

# National Elder Abuse Conference

July 2019

**ROCK  
THE BOAT**

## **Discussion Paper # 5**

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Our recipe for success—a contemporary and collaborative response  
to elder abuse in the community

Caxton Legal Center and our panel acknowledge  
the Jagera and Turrbal people as the first nations and custodians  
of the land on which we work.  
We remember their ancestors with respect and strive to achieve justice  
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

#### Chair:

**Virginia Trioli** – journalist, television anchor, radio presenter,  
writer and commentator

#### Panellists:

**David and Maggie Sheehan** – lived experience, Hervey Bay

**Antoinette Libertone** – Department of Health and Human  
Services, Victoria

**Alexia Huxley** – Council of the Ageing, Victoria

**Marlene Krasovitsky** – EveryAge Counts, New South Wales

**Barbara Blundell** – Curtin University, Western Australia

**Karyn Walsh** – Micah Projects, Queensland

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# OUR RECIPE FOR SUCCESS—A CONTEMPORARY AND COLLABORATIVE RESPONSE TO ELDER ABUSE IN THE COMMUNITY

## Session outline:

This final conference panel will draw together lived experience and conference discussions to inform the development of a contemporary and collaborative response to elder abuse in the community.

## Introductory remarks

We need to consider the necessary ingredients for a contemporary and collaborative response to elder abuse in the community. The timing for this discussion, of course, is critical. We have the national plan to respond to the abuse of older Australians that was recently released. Twelve elder abuse trial sites are underway. The elder abuse knowledge hub is going to be developed, and aged care and disability experiences are under more scrutiny as you saw just a moment ago from the premier. In my experiences, it is unusual for the premier to suddenly respond in that way and come in and say, 'Look, I am doing something'. You get the sense, the gas heat has been turned up underneath the pot, and they are feeling the heat. We are interested in the broader elder justice agenda and in identifying some of the emerging opportunities in and what is missing from practice policy, public awareness, engagement, education, training and research.

### Question 1

There has been increased focus, funding and collaboration in developing prevention and intervention responses to elder abuse in recent years. What issues need to be considered and addressed for these efforts to be truly successful. Focusing on lived experiences of David and Maggie Sheehan, what services were missing or not talking to each other when most needed?

## Response

**David Sheehan:** Well, we did not know there were services.

**Virginia Trioli:** That is the right way to answer that question. Yes. What services?

**David Sheehan:** So we did not know anything and it was only by chance I saw the ad for the Seniors Legal and Support Service. So once we got onto them, then it was easy going.

**Virginia Trioli:** Did you have a computer?

**David Sheehan:** Yes.

**Virginia Trioli:** Did you google it?

**David Sheehan:** No. I googled how to get rid of unwanted guests and the answer was, throw them out you know, change the locks. I thought that was a bit dangerous.

**Virginia Trioli:** A note to all the agencies in the room. You need to get in touch with your IT department. You need to sort an algorithm so that when someone searches certain topics your organisation pops up. That is easily fixed. There are young people out there who can do that for you.

**David Sheehan:** Once police arrived, they were terrific, they were really, really good.

**Virginia Trioli:** They were on it?

**David Sheehan:** Yeah, they were on it straight away. And the police sergeant, who first attended, got things sorted out very quickly and ...

**Virginia Trioli:** Did they know what services to connect you with?

**David Sheehan:** Well, they connected the offenders with the courts, that was all I was interested in it, but ...

**Virginia Trioli:** But what about all the other support that you might have needed, did they do that too.

**David Sheehan:** We were involved with the senior legal services before that. And they kept telling us, if you have any trouble call police. And that is the one thing, which has been brought up during the conference, that people do not do that. They do not call police because it is a family member. And we did not call police either, they called police, the offenders called police. So that was very helpful for us. And that ...

**Virginia Trioli:** It was an own goal, wasn't it?

**David Sheehan:** It was an own goal, and at the time I thought, dumb and dumber. The police sergeant handled it very well. And so the court thing started, and the police officer, who attended after that, came around a number of times because they had to serve papers on us and on them. And then they had to escort them off the property. And I cannot tell you how good a site that was to see these people driving out the gate with the police car behind them.

**Virginia Trioli:** I know, I totally get it. I want to ask Maggie, were there any particular services that you would have found useful or you would have liked to have known about?

**Maggie Sheehan:** All of them. Because there is such little advertising of all the different agencies you possibly could use. And even our own lawyer who we spoke to before. He did not even know, we asked him, we wanted to get rid of these people. What is the procedure? And they did not seem to know, and it was literally across the road from the seniors legal office. It was their office was just across the road to the legal office as far as that door.

**Virginia Trioli:** A question for you Maggie just before I let you go. Do you know what those agencies are now?

**Maggie Sheehan:** Still do not know the total of them? But that is a little bit of failing on my side because ...

**Virginia Trioli:** No, I am not suggesting that. I am just wondering if it is part of the process that you therefore logically became informed of them or still not.

**Maggie Sheehan:** Yeah. Well, because we have been so busy with coming to this conference, but I am going to start doing things a little bit different now. I have learned a lot from being here.

