

Monday 15 June 2020

## **Australians urged to be on alert for elder abuse, with concerns more people living with dementia at risk**

Today on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, Dementia Australia is urging all Australians to know the warning signs of elder abuse and to be alert to vulnerable Australians, including people who live with dementia.

Dementia Australia CEO Maree McCabe said elder abuse is a serious issue that is likely to have become even more prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Based on international indicators, it is likely that between [two per cent and 14 per cent](#) of older Australians experience elder abuse in any given year, with the prevalence possibly higher during a time when people living with dementia were isolating at home,” Ms McCabe said.

“While not all people living with dementia will be vulnerable to elder abuse, COVID-19 and self-isolation may have increased the risk factors including financial stress within families with the loss of employment, and unchecked family conflict in confined living circumstances, similar to the experience of women and children who are experiencing increased family violence.<sup>1</sup>

“People living with dementia are already at an increased risk of elder abuse due to their cognitive impairment and dependency on others, and the COVID-19 pandemic may have exacerbated this risk.”

An estimated 459,000 Australians live with dementia and 70 per cent live in the community.

Some of the warning signs of elder abuse to look out for include:

- Unnecessary levels of isolation that go beyond government restrictions
- Changes in the older person’s behaviour, with the person disengaging from family members, health, aged care and other services, or making threats of self-harm or expressions of hopelessness
- The older person being prevented access to potential supports and modes of communication (such as phone or internet)
- Large sums of money to pay for unspecified items are being requested or spent

“Often older people living with dementia, as with others who are abused, will not necessarily tell people what’s happening and for some, cognitive decline can impair their ability to raise the issue,” said Ms McCabe.

“That’s why we are calling on Australians to understand the warning signs and to look out for their family member, friend, neighbour or client, and to know who to call for help.”

If you know or suspect someone may be a victim of elder abuse, please contact your state or territory Elder Abuse Hotline or call the National Dementia Helpline on 1800 100 500.

The Elder Abuse Hotlines across Australia are:

ACT - Older Persons Abuse Prevention Referral Line - (02) 6205 3535

NSW - NSW Elder Abuse Helpline - 1800 628 221

NT - Elder Abuse Information Line - 1800 037 072

QLD - Elder Abuse Prevention Unit - 1300 651 192

SA - Elder Abuse phonenumber - 1800 372 310

TAS - Tasmanian Elder Abuse Helpline - 1800 441 169

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<sup>1</sup> The Lookout, COVID-19 and Family Violence, <http://www.thelookout.org.au/family-violence-workers/covid-19-and-family-violence/covid-19-and-family-violence-faqs>

VIC – Seniors Rights Victoria - 1300 368 821

WA - Elder Abuse Helpline - 1300 724 679

Dementia Australia is the national peak body and charity for people, of all ages, living with all forms of dementia, their families and carers. It provides advocacy, support services, education and information. An estimated 459,000 people have dementia in Australia. This number is projected to reach almost 1.1 million by 2058. Dementia Australia's services are supported by the Australian Government.

**National Dementia Helpline 1800 100 500**

**Interpreter service available**

(The National Dementia Helpline is an Australian Government Initiative)

**Dementia is a National Health Priority Area**

[www.dementia.org.au](http://www.dementia.org.au)

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When talking or writing about dementia please refer to [Dementia-Friendly Language Guidelines](#).