

Promoting the Safety, Dignity and Independence of Senior Victorians

Implementation of
Elder Abuse
Prevention Strategies

Report on submissions to
the Consultation Paper -
Community Education
and Older Person's
Legal Service

October 2007

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1. Introduction

In March 2007 a public consultation paper was released by the former Department for Victorian Communities seeking comment on two key commitments of the Victorian Government's *Supporting the Safety and Dignity of Senior Victorians* report (June 2006).

The two commitments were the establishment of a statewide information and education service, the responsibility of the Office of Senior Victorians (OSV), and the establishment of an older persons legal service, the responsibility of Victoria Legal Aid (VLA). The two services are to be combined into the one community education and legal services centre, referred to in the consultation paper as the 'Elder Abuse Prevention - Community Education and Older Persons' Legal Centre' (the centre).

The consultation paper sought submissions to obtain community views on terminology used in relation to elder abuse, and the proposed outcomes, priorities, and functions of the centre. Forty five submissions were received, with strong support for combining the services, and for the combined service to operate within a rights and empowerment framework for older people. The list of submissions received is on page 5. This report summarises the key issues raised by the submissions. The questions from the consultation paper are listed on page 6.

2. Terminology

Of comments made in relation to a possible name for the service, the proposed 'Older Persons Rights Service' was supported by approximately one third of submissions. Other names were suggested, with the majority supporting the use of 'rights' in the title, arguing it has a more positive focus than 'abuse', and that older people may not identify their experience in terms of 'abuse'. Those supporting the use of 'abuse' made comment that the name should be descriptive of what the service is seeking to achieve, with 'rights' not descriptive enough, too broad in meaning, and possibly not understood by some cohorts of older people. Other comments included using 'centre' rather than 'service', as it suggests a community approach, and that the name of the service should have a usable/friendly acronym.

Half of the submissions that commented on appropriate terminology for elder abuse strategies favoured using 'elder abuse', arguing that the terminology should express the specific focus of the service and a 'softened' term may detract from that aim, and that 'elder abuse' is in keeping with terminology used internationally. Comments not supportive of 'elder abuse' argued that it is negative, stigmatising, and not appropriate for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) or Indigenous communities. Other proposed terms included 'exploitation', 'abuse of older people', 'protection of older persons' rights', 'promoting/supporting the safety, dignity and independence of senior Victorians', 'advocacy strategies', 'empowerment', and 'promotion of independence'.

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2.1 Terminology – summary of comments for consideration

Comments that were made for consideration:

- that 'rights', 'abuse', and 'older person' be considered when naming the service;
- that it may be appropriate to refer to the service as a 'centre'; and
- that the terms 'abuse', 'rights', 'prevention', 'abuse of older people', and 'promoting the safety, dignity and independence of senior Victorians' be considered as appropriate terminology when referring to elder abuse strategies.

3. Outcomes

There was general support for the proposed outcomes of the service being:

- to increase community awareness and understanding;
- to assist older people to be better informed; and
- to provide professional education to service providers to strengthen their capacity to detect and appropriately respond to suspected abuse.

There was some concern about the potential for increased demand for services to respond due to the intended community education campaign.

3.1 Outcomes – summary of comments for consideration

The summary of comments is:

- the service outcomes as identified in the consultation paper are supported; and
- service providers should be supported by the service to ensure that they can prepare for, and appropriately respond to, an increase in demand for services.

4 Priorities

4.1 Priority areas

The majority of submissions supported both the community education and professional education strategies as priority areas for the service, but that the implementation of professional education should precede broader community education to ensure the system is able to respond to the expected increase in demand.

Other priorities included the implementation of a telephone advisory function and the development of a database of local area service providers for ease of referral. Longer term priorities included: the development of consistent policies, procedures, guidelines and tools; the development of research and best practice and the dissemination of best-practice research and materials.

4.2 Priority groups

In addition to the four (4) groups proposed in the paper, CALD communities were strongly identified as a priority group by the majority of those submissions that made comment. There was some concern as to how effectively the service could engage with CALD communities given the resources available, as language interpretation and printing of information in a variety of languages is costly.

