



# Rights. Respect. Trust.

Victorian Government Elder Abuse Prevention Strategy



## Working together to prevent elder abuse



Every Victorian has the right to live safely and to be treated with dignity and respect. However some senior Victorians are affected by elder abuse, and this is totally unacceptable.

The Victorian Government is acting to overcome elder abuse, working with families, service providers, professionals and the community.

The Government has provided funding of \$5.9 million to help safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of senior Victorians.

A key initiative was the establishment in April 2008 of Seniors Rights Victoria, which includes a telephone helpline, advocacy and support, legal services and community education.

Our approach is based on empowering senior Victorians – giving older people the information and support they need to work with professionals to make their own decisions.

And we are strengthening the ability of service providers to respond to instances of elder abuse and increasing community awareness and understanding of the issue.

Preventing elder abuse is a shared responsibility which we can achieve by working together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Neville', written in a cursive style.

**Hon Lisa Neville MP**

Minister for Senior Victorians

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### **What is elder abuse?**

Elder abuse is any act that harms older people and that is carried out by someone they know and should be able to trust, such as family or friends.

Such harm can be financial, physical, sexual, emotional or psychological, including mistreatment and neglect.

Elder abuse is an unacceptable but unfortunate reality in our ageing society. It is a complex social problem that requires careful and considered responses.

Research indicates that between 1 and 5 per cent of senior Victorians may be experiencing some form of harm or abuse.

### **Who is affected by elder abuse?**

Elder abuse affects the entire community because it occurs in all areas of society regardless of location, socioeconomic and health status, age, culture, gender, sexual identity, ethnicity or religion.

### **Who is most likely to experience abuse?**

Older women are two or three times more likely to experience abuse than older men.

### **Who is usually responsible for elder abuse?**

Elder abuse can occur in a range of relationships and environments but research has found that close relatives, often sons and daughters, are most likely to be responsible for the abuse.

### **Types of elder abuse**

One of the most common types of elder abuse is financial abuse. This is often accompanied by other forms of abuse.

Financial abuse is the illegal, improper use or mismanagement of a person's money, financial resources, property or other possessions.

Other forms of elder abuse include emotional/psychological abuse, which may involve actions and threats that cause fear and feelings of shame and powerlessness, and physical abuse.





## **Dignity, respect, independence and empowerment**

Older people have the right – as do people of all ages – to live safely in their own homes, and to be treated with dignity and respect.

The Victorian Government is committed to promoting and supporting the independence of senior Victorians. All adults, no matter what age, have the right to self-determination and to make their own decisions based on informed choice. That is why empowerment is the key to preventing elder abuse, and the basis of the Government's response.

### **What the Government is doing**

The Victorian Government produced the *Report of the Elder Abuse Prevention Strategy* in December 2005.

The Government has provided \$5.9 million over four years to tackle elder abuse in our community and implement the report's recommendations.

The recommendations aim to engage and empower senior Victorians by providing dedicated support, educational and legal services.

The implementation plan involves government departments, service providers and the community working together.

Government initiatives include:

- A financial literacy program designed to educate older people to improve their money management skills, become more confident in their ability to manage their finances, and more aware of the details of their finances, other assets and rights,
- An education and training package for professionals to strengthen the capacity of funded health and community service providers to identify and respond to elder abuse;
- Specialist legal and advocacy services to meet the complex needs of older people, including people of culturally and linguistically diverse and Indigenous backgrounds;
- Educating the community that abuse of older people is unacceptable.



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### Where can you get help?

The Government has established Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV). This free and confidential statewide telephone and advisory service aims to help prevent elder abuse and safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of senior Victorians.

Seniors Rights Victoria provides:

- a telephone helpline for information and referral,
- advocacy and support;
- legal advice;
- community and professional education.

The service works directly with older people who ring for advice and representation, and with professionals who manage the financial, medical and legal affairs of older people.

Older people suffering abuse may also be identified through family, friends or service providers.

Seniors Rights Victoria can be contacted on **1300 368 821** from 10am to 5pm Monday to Friday or visit the website at **[www.seniorsrights.org.au](http://www.seniorsrights.org.au)**.

*If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 000.*

### Who manages Seniors Rights Victoria?

Seniors Rights Victoria is funded by the Victorian Government through the Office of Senior Victorians and Victoria Legal Aid.

Seniors Rights Victoria is a partnership led by the Council on the Ageing with the Public Interest Law Clearing House, Eastern Community Legal Centre and Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre.

Seniors Rights Victoria operates from central Melbourne, as well as Melbourne's outer east and Bendigo. Pro bono clinics are being established to ensure a stronger regional presence across Victoria.

### Further information

For further information on action the Victorian Government is taking to prevent elder abuse, please visit **[www.seniors.vic.gov.au](http://www.seniors.vic.gov.au)**



# True stories

The following are true stories of elder abuse. They illustrate how abuse can occur, and how Seniors Rights Victoria can help.

## Beryl

Beryl, a 91-year-old stroke victim and nursing home resident, appointed her son, Barry, as her power of attorney – authorising him to pay her bills.

Relatives became suspicious when they found that Beryl’s bills were in arrears, and that withdrawals were being made from her account the day after her pension was paid.

It also emerged that Barry sold Beryl’s house and used the money to extend his own home on the pretext that she could live with him.

After the renovations were completed, Barry refused to let his mother move in, forcing her to stay in the nursing home, which caused her great distress.

## How Seniors Rights Victoria helped

Seniors Rights Victoria helped Beryl to appoint State Trustees as her attorney and place a caveat over Barry’s property, claiming a reasonable share.

SRV is also helping Beryl to recover her money so that she can access her preferred style of accommodation and care.



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### Rosalind

Rosalind was pressured by her son and daughter-in-law to loan them \$100,000 so they could buy a new house. This was on the understanding that Rosalind, 71, could live with them into her old age.

The relationship between Rosalind and her son and daughter-in-law broke down. They asked Rosalind to move out of the house immediately but she had no money to move.

### How Seniors Rights Victoria helped

Seniors Rights Victoria advised Rosalind that she had an equitable share in the house and that she should protect her share by placing a caveat on the title.

SRV then helped Rosalind negotiate an agreement for repayment of the loan. Her son and daughter-in-law agreed to pay a lump sum upfront to enable her to find rental accommodation and to make regular repayments. Rosalind was relieved to be able to make the agreement and move out.

### Doreen

Doreen, 75, lived in a small country town. After her only son moved back home, he experienced mental health problems and began drinking excessively.

He was physically and verbally abusive towards Doreen, who was terrified but also protective of her son.

### How Seniors Rights Victoria helped

Seniors Rights Victoria advised Doreen of her legal rights in relation to her son, and of alternative options such as aged care accommodation that could allow her to move without confronting him (which was what she wanted).

SRV also provided referrals to an aged care assessment team and offered advice to Doreen about her will and enduring power of attorney.



If you would like to receive this publication in an accessible format, such as large print or audio, please telephone the Office of Senior Victorians on (03) 9208 3873. This publication is also published in PDF and Word formats on [www.dpcd.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au)

Published by the Office of Senior Victorians  
Department of Planning and Community Development  
1 Spring Street

Melbourne Victoria 3000  
Telephone (03) 9208 3799

April 2009

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Designed by Utility Creative

3/340 Gore Street Fitzroy Victoria 3065  
Printed on 50% recycled paper

ISSN 978-1-921331-08-4