



An elder abuse perspective on Strong Foundations: Building on Victoria's Work to End Family Violence | February 2024

Submission by Eastern Community Legal Centre, with endorsement and contributions from Peninsula Community Legal Centre and Justice Connect



Peninsula
Community
Legal Centre

Eastern Community Legal Centre acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which this submission was written, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

Summary of recommendations

A summary of Eastern Community Legal Centre's recommendations in respect of elder abuse in response to the *Strong Foundations – Building on Victoria's Work to End Family Violence* document, as endorsed by PCLC and Justice Connect, are below. Victoria should:

1. **Develop a dedicated elder abuse plan** which sits alongside the next National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (due to be released in 2024) and Victoria's 2024-2026 Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan (**RAP**). Any Victorian elder abuse plan should centre people with lived experience of elder abuse and should be co-designed with relevant stakeholders including representatives from diverse communities. In the alternative, Victoria should ensure the next RAP accurately reflects the major differences between elder abuse and other forms of family violence, and establishes evidence-based approaches to preventing, raising awareness of, educating around, and responding to elder abuse.

Priority 1: Drive down family and sexual violence

2. **Identify elder abuse as a specific form of family violence to drive down** and acknowledge the distinct characteristics of elder abuse when compared with other forms of family violence.
3. Conduct robust **academic and other research into the drivers of elder abuse** to ensure that elder abuse primary prevention practice is consistent, well-informed, and evidence-based, including funding a longitudinal study on attitudes towards ageing.
4. Provide **dedicated primary prevention funding** to community legal centres and other organisations and continue and increase funding for Elder Abuse Prevention Networks.
5. Improve data collection and research to **better capture the impact of elder abuse in culturally and linguistically diverse communities**.
6. Provide **dedicated funding to community legal centres for elder abuse specific community legal education** initiatives and the development of resources and information on elder abuse and related topics.
7. Ensure **any plan to change attitudes and behaviours that can lead to elder abuse is grounded in evidence and aimed at the whole community**, taking into account the known evidence that perpetrators of elder abuse are not primarily from one gender.

Priority 2: Focus on children and young people

8. **Engage children, young people, and people of all ages with free education**, early intervention initiatives, and resources that are relevant to the prevention of elder abuse.

Priority 3: Strengthen support for Victim Survivors

9. **Increase funding for specialist elder abuse legal services at community legal centres**, including integrated multidisciplinary legal programs and health justice partnerships, looking to existing successful programs for good practice models.

10. Increase **elder abuse financial counselling** support, both as part of the multidisciplinary legal teams at community legal centres and more broadly.
11. Design and implement supports and **services for older people who lack decision-making capacity** and who are at risk of or experiencing elder abuse.
12. Develop and implement guidelines, education, and resources on best practice approaches in **substitute and supported decision-making**.
13. Establish an **elder abuse safeguarding body** with powers to investigate cases of elder abuse including where the older person lacks decision-making capacity, or grant such investigatory powers to an existing agency.
14. Fund **programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim survivors** of elder abuse which are designed and led by First Nations leaders, Elders, First Nations community members, and Aboriginal Controlled Organisations.
15. Fund the development of **specific programs to support older people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities** who are at risk of or experiencing elder abuse.
16. Deliver **dedicated elder abuse training** across the family violence, human services, aged care, police and legal workforces.
17. Provide **specialist elder abuse mediation services** for older people experiencing or at risk of elder abuse.
18. Pilot and introduce **other additional specialist elder abuse services** including specialist casework, mental health and wellbeing support, and social connection supports, and restorative justice programs.
19. Provide ongoing funding for **dedicated elder abuse response initiatives between Victoria police and other organisations** including CLCs.

Priority 4: Respond to change

20. Specifically **acknowledge and target technology facilitated elder abuse**, including scams, as a form of elder abuse and (as a preventative measure) support older people with digital literacy.
21. **Ensure that paper-based, in-person, and telephone supports remain available** to support and inform older people at risk of and experiencing elder abuse (in addition to digital supports).

Priority 5: Understand and demonstrate our impact

22. **Carefully design evaluation frameworks for services responding to elder abuse**, and in designing any evaluations have regard to independent evaluations of the Commonwealth Elder Abuse Service Trials including the evaluation commissioned by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and the evaluation of Eastern Community Legal Centre's Elder Abuse Response Programs.
23. **Focus on capturing qualitative data**, including client stories, surveys, and direct accounts from people with lived experience of elder abuse.
24. Actively seek opportunities to listen and **learn from people with lived experience of elder abuse**, and centre lived experience expertise when designing elder abuse plans or initiatives.



Introduction and about ECLC, PCLC, and Justice Connect

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission with a specific focus on elder abuse, in response to the *Strong Foundations – Building on Victoria’s Work to End Family Violence* document (**Strong Foundations document**), with endorsement and contributions from Justice Connect and Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC).

Community legal centres (CLCs) play a critical role in preventing, raising awareness of, and responding to elder abuse and form an important component of the broader family violence and elder abuse service system.

ECLC is a multidisciplinary legal service that works to prevent problems, progress fair outcomes and support the wellbeing and resilience of communities and community members in Melbourne’s East. ECLC has over 15 years’ experience working in elder abuse prevention and response. ECLC has two Elder Abuse Response Programs which are funded by the Commonwealth Attorney General’s Department. A successful independent evaluation of the programs is available [here](#). ECLC also invests significantly in elder abuse primary prevention and early intervention initiatives. For example, for more than 15 years ECLC has led the Eastern Elder Abuse Network (EEAN) which has more than 60 member organisations and works to prevent, raise awareness of, and respond to elder abuse; and in 2021 ECLC developed the [Preventing Abuse of Older People: A Primary Prevention Framework](#) and [Guide](#).

Justice Connect designs and delivers high-impact interventions to increase access to legal support and progress social justice in the face of rising unmet legal need. [Justice Connect’s Seniors Law program](#) has over 15 years of experience in providing innovative, tailored legal services for older people facing elder abuse in Victoria and New South Wales. Justice Connect’s Health Justice Partnerships were the first and are the longest running in Australia to support older people and tackle elder abuse.

