



Position Statement

Protection Against Elder Abuse

Purpose

We - Aged and Community Services Tasmania (ACST), Advocacy Tasmania, Council on the Ageing Tasmania (COTA Tas), and The Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) – share a serious concern about the prevalence and negative impact of the abuse of elderly people in Tasmania. We are also concerned that although this is a significant and disturbing social issue, there is no whole-of-government strategy in Tasmania that provides the framework to prevent and address the abuse of elderly Tasmanians.

This paper briefly outlines our recommendations for a whole-of-government strategy to protect elderly Tasmanians against Elder Abuse. This paper also outlines the context of our concerns and the research and policy work to date in Tasmania in this area.

Recommended strategy

In a period of population ageing, and in a climate where the emphasis is on healthy ageing, there is an increased need to address the existing structural problems associated with the abuse of elderly people. In particular, there is a need for an overarching policy position on Elder Abuse, and an associated strategy to ensure the protection of people against abuse, and to improve the mechanisms for dealing with instances of abuse.

ACST, Advocacy Tasmania, COTA (Tas) and TasCOSS recommend the following:

- That the Community Development Unit of the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPaC) undertake to be the lead Government agency responsible for coordinating a whole-of-government strategy to prevent and address the abuse of elderly Tasmanians.
- That a pro-active policy position on the prevention of the abuse of elderly people be developed and adopted by DPaC that documents a prevention, protection and response position, and forms the basis for the work of the whole-of-Government Protection Against Elder Abuse strategy.

- That an advisory committee be established to assist in the establishment and ongoing work of the strategy, and that the committee comprise of relevant Government and non-Government stakeholders.
- That an independent non-Government organisation develop and implement dedicated prevention, protection and response measures, including education and training initiatives, a response Freecall helpline, advocacy services, and a public awareness campaign.

Background

Research into the causes, instances and effects of abuse of elderly people documents the prevalence and negative impact of such abuse. Abuse of elderly people encompasses a range of acts, from subtle psychological or social abuse to overt criminal assault.

Aged and Community Services Australia define elder abuse as:

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 and social abuse and/or neglect.

Unfortunately, elderly Tasmanians are not exempt, and in the past the instances of abuse and need for action have been documented and brought to Government attention by, in particular, Advocacy Tasmania, the Northern Interest Group on Abuse of Older People, the Multicultural Council of Tasmania, and COTA (Tas). Recent research by the TasCOSS Home and Community Care (HACC) Consumer Consultation project also provides current evidence of a range of instances and forms of abuse of elderly people in the Tasmanian community. The research report, *Safe as Houses*, recommends the participation of the HACC unit in a whole-of-government Elder Abuse strategy that implements protection and response initiatives.

We believe that community concerns about the abuse of elderly Tasmanians are shared by the Tasmanian Government. Government concern has been demonstrated by Federal and State representation on a recent ACST convened Elder Abuse Working Party. The Working Party sought to coordinate a policy direction for responses to Elder Abuse and to determine initiatives to prevent abuse. As an outcome of the working group's workshops and meetings of over 12 months, the need for the urgent establishment of a Tasmanian advisory committee, supported by all levels of government, comprising industry and government representation, to develop a strategy for the prevention of the abuse of older persons and the development of an elder abuse response framework for Tasmania was identified.

ACST, Advocacy Tasmania, COTA (Tas) and TasCOSS believe that it is timely to establish an advisory committee, as part of a broader strategy to prevent and address the abuse of elderly people.

National Context

At a time when Tasmania has the fastest rate of population ageing in the nation, there is an urgent need to ensure that the most vulnerable elderly people in our community are offered adequate protection, and that the abuse of elderly people is appropriately addressed.

The *National Strategy for an Ageing Australia* identifies that current attitudes to older people are not always positive or supportive and that one of the challenges for the future is to ensure policies and programs that effectively target situations in which older people are vulnerable. A key goal is to deliver social and economic conditions which optimise opportunities for physical, social and mental well being throughout life.

Apart from Tasmania, in all states and the ACT Government-led Elder Abuse policy positions and prevention strategies are in place. Governments collaborate with community based organisations to offer prevention and response services such as Elder Abuse hotlines, advocacy, counselling, public awareness and education resources, and aged and community care worker training.

