



Regaining Your Control

To assist older South Australians to maintain or regain control over their lives and future decisions.





Growing older is associated with increased wisdom and knowledge, but it can also bring frailty and vulnerability.

Feeling safe in your home and community, being treated with dignity, and retaining independence take on even greater importance.

To help senior South Australians to achieve these aims, the State Government has invested more than \$6 million into over 80 projects to support *Improving with Age: Our Ageing Plan for South Australia*.

The initiative *Our actions to prevent the abuse of older South Australians* grew out of the Plan. It contains five priority actions that are making a real contribution to the safety of senior South Australians.

One of the ways we are doing this is by highlighting the issue of elder abuse.

Since 2003, this booklet, *Regaining Your Control*, has been arming senior South Australians, families and carers with the tools to prevent, or put a stop to, elder abuse.











It identifies exactly what elder abuse is, provides strategies to prevent it, and advises where to seek help if you, or someone you know, is being abused.

This booklet was developed through a collaboration between the Aged Rights Advocacy Service, the Department for Health and Ageing, Helping Hand Aged Care and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Regaining Your Control continues to be a valuable resource in protecting and promoting the rights and wellbeing of senior South Australians.

Hon John Hill MP
Minister for Health and Ageing

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A Question of Control

Are you experiencing or have recently experienced any of the following with family or friends? Have you:

- been pushed around, hit or physically restrained?
- been yelled at, called names, told that you are stupid?
- been asked for money or forced to hand over money on a regular basis or felt threatened or intimidated when you have asked for the money to be returned?
- had someone control your actions and lifestyle, eg. stopped you from visiting family / friends and threatened you or others if you went against their wishes?
- had your social contact or activities with others restricted / stopped?
- had restrictions to your rights to live independently in your own home?
- had family or friends threaten you if you did not comply with their wishes?
- been prevented from obtaining medication or essential items eg. glasses, dentures, hearing aids, warm clothing, heating?
- been forced into sexual activity against your will?
- been forced to sign documents against your will or threatened if you said no?

Introduction

If you answered yes to any of those questions, then you may be at risk of abuse or in an abusive situation. Please read on...

Many older people live independently in their own homes. The support of family, friends and community programs can assist a person to retain control of their life and enhance their independence and wellbeing. In addition, the maintenance of social links reduces isolation whilst supporting and strengthening the older person's capacity to enjoy a healthy lifestyle.

Research indicates that one in twenty-five people over 65 years of age who experience abuse are mistreated by someone they trust. "Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse".

(UN principles for Older Persons 1991.)

The aim of this booklet is to provide information that will assist older people to remain in control of their lives and develop strategies to prevent abuse by family or friends towards them or other older people. It also aims to provide opportunities for people to develop locally relevant and responsive strategies for the prevention of elder abuse in our community.

Introduction (cont)

Elder Abuse

“Elder Abuse is any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust, which results in harm to an older person. Abuse can include physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social and / or neglect.”
(Australian National Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse - 1999)

All adults have the right to make their own choices and can decide for themselves where they live, who they live with, how they spend their money and so on. As we age our rights remain and include a right to maintain personal independence, be treated with dignity and respect, live without exploitation, abuse or neglect, be and feel safe.

Agencies as listed in this booklet are able to identify your rights and support you to maintain or regain control over your life.

Types and Signs of Abuse

There are several types of elder abuse. The following defines the various forms of harm and outlines some of the possible signs.

Physical Abuse

A non-accidental act which results in physical pain or injury and includes physical restraint or coercion, hitting, slapping, burning, pushing, pinching or forced confinement to a bed or chair.

Signs: Injury or bruises in different stages of healing, abrasions, welts, rashes, swelling, unexplained injuries / hair loss, tenderness or pain when being touched, acting fearfully.

Sexual Abuse

Non-consensual sexual contact, language or exploitative behaviour and includes rape, indecent assaults, sexual harassment or interference.

Signs: Fear and agitation, disturbed sleep, withdrawal, unexplained bruising, infections or difficulty in walking.

Types and Signs of Abuse (cont)

Financial Abuse

The illegal, improper use and / or mismanagement of a person's money, property or resources. It includes forgery, stealing, forced changes to a Will, unusual transfer of money or property to another person, withholding of funds from the older person, failure of others to repay monies loaned, lack of financial information to an older person by Enduring Power of Attorney.

Signs: Bills unpaid, papers, credit cards, personal belongings missing, unusual activity in bank accounts, changes to a Will or other documents when appearing incapable of making such decisions; confusion regarding assets, property and income.

Psychological / Emotional Abuse

Any language or actions designed to intimidate another person and cause fear of violence, isolation, deprivation or feelings of powerlessness ie. insults, shouting, treating the older person like a child, threats of restricting access to others and humiliation.