PCLC has been providing free legal services to Melbourne’s south eastern communities since 1977. In addition to its general legal services, the Centre operates specialist programs in family violence, family law, fines, and tenancy. PCLC also undertakes community legal education, community development and public advocacy activities. PCLC operates in a region which has the second largest population of older people in Victoria. The increasing demand for elder law services in the region led the Centre to launch a specialist legal clinic for older people in early 2021, which runs one day a month.

Overview

The Strong Foundations document will provide a foundation for Victoria’s next 2024-2026 Family Violence Reform Rolling Action Plan (**RAP**).

In its current form, the Strong Foundations document will not be effective at preventing or responding to elder abuse in Victoria. The Strong Foundations document does not centre older Victorians or reflect elder abuse. In fact, the 56 page document only references elder abuse once and only refers to older people 5 times in passing.

The Strong Foundations document does not recognise fundamental differences between elder abuse and other forms of family violence, or that people experiencing or at risk of elder abuse have different

needs to people at risk of or experiencing other forms of family violence. It does not acknowledge that research, evidence, and public awareness in terms of elder abuse are much less developed than in the context of family violence more broadly. Finally, it does not recognise that different approaches to primary prevention, early intervention, and response to elder abuse are required. Therefore, the premise of the Strong Foundations document as well as the proposed priorities and approaches are largely inapplicable in respect of elder abuse.

To ensure Victoria has an effective approach to preventing and responding to elder abuse, **Victoria should develop a separate dedicated elder abuse plan which incorporates the recommendations contained in this submission.** In the alternative, Victoria should conduct a significant review of the Strong Foundations document in light of recommendations made in this submission and other submissions received in relation to elder abuse, including those from Seniors Rights Victoria and the Federation of Community Legal Centres, to ensure that the next RAP meaningfully includes elder abuse as a priority area with specific actions to respond to the needs of older Victorians (**Recommendation 1**).

In this submission, some brief context about elder abuse is provided with a particular focus on drawing distinctions between elder abuse and other forms of family violence. Afterwards, responses are provided to each of the survey questions posed in respect of the Strong Foundations document.

Context – elder abuse

Older people make up an important part of the Victorian community. As explained by the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, ‘seniors make a valuable contribution to society and are workers, helpers, volunteers, parents, grandparents and carers in our community.’¹

Currently 22% of Victorians are older people (60+), noting this does not factor in the number of older First Nations people who are 50+. This is similar to the percentage of young Victorians (12-24 years old) who comprise 24% of Victorians.² Victoria’s population is ageing – by 2046, the number of older people is expected to increase by 60% to more than 2.3 million people.³

Elder abuse is very common. The first national Elder Abuse Prevalence Study in Australia, released in 2021, showed that 1 in 6 Australians experience elder abuse, however elder abuse is underreported, and the prevalence is likely much higher.⁴

Elder abuse is a form of family violence but there are significant differences in how elder abuse presents and how it needs to be understood, managed, prevented, and responded to. For example:

- Elder abuse is most commonly perpetrated by adult children against their parents, followed by intimate partners, partners of adult children, and (to a much lesser extent) grandchildren. Elder abuse is also perpetrated by neighbours, friends and carers.⁵

¹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, ‘Seniors’, available [here](#).

² Victorian Government, ‘Listening to Victoria’s Young People’, available [here](#).

³ Victorian Government, ‘Victoria’s Seniors’, available [here](#).

⁴ Australian Institute of Family Studies, ‘National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report’ (2021), p 170, available [here](#).

⁵ Australian Institute of Family Studies, ‘National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report’ (2021), p 3, available [here](#).

- The parent-child relationship dynamic that is commonly present in elder abuse raises unique and specific issues for victim survivors of elder abuse. For example, victim survivors often experience feelings of shame and responsibility when it comes to their child/ren, their child/ren may be their sole source of social connection or company, they may feel responsible for their child/ren's wellbeing (particularly if the child is experiencing personal challenges for example relating to mental health or substance use), and in addition, the older person may be dependent on their child/ren to meet their medical or care needs.
- Elder abuse is much less gendered than other forms of family violence – 45% of perpetrators of elder abuse are women, and only slightly more women experience elder abuse than men.⁶
- There is little research and evidence into the drivers of elder abuse, whereas there is a significant evidence base regarding drivers of family violence.⁷
- There has been significant investment into awareness-raising and education around family violence which has led to an increased public awareness but this is not the case with elder abuse and there is much lower public awareness. As described by the National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study, “elder abuse is a ‘hidden problem’... there is a need for awareness-raising measures.”⁸
- The Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (**MARAM**) was designed with intimate partner family violence in mind and is unfortunately usually not fit-for-purpose in the context of elder abuse.
- There are types of elder abuse that are less common than in other forms of family violence, such as institutional abuse in aged care, neglect, and grandparent alienation.
- The family violence service system in Victoria has expanded significantly since the Victorian Family Violence Royal Commission, but the system was not designed or tailored to respond to elder abuse. There is only a limited specialist elder abuse service system which does not meet the needs of older Victorians experiencing abuse.
- Victim survivors of elder abuse face different challenges than other victim survivors of family violence, including issues with ill-health, loneliness and social isolation, higher care needs and sometimes dependence on the perpetrator of abuse to have their needs met, and sometimes issues relating to cognitive decline and decision-making capacity. In addition, sometimes victim survivors of elder abuse are taking on a ‘carer’ role for adult children who are impacted by mental illness or addiction and who have unmet support needs.

⁶ Australian Institute of Family Studies, ‘National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report’ (2021), p 72, available [here](#).

⁷ Australian Institute of Family Studies, ‘National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report’ (2021), p 148, available [here](#).

⁸ Australian Institute of Family Studies, ‘National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report’ (2021), p 167, available [here](#).

- Importantly, in addition to the above factors, victim survivors of elder abuse often face an ‘impossible predicament’: where they need the elder abuse to stop; but simultaneously do not feel that the options available to them are tenable. As explained in the independent evaluation of ECLC’s Elder Abuse Response Programs:

‘Older people [faced] impossible predicaments where they felt they had no choice because the consequences of enacting the limited available options only compounded the difficulty of the situation.’⁹

One reason that elder abuse victim survivors are unable to take action (including legal action) against perpetrators of abuse, usually their adult children, are because they are worried about the impact on their children, for example, the chance that their child may face criminal implications or loss of employment. Another reason is that they are often fearful or concerned about retaliation from their children.

