

23 April 2015

Director Legal Policy
Department of the Attorney-General and Justice
GPO Box 1722
DARWIN NT 0801

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: ELDER ABUSE AND DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

National Seniors Northern Territory Policy Advisory Group (NTPAG) welcomes the Northern Territory Government initiative in seeking submissions regarding possible improvement to the Domestic and Family Violence Act, its operation and its interaction with related Northern Territory legislation.

The NTPAG submits that Elder Abuse should be considered by the review as distinct and separate behaviours within domestic and family violence and the amended Act should include explicit references to Elder Abuse.

Existing research notes that some 80% of Elder Abuse occurs within families and is perpetrated mostly by male family members. Financial abuse is rife. All the various indicators of Domestic Violence and Child Abuse are present in Elder Abuse.

NTPAG, in its 2015-2016 Budget Submission to the NT Government (attached) noted and referenced the background to the issue of Elder Abuse, recommended that the NT Government fund research on the issue, the development of protocols and the establishment of service responses within the Northern Territory that are sensitive to the needs of the clients and cultures identified.

These programs need to be supported by complementary legislation that will allow authorities to prosecute the perpetrators of these concerning acts.

If requested representatives of NTPAG will contribute further to the review of the Domestic and Family Violence Act. Please contact me at the above address.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Borger
Chair NT Policy Advisory Group



Be
heard

Attachment 1

Elder Abuse

Recommendation 4:

National Seniors recommends that:

- *The Government fund the extension of the elder Abuse research/survey to be undertaken by the Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS) in 2015 and provide support to ensure the methodology is robust.*
- *Protocols for the Northern Territory are developed to build on experience from other jurisdictions including the public sector, NGOs and the retail and service sectors.*
- *Funding be set aside for the establishment of suitable service responses, sensitive to the needs of the clients and cultures identified.*

Preventing elder abuse in an ageing world is everybody's business. "Elder abuse is a violation of human rights and a significant cause of injury, illness, lost productivity, isolation and despair." (Active Aging , a Policy Framework WHO, 2002). Confronting and reducing elder abuse requires a multidisciplinary approach. Workers throughout the Northern Territory within Health, Aged Care and Legal Services express concern at professional limitations of response services to the presentation of elderly clients with suspect or clearly identifiable abuse. This is a significant gap in the services that should be available to Senior Territorians. Accepting that within the NT the statistics are not collected, research still not carried out, reporting purely anecdotal, the National Seniors NT Policy Advisory Group still questions the lack of concern by government in making a contribution to the introduction of services for this need. The Northern Territory is the only State/Territory where Services for the Abuse of older adults are not established or being developed.

Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS) is instigating, staffing and funding a six month trial, of an Information Line, on a designated 1800 number, to gather data to demonstrate the need for services for this vulnerable group within the Territory. This trial is to commence mid-January 2015 for a six month period. National Seniors supports the DCLS initiative. However, such a limited survey by an organisation already stretched by funding cuts from the Commonwealth Government, will be strained to provide a comprehensive Territory picture, it may however direct attention towards immediate service development needs.

Regardless of the postcode, Toorak, Parap or Papunya will have demonstrated physical, financial and psychological abuse of some elderly people within certain situations and families. Within other jurisdictions, establishing a hotline or similar response facilities, have provided ample proof of the need and the efficacy of these resources.

Strategies for action have been trialled and tested in other States and Territories. Until reporting is required the issue is too daunting, too painful, avoided by many and in particular the victims. Reluctance to confront is an obvious prohibitor of action. This requires politicians and community leaders to acknowledge the need and to concurrently implement protocols for recognising and reporting elder abuse within all service sectors.

References:

2014 - AGAC (Australian Guardianship and Administration Council) 3rd National Elder Abuse Conference, Perth WA. 3-4th September 2014.

2014 - "Take Action" Elder Abuse Awareness Day Conference, Adelaide Convention Centre. 16th June 2014

2013 - INPEA (International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse), Seoul, South Korea. 23rd June 2013

2012 - Elder Abuse: A Cause for Action. The Australian Association of Gerontology Northern Territory Conference - *Working Towards A Safer Future* - Alice Springs NT September 2012.