In addition, some other additional target groups were also identified in order to achieve the proposed outcomes. These include the following groups of older people, support groups and service providers:

- those with a mental illness;
- those who are financially disadvantaged;
- those who cannot access the service directly;
- those who are homeless;
- those living in rooming houses and Office of Housing accommodation;
- caregivers;
- those with Enduring Power of Attorney;

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- financial service providers;
- the Real Estate Institute of Victoria;
- agencies working with those most vulnerable;
- local councils;
- home nursing services;
- migrant resource centres; and
- older person's networks.

Indigenous communities were also recognised as a potential target group with specific needs that would need to be considered by the service. However, it was considered that any work that the service carried out in relation to elder abuse in indigenous communities would need to be undertaken in consultation with Aboriginal Affairs Victoria to ensure consistency with their policy framework.

4.3 Priorities – summary of comments for consideration

The summary of comments is:

- that the centre prioritise the professional education strategy and a telephone advisory function in order to build the capacity of service providers prior to engaging in broader community education strategies;
- that longer term priorities include the development of consistent policies, procedures and guidelines, the development of research and best practice, and the dissemination of best-practice research and materials;
- that the following be considered as priority groups of older people for engagement in elder abuse prevention strategies: those from a CALD background; those who depend on others for care; those who are socially isolated; women; and those with some level of cognitive impairment; and
- that consideration be given to the additional groups as listed above for community and professional education as appropriate.

5 Functions

5.1 Support of individual cases

Of twenty seven comments, all either supported or acknowledged that the service should provide direct intervention in some individual cases of suspected abuse, but only as a last resort and within clearly defined parameters. There was some concern regarding whether the resources of the service would provide sufficient support for this, and how any direct intervention would be managed. It was agreed that the primary focus of the service should be on building the capacity of the appropriate agencies and services to respond.

5.2 Legal and pro-bono and volunteer support

A range of strategies were proposed for maximising legal pro-bono and volunteer support. It was recognised that in order to successfully manage these strategies, a staff member should have specific co-ordination responsibility to recruit, train and support volunteers.

5.3 Developing confidence in identifying and responding to situations of abuse

Thirty three comments identified functions the service should undertake to ensure that the community, older people and professionals are more confident in being able to identify and respond to situations of abuse. These included:

- prioritising the development of strong partnerships with institutions and agencies that older people already identify with;
- the development of a website;
- the development and publication of materials in appropriate languages;

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- the development of a toolkit or handbook to ensure providers are resourced with current precedents and practice guidelines; and
- ensure information is available in printed and electronic form with regard to the (i) roles and responsibilities of service providers and (ii) identification of referral pathways.

5.4 Research and clearinghouse

The majority of comments made in relation to research considered that given available resources, there would be limited capacity to undertake research. The service should, however, establish links with research organisations, influence research agendas, lobby for resources and collect high quality data to inform best practice and legislative reform.

Of comments made in regard to the service functioning as a clearinghouse, the majority supported the service acting as a clearinghouse but it was acknowledged that due to resources, this might be outside the service's ability, and best performed by another service or organisation.

5.5 Support of local area networks of service providers

The majority of comments agreed that the service should support existing local area networks (LANs) of support services and community agencies and assist in the development of new LANs. The support for this ranged from hesitant, due to available resources, to critical for the success of the service. The majority of submissions indicated that the most important function for the service in providing support to LANs was co-ordination of the development of templates for terms of reference, policies, protocols and guidelines that could be adapted by community agencies.

5.6 Functions – summary of comments for consideration

- the priority of the service be to strengthen the capacity of service providers and community agencies to respond to issues of elder abuse;
- the service develop strong partnerships with existing service providers and community agencies;
- the service become involved in individual cases only as a last resort;
- a staff member of the service co-ordinate the legal pro-bono and volunteer support of the service;
- the service develop a range of materials to be made available in appropriate languages targeted to suit the needs of specific groups as required;
- the service seek to influence - and where appropriate collaborate in - research activities, lobby for resources, and put in place infrastructure to ensure the collection of high quality data;
- the service assist existing LANs to effectively respond to abuse issues, and where appropriate promote the establishment of new LANs within resource limitations; and
- a range of templates be developed that will provide LANs with a capacity to develop their own terms of reference, policies, protocols and guidelines.