In summary, elder abuse victim survivors usually have different and distinct experiences from other victim survivors of family violence. They face different types of abuse, from different types of perpetrators, and they have different needs. Although elder abuse is a form of family violence, much of the evidence and many principles and approaches that apply in the broader family violence context do not apply, or need to be significantly adapted, in the elder abuse context.

Case study 1

Sophie was referred to Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) by the Orange Door after Victoria Police became involved with her and her daughter Maggie.

Maggie was emotionally, psychologically, and verbally abusive towards Sophie and the elder abuse had been ongoing for a long time. As part of her abusive behaviour, Maggie reported to Victoria Police that her mother Sophie was the perpetrator of family violence and stated that Sophie had dementia and was an alcoholic. Victoria Police took out a Family Violence Intervention Order (FVIO) protecting Maggie from Sophie, in a case of misidentification.

Sophie sought assistance from ECLC in respect of the FVIO. ECLC advocated to Victoria Police that the situation was one of misidentification and explained that Maggie’s purported ‘diagnosis’ of dementia was part of her use of violence against Sophie. Victoria Police ultimately agreed and withdrew from the proceeding.

During a client survey, Sophie was asked if there is anything she wants to tell the community or government about elder abuse. She said “many older people don’t talk about things and suffer silently. I only asked for help when the situation turned drastic”.

⁹ RMIT, La Trobe, and NARI, ‘Final Evaluation of Eastern Community Legal Centre’s Elder Abuse Response Programs’, p 38, available [here](#).

Responses to survey questions

Priority 1: Drive down family and sexual violence

General observations

Priority 1 under the Strong Foundations document specifically identifies family violence and sexual violence as areas to drive down and does not refer to elder abuse. This is deeply disappointing given the high prevalence of elder abuse in Australia and the limited investment in initiatives to drive down elder abuse to date.

Furthermore, it is disappointing that it is not acknowledged that there is a lack of evidence base regarding the drivers of elder abuse. Building a strong evidence-base regarding the drivers of elder abuse is critical as it is not possible to design effective primary prevention and early intervention activities without a strong evidence base.

Priority 1 does not acknowledge that Australians have much lower understanding and awareness of elder abuse when compared to other forms of family violence and does not recognise that dedicated public awareness initiatives relating to elder abuse are needed to increase awareness.

Priority 1 of the Strong Foundations document focuses on changing men's behaviour. This does not reflect the elder abuse context, given that many perpetrators of elder abuse are not men. The National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study found that 45% of perpetrators of elder abuse are women, and 55% were men.¹⁰

It is disappointing that in the context of Aboriginal-led prevention, Elders and older Aboriginal people are not mentioned under this priority. On a separate note, the suggestions in respect of education under Priority 1 do not specifically target elder abuse, for example, they do not include ageism and respect for older people.

Finally and on a positive note, it is pleasing to see acknowledgement under Priority 1 that it is important to tailor messages and activities for people of different ages, and that there is a commitment to addressing ageism as a form of discrimination.

What steps would you recommend the Victorian Government take to build a community wide approach to preventing family and sexual violence?

Priority 1 under the Strong Foundations document does not specifically address elder abuse and would not be effective at driving down elder abuse. It is proposed that a separate elder abuse plan with an analogous priority is developed which sits alongside Victoria's next RAP, which incorporates the recommendations contained in this submission. Alternatively significant amendments would be required to Priority 1 to effectively drive down elder abuse, and recommendations in this regard are below.

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Family Studies, 'National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report' (2021), p 73, available [here](#).

Elder abuse must be centred

Any Victorian plan to drive down family violence and elder abuse must address elder abuse as a specific form of abuse to be driven down, and in doing so, acknowledge the distinct characteristics of elder abuse when compared with other forms of family violence (**Recommendation 2**).

Primary prevention, research and evidence

There should be significant and dedicated investment in elder abuse primary prevention initiatives, to continue important work that has been undertaken in Victoria, including work done by CLCs and some Elder Abuse Prevention Networks and Primary Care Partnerships.

Influencing cultural change through primary prevention approaches is a long-term investment. It involves working across all spheres of society with mutually reinforcing messages and activities to address the drivers of elder abuse. This requires high level leadership, policy, and resourcing to influence and embed change at all levels where community work, live and play.¹¹

The Victorian Government has invested in some important primary prevention initiatives to date, including:

- Committing to developing a primary prevention framework to address the drivers of elder abuse, which will help to strengthen an evidence-based approach to primary prevention of elder abuse, bringing consistency of language and approach at a state level;
- Investing in Elder Abuse Prevention Networks (EAPNs) (comprised of organisations who engage in elder abuse primary prevention, early intervention, and response work, or who work directly with older community members) which have been central in helping to raise the profile and awareness of elder abuse and its drivers at both state and national levels and embedding place-based approaches to influence change; and
- Funding other primary prevention projects. For example, in 2018, ECLC and Swinburne University were funded by the Victorian Government's Office for Women for a prevention of elder abuse project funded under the 'Free from Violence' grant program. To reflect the nature of this primary prevention initiative, the project was named Older People: Equity, Respect & Ageing (**OPERA**). Current research suggests that ageism is a contributing factor to elder abuse. Building on this assumption, OPERA sought to contribute to the evidence base by further exploring and understanding the expressions, experiences and impacts of ageism in Melbourne's East. More information about the OPERA project is available here.

However, significant further investment is needed in research and other primary prevention initiatives to help to end elder abuse in Victoria, and any efforts to drive down elder abuse must be grounded in a solid evidence base including in relation to the drivers of elder abuse. It is critical that funding is invested into research into elder abuse.

¹¹ Respect Victoria 2022; Our Watch 2021.

Case study 2

In 2021, Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) launched the [Preventing Abuse of Older People Primary Prevention Framework](#) to guide local primary prevention action to address elder abuse.

This framework was grounded in evidence from the [Older People: Equity, Respect & Ageing \(OPERA\)](#) Project, a partnership project between ECLC and Swinburne University.

