

Elder abuse and the COVID-19 pandemic

Some older Queenslanders may be facing increased risks of elder abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community awareness about elder abuse and where to get help is always important, especially now.

Research in Australia and overseas shows family violence often escalates during major crises and disruptions. The social, emotional and financial stresses of the pandemic are affecting everyone and may increase the risk of conflict and elder abuse within families, even in situations where this has not occurred previously.

Social and physical isolation could heighten the risk, particularly where older people are living with the person abusing them. The abuser may be spending more time at home alone with the victim, who may be isolated from their usual support networks and routines. In these situations, it could be difficult for victims to seek help, or remove themselves from abusive situations.

Financial hardship resulting from the pandemic may also increase the risk of elder abuse. Older people may be forced to hand over money or property and be left short of funds or resources for their own essential needs.

What is elder abuse?

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

Types of abuse

Elder abuse can take various forms, including:

- **physical abuse** — any act of violence that causes physical pain or injury, e.g. hitting, pushing and kicking
- **emotional or psychological abuse** — any act that causes emotional pain or injury, e.g. threats, humiliation, controlling behaviours
- **financial abuse** — misuse or theft of money or assets
- **neglect** — failure to meet care needs, e.g. provide food, medicine or hygiene care
- **sexual abuse** — any sexual behaviour performed without a person's consent, including sexual contact and non-contact acts of a sexual nature.

Visit www.qld.gov.au/knowthesigns for more information about elder abuse.

Elder Abuse Helpline — make the call

1300 651 192 www.qld.gov.au/knowthesigns



Key statistics about elder abuse

Data from Queensland's Elder Abuse Prevention Unit suggest that most cases of elder abuse occur within families. Of the 1,780 notifications of abuse in 2018–19:

- 72 per cent of perpetrators were sons or daughters
- 32.4 per cent of perpetrators lived with the victim
- the victim was dependent on the perpetrator in 21.6 per cent of cases
- the most common age group was 80–84 years for victims, and 50–54 years for perpetrators.

Know the signs of elder abuse

Is an older person you know:

- showing unusual bruises or other injuries that they struggle to explain?
- afraid of someone close to them?
- anxious or nervous but unable to articulate why?
- reluctant to talk or make eye contact?
- deferring to another person to speak on their behalf?
- struggling to pay for bills, medication or necessities when they didn't previously?
- showing significant changes in their appearance in ways that make you worry for their health or wellbeing?

Help is available to stop elder abuse

If you suspect that an older person you know is being abused, or are experiencing elder abuse yourself, phone the **Elder Abuse Helpline on 1300 651 192**.

The helpline offers confidential information, support and referrals for older people experiencing abuse and anyone who witnesses or suspects the abuse of an older person. If you are concerned about an older person you know, helpline staff will talk things over with you and advise about how help may be provided. Depending on their situation, the older person may be able to contact the helpline themselves for support.

The helpline is open and available (9 am to 5 pm, Monday to Friday) to assist vulnerable older Queenslanders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Phone 1300 651 192 — anyone can make the call.

For more information about elder abuse and support services, visit www.qld.gov.au/knowthesigns

If you witness violence, or are worried that an older person is at immediate risk, call the police on triple zero (000).

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