

# Volunteering in aged care: Elder abuse and advocacy pathways

**Older people have the right to feel safe and respected.**

This means it is important that volunteers are aware of what elder abuse is and what advocacy pathways are available for older people.

**IMPORTANT**



**If you become aware that an older person is being abused, do not manage the situation yourself.**

**You must report it to your registered provider or Volunteer Manager.**

## What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse can be defined as 'a single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person'.

Elder abuse can take various forms such as physical, psychological or emotional, sexual and financial abuse. It can also be the result of intentional or unintentional neglect. (World Health Organisation)

## There are 5 main forms of elder abuse:



### Financial abuse

Theft or misuse of an older person's money, assets or property.



### Psychological or emotional abuse

An act that causes emotional pain, anguish, or distress or is demeaning to an individual.



### Neglect

Failure to meet an older person's basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, warmth or essential medical care.



### Physical abuse

An act that causes pain, injury or a combination of both. Physical abuse may appear as a change in appearance, attitude or behaviour.



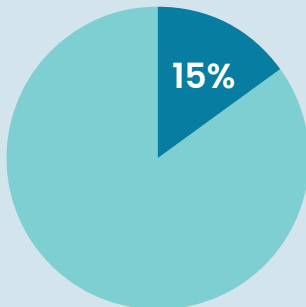
### Sexual abuse

Any behaviour of a sexual nature, done to an older person without their consent. This includes physical interactions and non-contact of a sexual nature.

## How common is elder abuse?

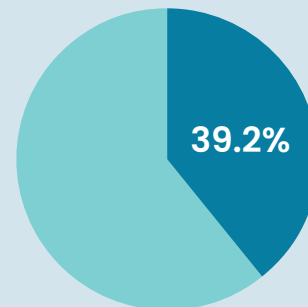
Abuse affects both older men and women and can occur in home or care settings.

### Elder abuse in the community



In Australia, around 1 in 6 (or 15%) of older people living in the community had experienced elder abuse in the past year prior to being surveyed (Australian Institute of Family Studies AIFS).

### Elder abuse in residential aged care



The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety estimated in 2020 that the rate of physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect in aged care settings is as high as 39.2%.



Culture plays a significant role in shaping how elder abuse is understood, experienced, and addressed, particularly among culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

In some cultures, behaviours that might be considered abusive, such as controlling finances or decision-making, may be seen as normal family dynamics or expressions of care and responsibility.

## Aged care rights and advocacy

The rights older people have when accessing Australian government-funded aged care services are outlined in the [Statement of Rights](#), incorporated in the Aged Care Act 2024. These rights help to ensure that older people and their needs are at the centre of the aged care system.

The Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN) provides free, independent and confidential support to older people seeking or receiving government-funded aged care. Their advocates help older people to understand and exercise their aged care rights, find aged care services that meet their needs, and resolve their issues with their government-funded aged care providers.

Advocates can also provide independent and confidential information to older people experiencing abuse or neglect within the aged care system.

## Additional information & support

### Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)

<https://opan.org.au/>

Aged Care Advocacy Line (1800 700 600)

### Elder abuse helpline

1800ELDERHelp (1800 353 374)

### National Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Counselling Service 24/7

1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support line 24/7

13YARN (13 92 76)

### Compass.info – Guiding action on elder abuse

<https://www.compass.info/>

### Noticed something? Looking out for older people – video

<https://vimeo.com/364232728>

### Humbugging - video

<https://youtu.be/5JW-UQUVJkk>

## Learn more about aged care volunteering

Visit [www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care/volunteers](http://www.health.gov.au/topics/aged-care/volunteers)



For free and confidential information  
call our Aged Care Advocacy Line:



**1 800 700 600**



[opan.org.au](http://opan.org.au)

OPAN is funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing through  
the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP).