Integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse

Information for professionals working with older people and their carers or family
What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse is a form of family violence that affects older people. It is any act carried out by a trusted friend or family member that causes harm to an older person.

Abuse may be physical, psychological/emotional, social, financial, sexual or a result of neglect. All forms of abuse are unacceptable and can affect anyone, irrespective of background, gender, ethnicity or means.

Examples include:

- **Physical**: kicking, hitting, locking in a room, use of restraints
- **Psychological/emotional**: pressuring, intimidating, bullying, name-calling, degrading, humiliating
- **Social**: preventing contact with family and friends and involvement in social activities, restricting movement in the home
- **Financial**: misusing financial powers of attorney, preventing access to money
- **Sexual**: viewing obscene videos in the presence of an older person without their consent
- **Neglect**: failure to provide necessities such as adequate food, accommodation or medication.
Example

Maria is 82 and experiences significant anxiety and distress due to verbal and psychological abuse from her husband John who she has been estranged from for over 15 years.

John has keys to the house and visits as he pleases. He is verbally abusive and threatening during these visits, increasing her anxiety and exacerbating her cardiac condition, resulting in a number of admissions to hospital.

Maria has three sons who are aware of the situation but not involved or supportive.

Maria has attended an outpatient clinic appointment with a niece who encouraged her to talk to the doctor about the abuse.

She conceded the situation is having a serious impact on her health and wants someone to talk with about these issues.

Maria’s doctor contacted the Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Liaison Officer for advice. Her doctor was then able to discuss with her a range of legal, therapeutic and support options and pathways. Maria chose to receive counselling.
What is the integrated model of care?

There are five services trialling an integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse.

The trial sites include:

- Melbourne Health
- Latrobe Community Health Service
- Monash Health
- Peninsula Health
- Western Health.

The model includes:

- Training for staff from the health service and local community services about recognising and responding to elder abuse.
- An elder abuse prevention and response liaison officer who you can consult about issues related to elder abuse.
- Counselling and mediation services (including financial counselling) available for the older person and their carers/family members.
- A local prevention network that is organising community events to raise awareness of elder abuse.

For further information, contact the Department of Health and Human Services on email: elder.abuse@dhhs.vic.gov.au
Who can provide advice?

There is an Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Liaison Officer available at each trial site if you need advice or secondary consultation.

Other useful contacts

Seniors Rights Victoria  
1300 368 821  
For information, advocacy and free legal advice regarding elder abuse.

Office of the Public Advocate  
1300 309 337  
For advice on guardianship and administration and powers of attorney.

Carers Victoria  
1800 242 636  
Advice and support for carers

Dementia Australia  
1800 100 500

Safe Steps  
1800 015 188  
Family Violence Response Centre

Men’s Referral Service  
1300 766 491  
If you or someone you know is in an unsafe or life threatening situation, you should ring Victoria Police on 000.
Elder abuse is a form of family violence that affects older people.