*Ageism is the underpinning concept that enables and allows abuse of older people.*

EveryAGE Counts has been running a campaign to tackle ageism faced by older Australians. What is the real impact of ageism in every-day life?

**Marlena Krasovitzky:** EveryAGE Counts is a campaign that is running, we are still very early days, but our heart and soul are in it, and our sole purpose is to tackle ageism and to reframe how we think about getting older. Because our view is that ageism, which has so often been acknowledged over the last couple of days, is the underpinning concept that enables and allows abuse of older people, as well as a whole bunch of other issues that older people come across in their lives. Whether it is income security, housing or travel insurance, whatever it is, it is those ongoing negative assumptions and stereotypes that diminish the value of older lives and allows us as a society, as individuals and as bystanders to look away and to trivialise an experience that comes to us or to infantilise the person who has told us of their experience.

And we have this script running in our head about, oh, well maybe they are a bit confused. Maybe that did not really happen. And we dismiss older people and we disempower them. We make it hard to navigate the system, we make it hard to access information. EveryAGE Counts is wholly and solely about putting ageism on the table, bringing it out of the shadows where it has been hiding in plain sight as we were told earlier. We want to strategise around it, and use all of the levers we have available to us to dismantle it.

**Virginia Trioli:** It is interesting, we have heard on a number of occasions during this conference about the idea that the experience of Australia waking up to family violence and what followed from it, is instructive in this space, in the same way as sexism and contempt has now been shown to be. If you look at the spectrum, that is the starting point where it may end in family violence. Surely ageism is the starting point where it may then end in elder abuse.

**Marlena Krasovitzky:** Absolutely. And we have looked at other great social movements around the world that have changed our attitudes. Feminism being one of them, but also our attitudes around racism or marriage equality. And the key common denominator is exactly as you say. It is starting with awareness, and we have to, as individuals and as a community, start to identify what ageism looks like in its many and varied forms and start to call it out.

*What has been effective in changing ageist social norms?*

**Marlena Krasovitzky:** It is very much the model upon which EveryAGE Counts is built – a long-term, multifaceted and coalition-based approach. It is not something any one of us can do on our own or any one organisation. This has to be a coalition and a collaborative effort. I am very pleased to see a number of our coalition members here in the room today and yesterday. But this is also long term, our initial planning horizon is 10 to 15 years, that is how long it takes to start to change social norms.

*Collaboration is key in preventing elder abuse. How can collaboration between all sectors improve?*

**Alexia Huxley:** I would like to go back a little bit. One of the things we have not talked about much at this conference is the concept of primary prevention, which is very strong in other areas of family violence. We talked a lot about response and identification of risk. But we have to look at how do we prevent elder abuse as a form of family violence before it occurs. How do we change awareness and attitudes at the community level so that there is a culture in which people do not tolerate elder abuse, know what it is and recognise it? That is really where the elder abuse prevention networks are operating at the community level to raise that awareness, but also, with that, to change attitudes.

**Virginia Trioli:** And what is at the heart of that? Are there some key indicators or some key responses that you can share with us?

**Alexia Huxley:** It is very exploratory at this stage in Victoria. We have had 10 networks going. Some of them started at the end of 2017, others during 2018. We did some research last year, some action research on what they were doing. And out

of that, we looked at what are the kind of drivers that people in those networks think lead to elder abuse. We have quite a lot of information about that. How do you set up an effective network, and what kind of things can networks do that will be useful. But I think we are very much still exploring what those things are. What we know, and I think it has been reflected in this conference as well, is that intergenerational approaches are very useful. Bringing together your local TAFE and your local primary school working with older people to raise awareness about elder abuse. One network, for instance, did yarn bombing, right. The local TAFE students working with older people, yarn bombed in Warrnambool to raise awareness about elder abuse. We know that intergenerational approaches are good. I think we both just ...

**Virginia Trioli:** And that gets that contact going as well.

**Alexia Huxley:** Absolutely. Younger people change their attitudes about older people if they have contact with them, we know that from research. Some of the other things that have shown to be useful, and we have seen here, are creative approaches. We do not have to just tell sob stories and sad stories. They are important and they are very important to us. But you can raise awareness about these issues in a fun way as well? And I think that is a really important part of the approach.

**Virginia Trioli:** I want to just return you to that other question about the changes needed to improve collaboration between the sectors.

**Alexia Huxley:** What we have seen is that networks have been led by different kinds of organisations, community legal centers or health centers. But what is really important is that they bring in a wide variety of different groups. They work at the local community level. They bring in police and other kinds of services. They also bring in sporting clubs, bowls clubs and groups like men's sheds. A variety of different groups are coming together to collaborate, which is one of the really important things. What also works well with this kind of model is that people who already work at the community level, whether it is a legal center or health center, know how to operate at that level and so they can form those networks. What I think is difficult is for people to understand that actually primary prevention is different to response, and it needs different kinds of skills. It probably needs a community work approach rather than a clinical approach. And that is where fostering collaboration is most useful, to get more people to understand what primary prevention is.

