



**Southern Melbourne**  
Primary Care Partnership



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Primary Care  
Partnership

Elder Abuse  
Prevention Network

Public submission

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Submission to  
Royal  
Commission  
into Aged  
Care Quality  
and Safety

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**SMPCP EAPN Submission to Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety**

*For and on behalf of the Southern Melbourne Primary Care Partnership Elder Abuse  
Prevention Network:*

*Jeni Lee, Access Legal Advocacy  
Phil Williamson, Community Representative  
Kit McMahon, Women's Health in the South East (SMPCP EAPN Chair)*

*P: (03) 9794 8677  
E: [kMcMahon@whise.org.au](mailto:kMcMahon@whise.org.au)*

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## Introduction

On behalf of Southern Melbourne Primary Care Partnership's (SMPCP) Elder Abuse Prevention Network (EAPN), we would like to thank the Commissioners for receiving and considering this submission. The EAPN welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. This submission considers the key terms of reference based upon our lived experiences, work and research into preventing elder abuse by creating respectful, safe and secure communities.

In putting this submission forward, the members of the SMPCP EAPN advocate and affirm that:

- The contribution of older Australians to our society is significant and under recognised.
- Older Australians have a right to dignity, respect and independence including the provision of high quality care as part of a safe environment that protects and respects their wellbeing and safety.
- Australia's ageing population will be best served by all governments working together to ensure regulatory and policy frameworks are sustainable and uphold the dignity, respect and independence of older people both now and into the future.

We contend that:

1. The safety, health and wellbeing of older Australians lies not just in the aged care sector and its 3,000 plus facilities across Australia. It must be viewed in the context of the attitudes, behaviours, norms, systems and structures in delivery of services to older people. It is these which create equity, equality and respect for older people as contributing members of a diverse community.
2. Primary prevention actions that seek to change the behaviours, norms and attitudes of the community that contribute to elder abuse, discrimination and the conditions that drive poor care is the only effective tool to keep older people independent, respected and valued members of our community.
3. Primary prevention should be embedded in every aged care policy framework developed at every level of government including aged care services.

### *Who is the SMPCP EAPN and what is our Context for this submission?*

The SMPCP EAPN is one of 10 Elder Abuse Prevention Networks that have been established across Victoria. They aim to raise awareness and change attitudes towards elder abuse and ageism across the community and were established as a result of the 2016 Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.

The SMPCP EAPN is a component of the Monash Health Integrated Model of Care for Responding to Suspected Elder Abuse and seeks to:

- focus on primary prevention activities including:
  - addressing the drivers of elder abuse such as ageist attitudes in the community

- conducting elder abuse awareness activities with older people, their families, carers and the general community
- utilising social media as a platform for community engagement and to facilitate the dissemination of primary prevention messages
- connecting practitioners working with older community members, their families and carers
- utilise a co-design approach in the development and delivery of elder abuse awareness activities

### *Context – Prevention of elder abuse as a form of family violence and the right to live free from violence in all its forms*

Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 (United Nations General Assembly) codifies the fundamental right of every human to live free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Further, the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing holds as one of its central themes of work as ‘the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against older people’ (United Nations 2002, p18). The action plan identifies the role of primary prevention as a key part of achieving change and a key mechanism to ensure that older people avoid the distress and harm that results from elder abuse.

The 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence recognised that ‘effective prevention measures are considerably less well developed for elder abuse’ compared to other areas of family violence (State of Victoria 2016, vol.6, p3). In response to Recommendation 187 of the Royal Commission’s report, the Victorian Government published its primary prevention strategy titled *Free From Violence*, Victoria’s strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women. The EAPNs were established with a specific focus on the primary prevention of elder abuse, providing a valuable opportunity for this research to expand the knowledge base on the prevention of elder abuse in Victoria, and the role and effectiveness of networked organisations acting locally.

### Matter at Hand

Based on our work, the SMPCP EAPN recommends that:

1. The Royal Commission into Aged Care and Quality and Safety include in its final recommendations that addressing the norms, drivers and attitudes that drive poor behaviours and attitudes towards older people be included in the reform of aged care services. *This will strengthen the system underpinning aged care services that are high quality and safe.*

and that

2. Primary prevention which promotes the wellbeing and health of older Australians is the starting point for all final recommendations and outcomes of the Royal Commission. *This will provide a strong foundation for person centred care enabling and providing the culture and environment within the aged care industry and community that enables older Australians greater choice, control and independence.*

and further that,

3. The forthcoming *Primary Prevention of Elder Abuse Framework* from the Victorian Government be included in recommendations as a key guidelines to the ways attitudes and poor behaviours to older Australian's which drive abuse be addressed. *This will directly address the underpinning drivers of ageism and discrimination against older people in our community as identified through community forums held by the Royal Commission.*