The framework presents three strengths-based ‘themes for action,’ together with goals set out across the individual, organisational, community and societal levels. The framework also identifies example activities together with populations and settings, to promote mutually reinforcing strategies and messages across the whole of community.

The framework provides an evidence-based guide for community service organisations, local government and other partners in Melbourne’s East to embed elder abuse prevention strategies into existing plans, policies and processes.

Recommendation 3: Conduct robust academic and other research into the drivers of elder abuse to ensure that elder abuse primary prevention practice is consistent, well-informed, and evidence-based, including funding a longitudinal study on attitudes towards ageing.

Recommendation 4: Provide dedicated primary prevention funding to CLCs and other organisations and continue and increase funding for Elder Abuse Prevention Networks.

Concerningly, there is a particular dearth of research and data in respect of elder abuse in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and there is currently no official data collection on elder abuse or family violence among people from CALD communities. This is a significant gap given that Australia is an increasingly ageing and multicultural society, with 1 in 3 people over 54 and 15.7% of Australians aged 65 and over being from a CALD community. Legal and justice data collection should be improved to better capture the cultural and linguistic diversity of users as well as their outcomes, particularly in the areas of family violence and elder abuse, and more research should be conducted to address gaps in evidence about older people in CALD communities (**Recommendation 5**).

Community legal education & resources

Free community legal education, resources and information on elder abuse and related topics, as delivered by CLCs, are essential and should be funded and expanded throughout Victoria.

Free education and information empowers Victorians to prepare themselves for a safe and healthy older age and safeguard against elder abuse. Many CLCs deliver free community education sessions on elder abuse and related topics (often without sufficient or dedicated funding), including future planning, wills and powers of attorney, scams, living with adult children, healthy ageing, rights in older age, and family agreements. For example, in 2023, ECLC delivered 65 education sessions on elder abuse, wills and powers of attorney, healthy ageing, and other related topics specifically designed for older Victorians.



Community education sessions such as these allow community members to learn and feel informed, understand their rights and legal options, take action to maintain choice and control over their lives, and know where to get help should elder abuse or other issues arise.

It is important to ensure that community education and resources are co-designed, available in community languages, are culturally appropriate and sensitive, and accessible for all community members including people from CALD communities and First Nations communities.

Older people from CALD communities may have lower awareness of elder abuse and related legal issues, which can be compounded by the very few culturally appropriate resources or online information that are available in community languages. In particular, people from CALD communities are likely to have a lower uptake of future planning, including enduring powers of attorney and advance care directives, which can act as a safeguarding mechanism against elder abuse.¹²

Recommendation 6: Provide additional and dedicated funding to CLCs for elder abuse specific community legal education initiatives and the development of resources and information on elder abuse and related topics.

Case study 3

Justice Connect developed ‘[Conversation Guides](#)’ to help support community members engage in future planning. Prior to developing the guides, Justice Connect had identified that community members wanted to have more conversations about future planning and these conversations were an important precursor to putting future planning documents in place, including enduring powers of attorney (EPOAs). Future planning and EPOAs can act to safeguard people against elder abuse.

Throughout 2023 Justice Connect facilitated a range of workshops using the Conversation Guides. Justice Connect worked directly with 700+ older Victorians, and frontline organisations, via 29 facilitated workshops and 4 ‘train-the-trainer’ sessions.

93% of attendees reported being more likely to plan for their future following the session, and 95% of workers reported having a better understanding of how to have conversations with clients about future planning.

There is growing demand for Conversation Guides workshops, demonstrating a key gap in the future planning process, namely the opportunity for older people to connect with peers and reflect on what is important to them as they age before being ready to execute formal legal documents.

¹² Justice Connect, ‘What’s Stopping Us? Why people don’t plan for a safe older age: a literature review’, page 9, available [here](#).

Case study 4

A Community Lawyer from Eastern Community Legal Centre delivered a community legal education session which covered multiple topics relevant to elder abuse, including planning for the future, substitute decision making documents, and family agreements. Thomas was one of the community members who attended.

During the session, Thomas shared that he was unwell and had very specific wishes about the end of his life, but he hadn't shared his wishes with his loved ones or done any paperwork. He asked questions about Appointment of Medical Treatment Decision Maker documents and Advance Care Directives. The Community Lawyer answered Thomas' questions, provided him with a resource with more information, and encouraged Thomas to seek legal advice and speak with his GP.

A few months later, Thomas approached the Community Lawyer at another event and told him that he had made his substitute decision making documents and felt much better knowing that he had his affairs in order.

Case study 5

Maria is an 84 year old widow. Maria's bank contacted her social worker because they were concerned about possible abuse of an enduring power of attorney (EPOA). The social worker made an appointment for Maria with a lawyer from Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC).

Maria had been living in a residential aged care facility since the death of her husband. Maria said that her son had suggested that she complete an EPOA so that he could assist her with financial matters after her husband died. Maria had no knowledge about EPOAs and her son had facilitated finalising the EPOA due to her limited proficiency in English.

Maria said that she did not know what her son had been doing in relation to her finances as he did not discuss them with her. She was worried about him because he had been behaving strangely of late. Maria was also worried about whether she had made the right decision to appoint her son. She feared he might take all her money and she would have nothing to leave to her daughter.

Maria thought that once the EPOA had been signed it could not be changed. PCLC's lawyer advised Maria about EPOAs and how they could easily be changed. Maria decided to revoke the power of attorney with PCLC's assistance.

Maria's story demonstrates the importance of access to information about future planning, as well as the value of elder abuse expertise at community legal centres.

Case study 6

Justice Connect has a health justice partnership with cohealth, a community health organisation.

A community member, Kim, attended a local community event. While she was there, she approached cohealth's outreach worker and mentioned that she had given some money to her son so he could start his business and she had mortgaged her property to do this.

The cohealth worker, having attended one of the education sessions delivered by a Justice Connect Seniors Law community lawyer, recognised the client would benefit from some legal advice and (with Kim's consent) made a referral to Justice Connect.

Justice Connect's lawyer met with Kim and arranged for one of their pro bono member firms to advise her on the legal risks and drafted documents to reduce them.

What steps would you recommend the Victorian government take to engage men and boys to change attitudes and behaviours that can lead to violence?

Any plan to change attitudes and behaviours that can lead to elder abuse should be grounded in data and evidence.

