



Response to the Consultation Paper  
Developing the National Plan on Elder Abuse

July 2018

AN AUSTRALIA THAT VALUES AND SUPPORTS ALL CARERS

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## ABOUT CARERS WA

Carers WA is the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in Western Australia and is part of a national network of Carers Associations. Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have disability, mental illness, a chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged. The person they care for may be a parent, partner, sibling, child, relative, friend or neighbour. Illness and disability are non-discriminatory and the caring role can be borne by any individual at any given time, regardless of socioeconomic status, age or location. Caring is a significant form of unpaid work in the community and is integral to the maintenance of our aged, disability, health, mental health, and palliative care systems. A report undertaken by Deloitte, Access Economics, 'The economic value of unpaid care in Australia in 2015', determined the replacement value of the care undertaken by carers in Australia to cost \$60.3 billion per annum.

Some important facts about carers include:

- There are 2.7 million unpaid carers in Australia. More than 856,000 carers are primary carers.
- There are more than 320,000 family and friends in a caring role in Western Australia or approximately 1 in 8 in the community.

## ENQUIRIES

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Carers WA welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Development of a National Plan on Elder Abuse. Carers WA wishes to confine its comments to the impact of elder abuse on carers and ensuring adequate information is available to educate carers on the various forms of elder abuse.

## Background – Carers and elder abuse

We have focussed on unpaid family and friend carers of older people as per our charter as a peak body for carers. We have not focussed on paid care workers or volunteers. This distinction is important because loose references to carers who perpetrate elder abuse, particularly in the media, often fail to distinguish between different groups of people who provide care, leading to skewed representations of family and friend carers.

It should also be noted that not all relationships between an older person and a family member or friend constitute a care relationship. Under the Carers Recognition Act 2004 a carer is defined as someone who provides unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have disability, mental illness, a chronic health condition, or who are frail aged. This may also include terminal illness and alcohol or other drug issues. This role is unpaid and ongoing and accordingly, not all relatives and friends perpetrating abuse can be considered carers. In addition, carers can themselves experience abuse from the person they care for.

The extent to which carers are perpetrators of abuse is not clear from the research. Similarly statistics on carers who are abused by the person they care for are difficult to find.

In the 2016 submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission, Carers Australia concluded that “the causes of elder abuse are wide-ranging and are highly contextual to individual circumstances. Moving away from the perception of carers as potential or actual perpetrators of abuse, and identifying the abuser as a distinct category, is more productive in addressing and preventing elder abuse.”<sup>1</sup>

A Carers Queensland survey of 571 carers found that 26% did not feel safe in their caring role and reported being abused.<sup>2</sup> Carers Australia conclude that carers who are abused continue to care for their abuser for a number of reasons: there may be no alternative care; they may be concerned for the wellbeing of the person they care for; and they may experience stress around seeking services to intervene.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Carers Australia Submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission; Elder abuse and Commonwealth Laws”, Carers Australia website, <http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/storage/carers-australia-elder-abuse-inquiry-submission-august-2016.pdf>, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> “Quality of Life Survey”, Carers Queensland, 2015, <http://carersqld.asn.au/11309-2>, accessed 15 November 2017.

<sup>3</sup> “Carers Australia Submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission; Elder abuse and Commonwealth Laws”, Carers Australia website, <http://www.carersaustralia.com.au/storage/carers-australia-elder-abuse-inquiry-submission-august-2016.pdf>, p. 7.

## Consultation questions

### 1 National priority action areas and proposed initiatives

- Do you think the proposed six National Priority Action areas adequately reflect the main concerns

The six national priority action areas adequately reflect the main concerns of Carers WA in relation to elder abuse. Acknowledgement of carers should be made explicit in the plan. When referring to older people and their families in the plan, the term carers should also be included.

- Which sectors are key to implementing the priority actions

The not-for-profit, community and advocacy sectors need to be involved in the implementation of the plan.

### 2 Other priorities

- Please describe any initiatives or priority action areas that are not already listed that you think should be included in the national plan.

In order to empower older people, including carers and the people they care for, to better protect themselves from the risks of elder abuse the following initiatives are suggested.

#### Capacity Building

Further funding of emotional support, peer support, planning assistance and counselling would build carer capacity. This support would assist carers to identify issues and stressors specific to their circumstances and reduce the stress of their caring responsibilities. Increased funding for these supports would reduce one risk factor which may lead to abuse within the caring relationship.

#### Financial Literacy

A carer who is assisting an older person with income and assets may have low levels of financial literacy and struggle with the complexities of laws and systems guiding these activities. Carers in this position require specialist advice and training on financial duty of care and legal responsibilities. This advice should be timely and affordable.

#### Resources and general education

Programs should be developed to educate carers on elder abuse. The Queensland Government have developed resources including posters and brochures to raise awareness and safeguard carers and care recipients from the risk of elder abuse. These can be

accessed at <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/campaign/theres-no-excuse-elder-abuse/what-elder-abuse/information-family-friends-carers>

### **3 Stakeholders**

- Who do you think should be the strategic partners, at a national level, for the development and implementation of each of the national Priority Action Areas?

Carers Australia should be considered a key strategic partner particularly in relation to National Priority Areas 1 and 4.