#### *Rationale – Why this is in the remit of the Royal Commission*

Our rationale for making these recommendations is twofold:

1. The terms of reference provide the capacity and scope for the role of primary prevention to be included in the final recommendations, in as much as Commissioners are authorised to inquire into:

*“(d) what the Australian Government, aged care industry, Australian families and the wider community can do to strengthen the system of aged care services to ensure that the services provided are of high quality and safe;*

*(e) how to ensure that aged care services are person-centred, including through allowing people to exercise greater choice, control and independence in relation to their care, and improving engagement with families and carers on care-related matters...”*

(Royal Commission into Aged Care Terms of Reference

<https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/Pages/Terms-of-reference.aspx>)

Our **rationale** is that enacted primary prevention methodologies and activities across the Australian Community is a key undertaking that the Australian Government, aged care industry, Australian families and the wider community can do to set strong foundations for high quality and safe care.

Further, primary prevention will provide strong foundations to empower person-centred care that delivers choice and independence in relation to care and improves engagement with families and carers.

2. We note the outcomes and interim report findings from the community forums which highlight the immediate picture of community experience of aged care. Especially:

*...the importance of maintaining dignity and respect for people in aged care, and numerous instances of disrespectful and dehumanising treatment... feelings of powerlessness and distress, and their frustration with the complaints processes*

(Royal Commission into Aged Care Interim Report “Neglect” Appendix 1 Community Forums p 4 and 5

<https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/Documents/interim-report/interim-report-volume-3.pdf>)

Our **rationale** is that primary prevention of elder abuse addresses the drivers that contribute to poor attitudes and behaviours towards older people and their care including, disrespect, dehumanising behaviour, lack of respect, lack of dignity, removal of autonomy and empowerment and distress.

## Our Recommendation in detail

Recommendation – Using a primary prevention framework to stop elder abuse

In 2019 SMPCP EAPN produced a literature review called *Preventing Elder Abuse: A literature review for the SMPCP Elder Abuse Prevention Network*. (Lord et al for the Southern Melbourne PCP Elder Abuse Prevention Network Steering Committee.)

The review calls for the establishment of a primary prevention framework specifically to prevent elder abuse and states that *“Taking preventative action to stop the abuse of older people in our community must be about addressing the attitudes that enable, minimise or condone elder abuse in our community.”* It also finds that even through primary prevention which targets health outcomes or family violence is well understood, its application to elder abuse is not readily viewed as a unique issue in its own right. The review argues that elder abuse and its prevention is worthy of its own prevention approach and framework. The SMPCP EAPN also advocate through the review that the approach taken to prevent violence against women and children – which aims to change discourse, create structural change and address the drivers of gendered violence – would be useful as a basis to create a model for the prevention of elder abuse.

Following the release of SMPCP EAPN’s review, and strong advocacy from the broader Victorian community, the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services is developing a framework for the primary prevention of elder abuse. At the time of writing this submission, this framework is in the final stages of development before publication.

It is the recommendation of this submission that a national evidence-based primary prevention framework be designed and implemented to address the behaviours attitudes and structures that drive ageism, discrimination and prejudice underpinning our communities’ attitude to older people be included in the Commissioners final recommendations.

## Elder abuse, primary prevention and links to the Royal Commission

Findings from the community forums run by the Commission and contained in the Interim Report showed that participants were aware of elder abuse and the components in the community that led to elder abuse.

In addition to the summary of the forums themselves, we note the regular referral in the forums themselves to behaviours against older people that are abusive and violent. This included evidence of controlling behaviours against older people, physical violence, fear of reprisal for speaking out. We also learned in these forums about poor attitudes to older people as evidenced by a lack of due care and respect in treatment because a person was frail, aged and no longer independent. Denial of basic rights, no cultural safety, social estrangement, being left isolated, and poor attitudes to care are all quoted regularly in the forums.

### What is primary prevention?

At its most fundamental, primary prevention is 'preventing problems occurring in the first place'. It is closely aligned with health promotion which (as per the World Health Organisation 1986 Ottawa Charter) as a set of actions that foster good health and wellbeing. When applied to violence (as per the model used by *Our Watch* and their seminal work *Change the Story: National framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children*), it translates to action by delivering whole of population initiatives which address the underlying drivers of violence.

*...Primary prevention requires changing the social conditions, such as gender inequality, that excuse, justify or even promote violence.... Individual behaviour change may be the intended result of prevention activity, but such change cannot be achieved prior to, or in isolation from, a broader change in the underlying drivers of such violence across communities, organisations and society as a whole. A primary prevention approach works across the whole population to address the attitudes, practices and power differentials that drive violence*

(Our Watch, Change the Story 2016)

Primary prevention strategies are well researched and highly regarded methodologies to create complex social change. This submission contends it is the poor attitudes and behaviours toward older Australians that require social change in order to address negative characteristics described in the community forums.