It is important to note that there is currently little baseline data or evidence about people's attitudes towards ageing and older people. A longitudinal study on attitudes towards ageing in Australia (similar to the National Community Attitudes Towards Violence against Women Survey [NCAS]), or a more localised study in Victoria, would provide important data to inform the development of targeted programs to shift harmful attitudes and behaviours among other things.

The evidence that is available indicates that 45% of perpetrators of elder abuse are women, and 55% are men.¹³ Therefore, it is not sufficient to focus on men and boys' attitudes and behaviours when seeking to drive down elder abuse, given that many perpetrators of elder abuse are not men.

Recommendation 7: Ensure any plan to change attitudes and behaviours that can lead to elder abuse is grounded in evidence and aimed at the whole community, taking into account the known evidence that perpetrators of elder abuse are not primarily from one gender.

¹³ Australian Institute of Family Studies, 'National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report' (2021), p 73, available [here](#).

Priority 2: Focus on children and young people

Priority 2 under the Strong Foundations document does not address elder abuse and is on the most part not relevant in the context of elder abuse.

What steps would you recommend the Victorian Government take to engage children and young people to create generational change?

The Victorian Government should engage children, young people, and people of all ages and provide free education, early intervention initiatives, and resources that are relevant to the prevention of elder abuse (**Recommendation 8**). Topics should include:

- respectful intergenerational relationships;
- ageism;
- grandparent alienation; and
- intergenerational relationships within family structures.

Priority 3: Strengthen support for victim survivors

Priority 3 under the Strong Foundations document is not tailored to the elder abuse context and would require significant changes in order to effectively outline support for victim survivors of elder abuse. It is proposed that a separate elder abuse plan with an analogous priority is developed. In the alternative, significant changes should be made to ensure Victoria's next RAP effectively strengthens support for victim survivors of elder abuse.

The premise of Priority 3 is that there is an extensive Victorian workforce available to support victim survivors, and that the next step should be 'to deepen our understanding of how this system is working as a whole...[and] find out more about the experience of victim survivors as they journey through it.' Although there is now a dedicated Victorian workforce available to victim survivors of other forms of family violence, unfortunately it is not the case for victim survivors of elder abuse.

The family violence service system in Victoria was not designed specifically to respond to elder abuse or support people experiencing elder abuse. Although some valuable support is provided to victim survivors of elder abuse through the family violence system, including through The Orange Doors and family violence services, it is inadequate. In addition support needs will only increase as Victoria's ageing population, and awareness of elder abuse, increases over time.

There are limited specialist elder abuse services in Victoria and those that exist are geographically limited and unable to meet current demand. For example, ECLC's (Commonwealth-funded) specialist elder abuse response programs support older Victorians at risk of or experiencing elder abuse, but only operate in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. In 2023, the programs had an average waitlist of 3-6 weeks. PCLC, despite operating in a region with the second largest older population in Victoria, only has resources to conduct a specialist elder law clinic once monthly, which also has an extensive waitlist. Other specialist multidisciplinary services, including the state-wide elder abuse service Seniors Rights Victoria, also have extensive waitlists.

Many Victorians currently experiencing elder abuse have no specialist services to go to. This is particularly dire for older Victorians who are experiencing cognitive decline or who do not have decision-making capacity, who have even fewer available options.

It must be recognised that elder abuse victim survivors often have different needs when it comes to response and support when compared to other family violence victim survivors, as demonstrated by the below case studies. Significant additional specialist and dedicated elder abuse supports, and improved response to older people and elder abuse by the Orange Doors and other services, are required to ensure older Victorians are adequately supported.

Case study 7

Trudy was referred to Eastern Community Legal Centre's (ECLC) multidisciplinary Elder Abuse Response Programs by Seniors Rights Victoria.

Trudy's daughter Trish had lived with her on and off throughout her adult life. Trish had convinced Trudy to let her move in temporarily but three years later was still living with her. Trish was psychologically abusive to Trudy, was offensive and derogatory, intimidated her and was controlling. Trudy had asked Trish to move out on multiple occasions but Trish never complied.

Trudy was hesitant about taking legal action as she wanted to maintain her relationship with her daughter. ECLC's Community Lawyer needed to think creatively about how Trudy could address Trish's behaviour, as well as work with the ECLC Advocate to ensure Trudy's safety.

Rather than pursuing options involving Victoria Police or a Family Violence Intervention Order, Trudy instructed ECLC to write to her daughter requesting her to leave the home, and the Advocate assisted in this process to help keep Trudy as safe as possible. As is often the case with victim survivors of elder abuse, Trudy wanted to maintain the relationship with her daughter and did not want to pursue drastic legal interventions.

In the client feedback survey, Trudy reported that the "holistic view was very useful/insightful and added another level of support" and that she was "very pleased and happy" with the outcome. Trudy also shared that she still had a relationship with Trish and they had recently shared a family celebration.

Case study 8

Mei was referred to ECLC's Elder Abuse Health Justice Partnership, ELSA, by a social worker at Eastern Health.

Mei had moved from Hong Kong to Australia to live with her son, who had promised to take care of her. She had sold her house and given the proceeds of sale to her son to contribute to a granny flat at the back of his house for her to live in.

Mei's health declined. She lost a lot of her independence and she was largely immobile and unable to transport herself. The relationship between Mei and her son broke down and he started being verbally and psychologically abusive towards her. However, she was reliant on him for grocery shopping and medication. Mei did not have any friends or community in Melbourne and did not speak English.

The ELSA Community Lawyer and Advocate offered to support Mei to try and recoup her money from her son, or to find alternative accommodation and other supports. However Mei felt it was too risky to sever ties with her son and she remained in the granny flat. ELSA was able to provide some limited support at meeting organised through the HJP with Eastern Health (that her son didn't know about), including by linking her in with other services.

What steps would you recommend the Victorian Government take to provide all Victorians who experience family or sexual violence with the support they need when they need it?

Any Victorian plan to strengthen support for victim survivors of elder abuse should be developed in extensive consultation with people with expertise in elder abuse prevention and response; people with lived experience of elder abuse; and older Victorians, including from diverse communities; and should include the following components.

