

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day: funding commitment applauded

The Attorney-General's World Elder Abuse Awareness Day announcement, that the Coalition would invest \$15m to protect the rights of older Australians, is a commendable step in raising awareness and taking action on this often hidden issue.

The plan includes: developing a national elder abuse hotline, developing pilot training programmes for frontline staff, a study into the prevalence of elder abuse, and a national awareness campaign to educate and change attitudes and values towards older Australians.

The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) today also released an Issues Paper as part of its national inquiry into elder abuse – referred by the Attorney-General in February this year.

The problem of elder abuse is of increasing concern as the population continues to age at an unprecedented rate. In 2050, just over a fifth of the population is projected to be over 65 and those aged 85 and over are projected to represent about five per cent of the population.

Law Council of Australia President Stuart Clark AM said the Council will appoint an *Elder Abuse Inquiry Working Group* to respond to the ALRC's inquiry and consider ways in which laws and frameworks across Australia can be strengthened.

"We must explore every avenue available to safeguard older Australians from abuse," Mr Clark said.

"Unfortunately effective responses and prevention measures for elder abuse are far less developed than they are for family violence and child abuse.

"The Law Council is determined to make a strong contribution to the ALRC's important work. We want to scrutinise existing Commonwealth laws that seek to safeguard and protect older persons from misuse or abuse and analyse if they are fit for purpose.

"This includes laws around financial institutions, superannuation, social security, health, and care."

The Law Council echoes the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) finding that Australia's federal system of government means responses to elder abuse are complicated, because they are scattered through multiple frameworks across health and ageing portfolios at multiple government levels.

"The law should protect the rights of all Australians, regardless of the state or territory in which they reside," Mr Clark said.

"If elder abuse is happening at anywhere near the one in ten rate the World Health Organisation estimates, then we need to be taking urgent action at a national level."

Elder abuse is any act which causes harm to an older person and is unfortunately often carried out by someone the victim knows and trusts, such as a family member or friend.

While the AIFS found that financial abuse appears to be the most common form of abuse experienced by elderly people, elder abuse is multifaceted and may be physical, social, financial, psychological or sexual. It may also encompass mistreatment and neglect.

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