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6 Further comment

Further comment was made that commitment to further resources would be necessary for the proposals to be successfully implemented. Also, the needs of older Victorians who may be at higher risk of abuse and from CALD backgrounds, were raised as challenges given the resources available.

6.1 Further comment – summary of comments for consideration

- additional resources be made available to the service; and
- there be careful consideration of how to best target disadvantaged and CALD groups using the resources available.

LIST OF SUBMISSIONS RECEIVED

Listed below are the submissions made in response to the Implementation Of Elder Abuse Preventative Strategies Consultation Paper - Community Education and Older Persons' Legal Service - March 2007

- 1 Aged and Community Care Vic
- 2 Aged Care Assessment Service Victoria
- 3 Alzheimer's Australia Vic
- 4 Armenian Planned Activity Group
- 5 Bapcare
- 6 Brimbank City Council
- 7 Brotherhood of St Laurence
- 8 Bundoora ACAS
- 9 Carers Victoria
- 10 CASA House
- 11 Caulfield General Medical Centre
- 12 City of Darebin
- 13 City of Greater Bendigo
- 14 City of Greater Dandenong
- 15 City of Melbourne
- 16 Community Legal Service, Wodonga
- 17 Council on the Ageing
- 18 Dousta Galla Community Health Service
- 19 Elder Rights Advocacy
- 20 Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria
- 21 Federation of Community Legal Centres
- 22 Gateways Support Services
- 23 Hume City Council
- 24 La Trobe Community Health Service
- 25 Law Institute of Victoria
- 26 Moonee Valley City Council
- 27 Office of the Public Advocate
- 28 Peninsular Health
- 29 Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre
- 30 Public Interest Law Clearing House
- 31 Royal District Nursing Service
- 32 South West Community Legal Centre
- 33 Southern Cross Care
- 34 Southern Health
- 35 Southport Community Legal Service
- 36 St John Ambulance Australia
- 37 St Vincent's
- 38 State Trustees
- 39 Uniting Care
- 40 Valerie Johnstone
- 41 Victoria Police
- 42 Women's Health Grampians
- 43 Women's Health in the South East
- 44 Wyndham Community Health Program
- 45 Yarra City Council

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LIST OF QUESTIONS FROM CONSULTATION PAPER

(Note: The numbering in brackets at the end of each question relates to the numbering of questions used in the consultation paper)

- 1 How should we refer to the Elder Abuse Prevention - Community Education and Older Persons' Legal Service? (5)
- 2 What is the most appropriate terminology to use in referring to elder abuse strategies? (5.1)
- 3 Are these the outcomes the Community Education and Older Person's Legal Service should seek to achieve? (6.3)
- 4 Are there other outcomes that should be considered? (6.3.1)
- 5 Are there other target groups that need to be considered in relation to the outcomes that can be achieved? (6.3.2)
- 6 Given the limited resources, which groups do you think the Community Education and Older Persons' Legal Service should target as a priority? (7)
- 7 Which initiatives or actions should the service prioritise? (7.1)
- 8 What should be the immediate priorities and what should be longer term priorities for implementations? (7.1.2)
- 9 Should the Community Education and Older Persons' Legal Service provide direct intervention in some individual cases of suspected abuse as a last resort where there is no one else who can assist the older person with the decision they wish to make? (8.1)
10. Should the service not become involved in individual cases, as this may undermine its ability to build the local capacity of others to respond? (8.1.1)
- 11 What factors could assist in maximising legal pro-bono and volunteer support for the service? (8.1.2)
- 12 Are there any functions the service should undertake to ensure that the community, older people and professionals are more confident in being able to identify and respond to situations of abuse? (8.2 & 8.3)
- 13 What role should the Community Education and Older Persons' Legal Service play in research on elder abuse? (8.4)
- 14 Should the service act primarily as a clearinghouse for research or should the service more actively participate in undertaking research efforts? (8.4.1)
- 15 Should the service act primarily as a clearinghouse for best practice materials and information or is this function best performed by another service or organisation? (8.4.2)
- 16 Should the Community Education and Older Persons' Legal Service have a role in supporting existing and helping new local area networks of service providers to develop? (8.5)
- 17 Is there anything else you would like us to know with regard to the subject matter scoped in this paper? (9)

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Consultation Paper - Community Education Service and Older Persons'
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