse dynamics and cross-sector protocols for consistent identification and referral.
4. **Invest in early intervention** by integrating elder abuse support into Family Relationship Centres and other community-based services, providing mediation and family support for older people where safe and appropriate, alongside specialist elder abuse services.
5. **Implement timely support protocols**, including specialist consultation, assessment, referral, and proactive follow-up within 24 hours to maintain engagement and reduce service drop-off.
6. **Adopt family-inclusive interventions**, including bifocal approaches that supports older people and their families by addressing underlying issues of the person using harm alongside the older person's needs.