### Recommendation for the primary prevention of elder abuse

Using the forthcoming Primary Prevention of Elder Abuse Framework from the Victorian Government, we ask that Commissioners recommend a primary prevention and health promotion strategy to address underlying driver of elder abuse in ageism and discrimination against older people in the community comprising a set of activities that:

- Are complimentary and delivered over time in settings where people live, work and play
- Draws on available evidence that ageism is a driver that results in abuse and violence against ageing Australians
- Is integrated into national policy relating to long-term investment and care and respect for older Australians
- Defines clear indicators of success
- Addresses the underlying drivers that lead to abuse which include ageism and discrimination against older people, not just the abuse itself or, its immediate precursors

The prevention of elder abuse can be supported through multisector partnerships, education and social communication activities which target the drivers. The World Health Organisation recommends that primary prevention and health promotion facilitate reorientating health services to create models of care that encourage prevention and promote health and wellbeing – in this case, the encouragement of respect for older people,

person centred care and prevention of abuse. (<http://www.emro.who.int/about-who/public-health-functions/health-promotion-disease-prevention.html>)

What scope would prevention of discrimination and abuse against older Australian's comprise?

Noting the forthcoming Victorian Government *Primary Prevention of Elder Abuse Framework*, this submission puts forward a potential scope of prevention for the consideration of Commissioners. This draws upon the current evidence base in Australia and globally that have been tested and tried in relation to the prevention of adult violence in intimate family settings<sup>1</sup>

The primary prevention and health promotion scope of work would seek to;

- Promote respectful relationships across generations and communities recognising the application of the self-determinants of health that can inhibit respect such as gender and culture
- Recognise the different forms of abuse experienced by older people including financial, emotional, verbal, physical, psychological, sexual and cultural as well as the role of grooming in abuse situations
- Address poor attitudes in the community including ageism
- Change ethos that accepts and condones all forms of violence and discrimination against older Australians including those behaviours in community which are violence-supportive or have weak sanctions against violence
- Mitigate risk factors that may contribute to abuse and its precursors such as isolation, frailty, dementia and material dependency
- Improve access to resources and systems of support including, increasing capacity and capability of health providers and allied health workers to recognise abuse against older people
- Ensure aligned legislative and regulatory frameworks do not create barriers to sustained change, access to services and information and do not knowingly or unknowingly create barriers to respectful relationships

## Conclusion

The members of the SMPCP EAPN thank the Commissioners for their time, and consideration of our submission. Based on the lived experiences of older members of our community and that of health and social practitioners we state that reform of aged care services must address the norms, drivers and attitudes that drive poor behaviours and attitudes towards older people in the Australian community. Further we conclude that:

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<sup>1</sup> Such as the Vic Health/Victorian Government *Prevention of violence before it occurs: A Framework and background paper to guide prevention of violence against women in Victoria 2007*; *Our Watch's Change the Story Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Framework 2016* and also, findings and summary of research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2016) *Elder Abuse, Understanding Issues, frameworks and responses*



1. The starting point for all final recommendations and outcomes of the Royal Commission should be rooted in primary prevention principles to support the wellbeing and good health of older Australians. This will provide a strong foundation for person centred care, enabling the culture and environment within the aged care industry and community that empowers older Australians to have greater choice, control and independence. This includes the ability for older Australians to remain at home for as long as they choose and for this choice to be recognised with dignity as a person exercising their human rights.
2. The forthcoming *Primary Prevention of Elder Abuse Framework* from the Victorian Government be included in recommendations as a key guidelines to the ways attitudes and poor behaviours to older Australian's which drive abuse be addressed. This will directly address the underpinning drivers of ageism and discrimination against older people in our community as identified through community forums held by the Royal Commission.

### Summary of Recommendations

- I. Primary prevention actions which address poor behaviours, norms and attitudes towards older Australians should be the foundation on which Aged Care Reform is built
- II. Primary prevention should be embedded in every aged care policy framework developed at every level of government which includes aged care services.
- III. Embedding primary prevention would improve quality of care, a strong foundation for person centred care, and increase opportunities for older Australian's to maintain their independence
- IV. Existing models of primary prevention – including one for addressing elder abuse – can be used and scaled up to the national level

#### References:

Michelle Lord (Southern Melbourne Primary Care Partnership), Kit McMahon (Women's Health In The South East) and Selina Nivelles (Monash Health) on behalf of the Southern Melbourne PCP Elder Abuse Prevention Network Steering Committee ***Preventing Elder Abuse A Literature Review for the SMPCP Elder Abuse Prevention Network***, February 2019