Tasmania stands alone among the other Australian states for the absence of a State strategy for protection against Elder Abuse. Without a strategy, Tasmania lacks the coordinated approach necessary to address the abuse of elderly Tasmanians and the visible means that enable people to act to prevent and respond to abuse.

Tasmanian Policy Context

The recently convened State Government Demographic Change Advisory Committee reflects an awareness by the Government of the need to address issues associated with population ageing in Tasmania. In addition to the work of this committee, three key State Government policy documents provide support for the argument for the need for a whole-of-government protection against Elder Abuse strategy: the ***Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing***, ***Tasmania Together 2020*** and ***Tasmania's Health Plan***.

The ***Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing***, *Time to be Living Well*, aims to increase elderly people's participation in the community and to facilitate a 'life long' positive approach to ageing. As part of the Plan's development, the discussion paper ***All ages, all Tasmanians together*** (2005) asked for public suggestions about what could be done to improve the safety and security of older Tasmanians. Encouragingly, the Plan commits acting on these concerns, and also commits the Department of Premier and Cabinet to "examine and progress options for improving the protection of older people in Tasmania in line with the commitment made by all key participants at the Elder Abuse Summit convened by Aged Care Services Tasmania".

The *Tasmania Together* community consultations (2006) also addressed issues around ageing and feeling safe. Concerns were raised about older people's personal freedoms, abuse and personal security. Within *Tasmania Together*

goals 1, 2, and 5 are of relevance to protection of elderly Tasmanians, and state:

- Goal 1. A reasonable lifestyle and standard of living for all Tasmanians;
- Goal 2. Confident, friendly and safe communities;
- Goal 5. Vibrant, inclusive and growing communities where people feel valued and connected.

Tasmania's Health Plan (2007) marks an important pro-active shift in the focus of community care. That is, the **Plan** seeks to focus on health and wellbeing, or prevention and early intervention, rather than solely on illness.

In addition to the above policy papers, in August 2006, the **Tripartite Agreement for Population Ageing in Tasmania** was signed. The principles underpinning this Agreement reflect a commitment by all three levels of Government to work together to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes for elderly Tasmanians.

Summary

We believe that now is the time to act to offer improved protection for elderly Tasmanians in an effective and holistic way. We look forward to working with the Tasmanian State Government to achieve the development of a whole-of-Government strategy to prevent the abuse of elderly people.

References

Australian Capital Territory Government, ACT Health (2004) *Meeting the Challenge of Elder Abuse*. www.health.act.gov.au

Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing (2002) ***National Strategy for an Ageing Australia: An Ageing Australia, Challenges and Opportunities for All***. February 2002.

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/ageing-ofoa-agepolicy-nsaa-nsaa.htm>

Advocacy Tasmania (2006) *Annual Report 2005-06*. Advocacy Tasmania Incorporated, Tasmania,

Faye, Bethany and Maureen Sellick (2003) *Advocare's Speak Out Survey SOS on Elder Abuse*. Advocare Incorporated, Western Australia.

Council on the Ageing Tasmania (2006) *State Budget Priorities Statement 2006-07*. Council on the Ageing Tasmania.

Hazzlewood, June and Peter Orpin (2007) *Vulnerability in Elderly Community Care Clients: A Literature Review*. University Department of Rural Health, for the Tasmanian Council of Social Service. www.tascoss.org.au

Multicultural Council of Tasmania (2006) *Power and Lessness*. Multicultural Council of Tasmania Inc, Hobart.

Northern Interest Group on Abuse of Older People (1996) *A Discussion Paper*. Advocacy Tasmania, Hobart.

Sadler, Paul (2006) *Elder Abuse: A holistic response background paper*. Aged and Community Services Australia.

Tasmanian Council of Social Services (2006) *Finding Ways to Stay at Home: HACC Consumer Consultation Report*. www.tascoss.org.au

Tasmanian Council of Social Services (2007) *Safe as Houses: Elderly HACC clients describe experiences of vulnerability*. www.tascoss.org.au

Tasmanian State Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet. (2007) ***Time to be Living Well: Tasmanian Plan for Positive Ageing***. Seniors Bureau, Tasmania.
www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/seniors/positive_ageing/html_version/

United Nations. Principles for Older Persons.
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/un_principles.html