Signs: Withdrawal, fearfulness, helplessness, resignation, reluctance to make decisions. Displays nervousness and anxiety with certain people.

Types and Signs of Abuse (cont)

Social Abuse

Restricting or stopping activities and / or social contact with others.

Signs: Sadness (due to a lack of contact with others), withdrawn / passive, uninvolved, listless, lack of confidence.

Neglect

The failure of the caregiver to provide necessities or basic needs. Neglect can be deliberate or unintended eg not providing adequate clothing / personal items, unwillingness to allow adequate medical, dental or personal care, use of medication (ie. too little or too much), refusal to permit other people to provide adequate care such as food or drinks.

Signs: Poor hygiene or personal care, absence of health aids, eg. dentures, hearing aids, glasses and mobility equipment, unkempt appearance, weight loss, secretiveness or agitation, lack of variety in food, drink, social activity, lack of personal items eg. photos, ornaments, etc.

Myths and Facts

Myth: Loss of control and elder abuse are not issues for men.

Fact: **Both men or women can be abused.**

Myth: Violence and harm towards older people is acceptable in some cultures.

Fact: **No cultural group is more or less violent than any other. Violence is a behaviour people learn from each other.**

Myth: Family business is private business.

Fact: **Everyone has the right to be safe and feel safe within the family. Abuse in any form is not OK. There are steps people can take to stop the abuse happening.***

Myth: No one will believe me if I tell them I am being abused.

Fact: **There are people who are trained to listen and assist if you are experiencing harm. For example, your family doctor, health or aged care provider if receiving care in the home or alternatively the Director of Care in a Commonwealth funded residential facility.***

Myth: If I tell someone that I am being abused they will make me leave my home.

Fact: Leaving home is only one of many options to consider if abuse or harm is happening. Before taking any action, seek professional help and make sure you have enough information to make an informed decision on how you can stop the abuse.

Myth: Abuse towards an older person is not a serious matter.

Fact: There are a number of elements of physical, psychological and sexual abuse that could be criminal and therefore must be reported to the police. To discuss appropriate action to stop elder abuse, please contact the Police or an appropriate agency such as: Aged Rights Advocacy Service, Legal Services Commission or the Office of the Public Advocate.*

*For older people, or their representative, help (to stop elder abuse) is available from a number of agencies listed in the back of this booklet.

Case Studies

Mr. Rose

Mr. Rose has been worried for some time that his son, whom he had appointed as his Power of Attorney, might be taking money from his account without his consent. On several occasions Mr. Rose approached his son to ask if he could look at the bank statement.

On each occasion the son became cross, and said that he would post him a copy of his bank statement. It never came. Over the period of three months Mr. Rose became anxious and frightened about his money situation, and his Department of Veterans' Affairs carer noticed a decline in his appearance, as well as an unwillingness to be involved in RSL social activities or to have contact with others. This was out of character for Mr. Rose. The care staff raised those concerns with their care manager who in turn talked to Mr. Rose.

Mr. Rose was able to make his own decisions and decided that he would like some independent advice. The care manager organized this for Mr. Rose so he could make new arrangements for the management of his finances.

John and Maud

John and Maud had allowed their son Ron to return to the family home after he had been evicted from his flat. Ron was an alcoholic and had a gambling addiction. John and Maud had reason to contact the police when Ron began exhibiting physical and verbal abuse towards them.

Police involved Aged Rights Advocacy Service who assisted John and Maud to look at ways that they could deal with the situation.

As Ron paid no rent or board he had no legal right to remain in the home. Their option was to get a restraining order against Ron and arrange that a police patrol call at their home on the set due date of Ron's departure to ensure that he left. John and Maud sought counseling from Helping Hand Aged Care's Successful Ageing Program to address emotional issues regarding the breaking down of the relationship with their son.

Please note: Fictitious names and circumstances are used. Any similarities to readers' names or situations are incidental.

Barriers to Getting Help

There are many reasons for an older person's reluctance to complain about or act to end abuse. Reasons for such reluctance may include:

- Denial ie. not wanting to admit to themselves or others that there is a problem.
- Fear of retaliation or punishment from the alleged abuser.
- Fear of repercussion eg. fear that they may be placed into residential care if an abusive carer is removed.
- Fear of not being believed or being accused of lying.
- A belief that families need to resolve matters internally and not involve "outsiders".
- They have sought assistance before but it was unsuccessful or created further harm.
- Being unaware of their rights, or available assistance.

Elder abuse is a difficult issue, but there are ways to prevent abuse happening to you or to assist someone else deal with the abuse they may be experiencing. The most important issue is to believe them and accept what they are saying. Then either provide them with information on ways they can stop the abuse or help them to link into appropriate agencies that can support them to take steps to overcome the abuse.