Specialist multidisciplinary legal services including health justice partnerships

Funding for specialist elder abuse services at CLCs should be increased, including integrated multidisciplinary legal programs and health justice partnerships, looking to existing successful programs for good practice models (**Recommendation 9**).

CLCs have strong links to the local community (including diverse communities) and regularly work in partnership with other community organisations. As a result CLCs provide a trusted place-based service for people experiencing or at risk of elder abuse. It is therefore critical that more CLCs are properly resourced to provide specialist legal services for older people, including tailored support for people from CALD communities, LGBTIQ+ communities, and First Nations communities.



There are currently too few specialist elder abuse services at CLCs and inadequate elder abuse expertise in CLCs and among the legal profession more broadly. Elder abuse issues require suitably expert lawyers and other community service professionals to provide appropriate specialist support to clients.

Despite being small in number, there are some very successful specialist elder abuse services being delivered by Victorian CLCs. For example, ECLC has two elder abuse response multidisciplinary legal programs; Justice Connect and ECLC deliver elder abuse health justice partnerships; and PCLC offers monthly elder abuse clinics. There is strong evidence that specialist elder abuse services being delivered by CLCs in Victoria are successful:

- In 2021, an independent evaluation commissioned by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department into the Commonwealth funded Elder Abuse Service Trials (which includes ECLC's Elder Abuse Response Programs) found that specialist, integrated elder abuse legal services are more effective at responding to elder abuse than mainstream services, which are not designed or resourced to provide combined legal and social supports, 14 and that they are cost-effective, as every \$1 spent on program costs leverages \$3.69 of value to the community;¹⁴ and •
- In 2022, an independent evaluation of ECLC's Elder Abuse Response Programs found that: '*...the evaluation findings clearly support the adaptation of ELSA and ROSE models to other geographical locations and their continuation and expansion...*'¹⁵

Case study 9

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) has two specialist Elder Abuse Response Programs, ROSE and ELSA, which are funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.

ELSA is a health justice partnership with Eastern Health, and ROSE is a specialist elder abuse unit that works in partnership with an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, Oonah, as well as a range of other partner organisations. Both programs are comprised of community lawyers, advocates (usually social workers), financial counsellors, and others.

An independent evaluation found that '...both programs have achieved their goals to the highest level possible... The evaluation findings clearly support the adaptation of [the] models to other geographical locations and their continuation and expansion...*'¹*

Unfortunately the programs are unable to meet demand, and have an average waitlist of 3-6 weeks.

¹⁴ Inside Policy, 'Final Evaluation of the Elder Abuse Service Trials, Final Report', pp 5 and 9, available [here](#).

¹⁵ RMIT, La Trobe, and NARI, 'Final Evaluation of Eastern Community Legal Centre's Elder Abuse Response Programs', p 7, available [here](#).

Case study 10

Justice Connect’s Seniors Law has over 15 years’ experience in designing and delivering integrated, specialised legal services for older Victorians’ facing abuse. In Victoria, Justice Connect’s Seniors Law program delivers three targeted health justice partnerships (HJPs) to prevent and address elder abuse: with cohealth, a community-based health service, and with two hospitals, St Vincent’s Hospital Melbourne and Caulfield Hospital. Through each HJP, Justice Connect provides intensive, tailored legal services to older people, along with delivering customised training & resources to frontline health workers about legal need.

A key benefit of Justice Connect’s HJP models is that they allow earlier intervention in clients’ ‘life problems’ before they escalate into complex legal disputes, facilitating significant cost-savings to government and the wider community. This is supported by an [evaluation](#) of Justice Connect’s Seniors Law program led by La Trobe University, which found that Justice Connect’s HJP model facilitates greater opportunities for preventative intervention, avoiding the escalation of issues into more complex and costly legal matters.

Case study 11

In early 2021, due to increasing demand, Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) introduced a specialised elder law service which runs one day a month from its Rosebud office. The service is staffed by one of PCLC’s family violence lawyers with expertise in elder abuse and a volunteer partner from a private law firm with expertise in elder law matters. Demand for this service far exceeds the number of appointments we are able to offer.

Dedicated elder abuse financial counselling support

Dedicated elder abuse financial counselling support, as part of integrated, multidisciplinary legal programs at CLCs and elsewhere, should be expanded and introduced across Victoria for people experiencing or at risk of financial elder abuse (**Recommendation 10**).

Dedicated elder abuse financial counsellors working in an integrated, multidisciplinary program at a CLC are even more effective at achieving outcomes for elder abuse clients than generalist or family violence financial counsellors. ECLC’s Elder Abuse Response Programs have dedicated elder abuse financial counsellors which have achieved life changing outcomes for clients. The independent evaluation into ECLC’s programs found that:

“Many evaluation participants – ECLC staff, external stakeholders and clients – noted the way that the financial counsellor could achieve outcomes that were unexpected...In some cases, clients had been laden with debts for years, which the financial counsellor was able to have waived...These outcomes were particular to the financial counsellor role and not achievable by other professionals, highlighting again the impact of the integrated practice model...”¹⁶

Case study 12

Grace was referred to ECLC’s Elder Abuse Response Programs by her supportive son who was looking for ways to support his mother. Grace experienced elder abuse from her daughter Tina. Tina had lived with Grace since birth and never contributed financially. Tina accessed Grace’s money without her authorisation directly from her bank account, accrued 80 fines amounting to approximately \$26,000 in Grace’s car and intercepted her mail so she would not know about her bills being unpaid. ECLC’s financial counsellor applied to Fines Victoria to have the fines revoked on the basis of elder abuse and was successful. The Financial Counsellor was also able to secure a goodwill payment of over \$5,000 from the bank in recognition of the funds stolen by Tina.

Dedicated supports for people who lack decision-making capacity including those with dementia

Older Victorians who lack decision-making capacity face increased risks when it comes to elder abuse and have fewer options of services who can support them. For example, legal services and CLCs cannot assist clients who lack decision-making capacity. In addition, other services, including Victoria Police, can struggle to investigate cases of elder abuse or take action when an older person lacks decision-making capacity. As a consequence, many older Victorians who do not have decision-making capacity are continuing to be abused and have very few options for support.

There should be specific supports and interventions designed for people who lack decision-making capacity and who are at risk of or experiencing elder abuse. Part of this should involve ensuring best practice when it comes to implementing supported decision-making and substitute decision-making.