What You Can Do to Prevent Abuse

Plan for the future

- Seek information in relation to accommodation, general and medical health care, financial management, property and assets.
- Decide on your preference - let others know your decisions.
- Think carefully and seek independent advice before signing any documents.
- Consider making advanced directives.

Remain active in the community

- Maintain your social contacts.
- Develop friendships outside your immediate family.
- Be involved with community activities.

Be as independent as possible

- Take care of your own health.
- Find out where help is available.
- Ask for help from services when required.
- Consider carefully before accepting personal care in exchange for your possessions or accommodation.

Plan to be safe and feel safe

- Keep important telephone numbers handy.
- Consider purchasing a personal alarm if worried about your safety in the home.

Please refer to the list of service providers at the back of this booklet.

Steps to Remain in Control

Getting Through The Maze

- If you are in danger talk to the police.
Obtain medical help if you have been injured.
- If you are not in immediate danger talk to someone you trust (eg. doctor, service provider, other family members, friend, neighbour) about your experience and concerns and how you might develop strategies or prevent further harm or minimise risk.
- Gain support to plan what action is required to regain or maintain control. Service providers that can assist are listed in the back of this booklet.
- If you need information or wish to discuss options and strategies to help regain your control and prevent harm, contact an advocate from Aged Rights Advocacy Service (ARAS) on Telephone: 8232 5377. ARAS assists older people to uphold their rights.
- Make sure the selected strategies and actions to prevent or end the harm are what **you** want.
- Follow through with your decisions and agreed actions to regain and maintain **your** control.

Emergency Contacts

Crisis Care

Telephone: 131 611

24 hour telephone counselling services for all age groups and issues.

Domestic Violence Helpline

Telephone: 1800 800 098

Lifeline

Telephone: 131 114

A 24 hour crisis telephone counselling service for a cost of a local call.

SA Police

Emergency Telephone: 000

Other police assistance Telephone: 131 444
(or your local police station)

Investigates fraud and other crimes.

List of Service Providers

Aged Rights Advocacy Service Inc.

Telephone: 8232 5377

Country free call: 1800 700 600

(Interpreters provided free of charge)

Advice and support to uphold your rights.

Assistance to overcome situations of elder abuse.

List of Service Providers (cont)

Aboriginal Home Care

Alzheimers Australia SA Inc.

Carers Association of SA Inc.

Ethnic Link Services

Helping Hand Aged Care - Successful Ageing

Legal Services Commission of SA

Local Councils

Domiciliary Care

Office of the Public Advocate

Public Trustee

Seniors Information Service

Details of these services are available from the **Commonwealth Respite & Carelink Centres**
Telephone: 1800 052 222; TTY: 1800 555 677 (for connection via ACE) Information about community care and other services available to assist older people, people with disabilities and carers.

List of Service Providers (cont)

Local Councils

Contact your local council in the white pages or the Local Government Association

Telephone: 8224 2000

Development of and support for a range of community initiatives and services for older people including in-home services, social programs, community transport, information and referral.

Domiciliary Care SA

Telephone: 8193 1234

See your white pages or phone Commonwealth Carelink for your local service on 1800 052 222.

Office of the Public Advocate

Telephone: 8269 7575 or 1800 066 969

Promotes and protects the rights of people with reduced mental capacity. Provides advice and information.

Public Trustee

Telephone: 8226 9200 or 1800 673 119

Provides advice, preparation and management of Enduring Powers of Attorney / Guardianship.

Seniors Information Service

Telephone: 8232 1441, TTY

Country FREECALL: 1800 636 368

Information about complaint procedures and referral to appropriate services and agencies for older people, their families and service providers

Details of these services are available from the

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This booklet was developed originally with funding from the Department of Veterans' Affairs and involved the following agencies.

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aged rights advocacy service inc.

Aged Rights Advocacy Service Inc:

Telephone: 8232 5377

Country Toll Free: 1800 700 600

TTY: 13 36 77 or SSR: 1300 555 727

Translating and Interpreting Service: 13 14 50

16 Hutt Street, Adelaide SA 5000

PO Box 7234, Hutt Street SA 5000

Facsimile: (08) 8232 1794

Email: aras@agedrights.asn.au

Website: www.sa.agedrights.asn.au



Helping Hand Aged Care

Telephone: (08) 8241 9014

Website: www.helpinghand.org.au



Australian Government

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Telephone: 133 254

Country free call: 1800 555 254

Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service

Telephone: (08) 8290 0300

Veterans' Line - 24 hour counselling

Telephone 1800 011 046

Website: www.dva.gov.au

ARAS is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Commonwealth HACC Program, The Department of Health & Ageing and Office for the Ageing SA Health.