Another important avenue is having an agency or body with powers to investigate suspected or actual cases of elder abuse, including where the victim survivor of elder abuse lacks decision-making capacity. There is currently no agency or organisation with investigation powers other than police in Victoria, who often are not equipped or able to investigate cases of elder abuse particularly where the older person lacks decision-making capacity. This is a significant system gap. It is proposed that a safeguarding body with powers to investigate suspected cases of elder abuse should be established and modelled on interstate counterparts, including the Ageing and Disability Commission in New South Wales.

¹⁶ RMIT, La Trobe, and NARI, ‘Final Evaluation of Eastern Community Legal Centre’s Elder Abuse Response Programs’, p 18, available [here](#).

Case study 13

Margaret was referred to Eastern Community Legal Centre's (ECLC) Elder Abuse Response Programs by her friend. Margaret's son is her attorney under a financial enduring power of attorney (EPOA).

Margaret tells ECLC that her son has been emotionally and verbally abusive towards her and has stolen from her for years. He recently sold her house without her permission and moved Margaret into a residential aged care facility on the other side of the city away from her friends.

Margaret is very unhappy in the aged care facility and has no access to any money. She gives ECLC a bundle of documents which includes bank statements which show large withdrawals that Margaret suspects her son has made.

ECLC meets with Margaret again but she is confused and does not remember the previous appointment. After speaking with her a few times, ECLC assesses Margaret does not have decision-making capacity and tells Margaret that unfortunately they cannot assist her.

Margaret tells ECLC she is deeply distressed and just wants her son's hands off her money. She asks who can help her stop him. Because ECLC has assessed Margaret does not have decision-making capacity, ECLC cannot provide Margaret with any legal advice and can only offer limited referrals.

There is no other organisation or agency that ECLC can refer Margaret to that has powers to investigate. The Elder Abuse Advocate arranges some referrals for social and emotional supports for Margaret. Margaret's son continues to steal money from her account.

Recommendation 11: Design and implement supports and services for older people who lack decision-making capacity and who are at risk of or experiencing elder abuse.

Recommendation 12: Develop and implement guidelines, education, and resources on best practice approaches to substitute and supported decision-making.

Recommendation 12: Establish an elder abuse safeguarding body with powers to investigate cases of elder abuse including where the older person lacks decision-making capacity, or grant investigation powers to an existing agency.

Dedicated supports for First Nations people

There should be specific programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim survivors of elder abuse which are designed and led by First Nations leaders, Elders, First Nations community members, and Aboriginal Controlled Organisations ([Recommendation 14](#)).

Case study 14

Led by Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP) in partnership with Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC), 'Safe Strong Elders' is a community-led, co-designed, elder abuse prevention project informed directly by the voices of local Elders.

Safe Strong Elders seeks to raise awareness of elder abuse, improve wellbeing and increase service accessibility for First Nations Elders. The Elder-led Steering Committee explored the problem of elder abuse and built a deeper understanding of what it looks like within their community.

With support from MMIGP & ECLC, a series of culturally safe and inclusive community workshops were developed highlighting elder abuse and its drivers; promoting community conversations about the problem; and developing a call for action to prevent elder abuse from occurring.

Dedicated supports culturally and linguistically diverse communities

Older people from CALD communities can face additional complexities when it comes to elder abuse, for example they may:

- face additional barriers when accessing support from mainstream health and welfare services, including language barriers or lack of familiarity with service systems (particularly for newly arrived migrants);
- experience unique forms of elder abuse, including threats of deportation or other threats relating to family or other visas; and
- be more dependent on family members for translation and information, including assistance with their finances and paying bills, which may increase the risk of some forms of elder abuse, including financial abuse.

Any intervention to address elder abuse needs to take into account the importance to the older person of emotional connections with family, community and culture, and specific programs to support older people from CALD communities who are at risk of or experiencing elder abuse should be designed and funded ([Recommendation 15](#)).

Case study 15

Giuliano is an 84 year old widower who migrated to Australia in the 1950s who sought assistance from Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC).

Giuliano's 64 year old daughter, Isabella, had been living in a unit in his back yard for 9 years. Giuliano and his wife had initially agreed to this arrangement because they were worried about their daughter's drug use and mental health and wanted her to have somewhere safe to live.

Since the death of his wife, Giuliano felt that his daughter was increasingly taking advantage of him. She had recently forged his signature so that she could receive a carer's pension even though she was doing nothing to care for him. She often called him old and crazy and threatened to put him in a nursing home and move into his house. She stole money, used his car without permission, and contacted his bank in a failed attempt to apply for an extension to his mortgage. Giuliano wanted to sell his house to purchase a smaller more manageable property but could not do so because his daughter wouldn't leave.

PCLC advised Mr. G that his daughter's behaviour amounted to elder abuse and gave him some legal options including applying for a Family Violence Intervention Order to exclude her from his property. The legal options did not appeal to Giuliano. as he still loved his daughter and did not want to do anything that might involve the police or leave her homeless, and he was fearful she might retaliate. Ultimately PCLC assisted Mr. G to successfully negotiate with his daughter to leave, without resorting to a technical legal solution.

Giuliano's case demonstrates the gap in appropriate legal options for those experiencing elder abuse. Other options need to be developed, such as specialist elder abuse family mediation service, which may support parties to arrive at solutions in a controlled, safe and legally supported environment.

Community education & resources

Community education delivered by CLCs, and resources and information, are critical to support older people who are at risk of or experiencing abuse. All community education and resources should be co-designed, culturally sensitive and appropriate, accessible, and available in community languages. For more detail, see above under Priority 1: Recommendation 6.

Workplace training and capacity building

Significant and dedicated training for the family violence, human services, aged care, legal, and police workforces regarding elder abuse should be implemented continuously (**Recommendation 16**).

CLCs regularly provide education and training sessions to professionals to contribute to capacity building. For example, ECLC regularly provides free education sessions to professionals about elder abuse and related matters, and in doing so helps build capacity within the workforce to identify and respond to suspected cases of elder abuse. In ECLC's experience, it is important that education sessions are rolled out regularly to ensure any new staff members have received the training and feel equipped to respond should they come across elder abuse.

Case study 16

In 2023, ECLC and Victoria Police held a family violence and elder abuse forum attended by around 60 staff members. Both Victoria Police and ECLC discussed case studies relating to elder abuse. Feedback received was that the session was invaluable in upskilling staff around their understanding of elder abuse and the options available to respond to elder abuse. Following the success of the 2023 forum, ECLC has been invited to present on elder abuse again at a Statewide Victoria Police Elder Abuse Forum in 2024.

Specialist elder abuse mediation services

Specialist elder abuse mediation services for older people experiencing or at risk of elder abuse should be introduced throughout Victoria ([Recommendation 17](#)).

Additional programs and pilot programs

Additional specialist elder abuse services including specialist casework, mental health and wellbeing support, and social connection supports, are needed, and additional elder abuse programs should be piloted and evaluated, such as restorative justice programs ([Recommendation 18](#)).

Partnerships and initiatives with police

Elder abuse focused initiatives between Victoria police and other organisations including CLCs can be an effective way to support capacity building among front-line services, better collaboration across the service-system, and ultimately better support for victim survivors of elder abuse ([Recommendation 19](#)).

One example of such a project was the Victoria Police Financial Elder Abuse Pilot which was initiated in response to a recommendation under the Victorian Family Violence Royal Commission and was completed in 2022. ECLC, PCLC and a range of other agencies partnered with Victoria Police in the pilot, which had a key aim of providing a co-ordinated and collaborative response to cases of financial elder abuse.

What steps would you recommend the Victorian government take to continue to shift the focus onto people who use violence?

This section of the Strong Foundations document mentions holding perpetrators accountable. Not much work has been done in this area in the context of elder abuse and although important, it is submitted that a more pressing priority is to develop a system that adequately supports older people experiencing or at risk of elder abuse.

Priority 4: Respond to change

What steps would you recommend the Victorian Government take to respond to cultural, social, and technological shifts that impact family and sexual violence?

Older people in Victoria face increasing and unique risks of elder abuse facilitated through technology. These risks can be more pronounced when people have lower levels of digital literacy, which includes some older Victorians. For example, older people increasingly face risks of elder abuse through online means, including:

- financial elder abuse through online banking or credit cards applied for online;
- financial abuse through other online services such as MyGov, for example redirection of the Age Pension; and
- Scams perpetrated through email, text messages or other text-based messaging sites, or social media sites (including romance or family scams).

It is critical that any Victorian plan to respond to elder abuse specifically targets technology facilitated abuse and (as a preventative measure) supporting older people with digital literacy. On the corollary, any plans to target or drive down technology-facilitated abuse, including scams, should centre older people ([Recommendation 20](#)).

What steps would you recommend the Victorian government take to embrace technology in how we prevent and respond to family violence?

Technological supports and interventions should be embraced for older people experiencing or at risk of elder abuse, however, it is important to note that many older Victorians require or prefer in-person, paper-based, and telephone support.

ECLC's experience is that many older Victorians prefer face-to-face or paper-based support offered through community hubs that they regularly attend such as libraries, seniors groups, residential aged care, or leisure facilities ([Recommendation 21](#)).

Priority 5: Understand and demonstrate our impact

What steps would you recommend the Victorian Government take to strengthen how we measure impact?

Measuring impact, and determining what constitutes a 'successful outcome', is a complex matter in the context of elder abuse. It is not as simple as determining whether an older person is 'satisfied' or if their elder abuse matter is 'resolved', for example. As explained by the independent evaluation into ECLC's Elder Abuse Response Programs:

*'...abuse and other related issues are routinely not resolved, but not because older people 'choose' to continue to be abused... Older people are rarely 'satisfied' when they have had to take legal action against their own children.'*¹⁷

Despite this complexity, it is critical that the impact of specialist elder abuse services, and other services responding to elder abuse, is measured – particularly given the very limited evidence and data in this context in Australia.

Victoria should carefully design evaluation frameworks in light of lessons learned and articulated in the independent evaluations of the Commonwealth Elder Abuse Service Trials and ECLC's Elder Abuse Response Programs, both of which recommended that future evaluation tools should be revised to reflect the complex nature of the context in which the services are operating and to assess service performance based on providing access to options and building capacity to make informed decisions¹⁸ **(Recommendation 22)**.

In addition, evaluations and the impact measured should be focused on qualitative data to capture the nuance and complexity of elder abuse response work, including client stories, surveys, and direct accounts from people with lived experience of elder abuse who have used the services **(Recommendation 23)**.

What steps would you recommend the Victorian government take to increase opportunities for Victorians to help us improve the system?

The Victorian Government should look for opportunities to listen and learn from people who have lived experience of elder abuse, and centre lived experience expertise when designing any future plans to prevent, raise awareness of, and respond to elder abuse **(Recommendation 24)**.

Case study 17

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) has actively sought to increase engagement with people with lived experience of elder abuse in developing strategies and designing or finessing approaches to elder abuse prevention and response initiatives. The independent evaluation into Eastern Community Legal Centre's (ECLC's) Elder Abuse Response Programs was greatly enriched by the contributions of two Lived Experience Advocates. Since their work on the evaluation, ECLC invited the Lived Experience Advocates to join ECLC's Elder Abuse Strategic Advisory Group, and they have consistently made important and insightful contributions which have actively improved ECLC's elder abuse work.

¹⁷ RMIT, La Trobe, and NARI, 'Final Evaluation of Eastern Community Legal Centre's Elder Abuse Response Programs', pp 15-16, available [here](#).

¹⁸ RMIT, La Trobe, and NARI, 'Final Evaluation of Eastern Community Legal Centre's Elder Abuse Response Programs', pp 16, available [here](#).



Contact details

This submission was written by Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC), with endorsement and contributions from Peninsula Community Legal Centre (PCLC) and Justice Connect.

ECLC, Justice Connect, and PCLC welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the issues raised in the body of this submission. For any queries at first instance, please do not hesitate to contact:

- Belinda Lo, Director – Legal Services, Eastern Community Legal Centre, belindal@eclc.org.au
- Claire Thurstans, Managing Lawyer – Elder Abuse, Eastern Community Legal Centre, 0428 072 187, clairet@eclc.org.au.