*A range of work is occurring in Victoria around elder abuse, including trials of an integrated model of care for responding to suspected elder abuse at five Victorian health services. What are some of the features of integrated interventions that are successful in preventing and then addressing elder abuse within families?*

**Antoinette Libertone:** The models have only been operating for a year, so we have an independent evaluation, which is telling us that the model is working and some things need to change. But the model is client centered and it is family inclusive. We have heard a lot about families today. It is a unique model because it actually does include primary prevention, early intervention and responses.

The learnings from it is that it provides diverse responses for diverse older cohort. We have a very diverse cohort when we are working with older people. There are four components and there are learnings from that. And they all intertwine and we will put that together as a response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria. And now we are there to strengthen what already exists. The first component is called an Elder Abuse Prevention and Response Liaison Officer. Their role is to give a consultation. If you suspect elder abuse and you do not know how to talk about it, you actually can ring them and have a chat to them about how do I talk to this person? How do I work with the person when I am in their home and the son is in the bedroom. You have someone there supporting you. And it being family inclusive does not mean that we do not hold perpetrators accountable. The second bit is training. It is about training the workforce on how to have the conversation.

And we are targeting workforces that are already going into people's homes, and they do not have to be going into someone's home for elder abuse. They might be providing an aged care assessment service, they might just be visiting the older person as a volunteer. But what we are trying to do is to get them talking about elder abuse as part of that conversation. And the third

bit, which I heard mentioned earlier today and also came out of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, is that if you do get a disclosure from the older person, they do not want a legal response. They want to restore and repair their relationships with their families. We have counselling available, mediation and financial counseling. We also do have a legal response if that is the path where the person wants to go. And the last bit is, what Alexia has been talking about, a prevention network in the community.

Their role is to go out, raise awareness and look at the drivers. Elder abuse is new. It started in 2008 for us in Victoria. There are things that we can learn from our colleagues in family violence, but we are still exploring. And the Victorian government recently announced that we actually going to have a framework for primary prevention, and we are also going to evaluate the networks. The models intertwine with each other and everyone has an opportunity to participate in the models.

**Virginia Trioli:** I just want to pause you on a couple of points there and I know it is early days, but you mentioned that you are also tasked with exploring the drivers of elder abuse. Is there any early information coming back on that particular point?

**Antoinette Libertone:** I think Alexia's report summarises some of those drivers. We do know some of the drivers, but what we do not want to do, as Alexia pointed out, is lock that in and have people say to us, you jumped in too early. It is an opportunity to explore. Ageism is certainly one of the theories, but we are looking at what the other theories might be that underline that practice. We found that there is also adult child elder abuse and intimate partner violence happening in that elder abuse space, so we cannot close that door. And it is about dispelling the myths when it comes to elder abuse. We see it as a form of family violence.

*What is the role of government in promoting this type of collaborative effort?*

**Antoinette Libertone:** The Victorian government has a big role in this. They are pivotal. We have two ministers who this portfolio falls under. We have Minister Donellan and Minister Williams, one minister for preventing family violence and one minister for aged care. And they both play a pivotal role. We also have an ambassador whom you heard from before. He goes out and speaks directly to older people and reports to the minister. We also have a statewide advisory group, which is chaired by a parliamentary secretary that feeds up. We are also part of a big reform agenda. It is a 10-year reform. And we recently launched our campaign, which will be evaluated; it is about respecting older people and raising awareness about elder abuse.

*What are the key program elements and learnings from the implementation of integrated responses in other sectors that may assist those working to prevent and address elder abuse?*

Integration across services can take a range of forms and there are costs and always limitations to the integration.

**Karyn Walsh:** I think that we have to be very careful about knowing what we mean by it, and that there has to be space for different conversations as well as conversations together.

**Virginia Trioli:** What do you mean?

**Karyn Walsh:** Because there are a lot of things that are very different for people according to age, gender and sexuality. We have to lift up the voices of difference, and we have to always make sure we hear the voices of people who are experiencing the issue. And what people constantly say is that they do not know where to go because it is not clear. I think that we all have to take that responsibility to be clearer. But we also have to make sure that integration is not becoming the one thing. It is about each of us having our role and being very clear about that role, understanding the dynamics of power, even with us and between relationships.

I think in the domestic violence field, the whole issue of changing the narrative is about trying to look at prevention. When we originally started talking about the new initiatives in Queensland, it was always a competition about what are we talking about?

Crisis work or prevention work or integrated services or integration with police or integration with the courts. We have to have the space for different conversations and not be competitive. Everyone is important. We need to nurture equality in our society regardless of what is causing that inequality. We have to have those values, particularly respect, and family relationships need to be grounded in respect, not grounded in exploitation or grounded in whose needs are more important than the other.

We are seeing so many older people and particularly older women being homeless, who have given their money to their children without any guidance, because they want the best for their adult children. We all owe it to our families and to people who do not have a family, we have the responsibility as a society to send that narrative of equality and respect. We have to make sure that we understand and also be prepared to walk with people through that. We have lived through a lot of generational change. When I think of when domestic violence first started, no one believed it. You had to hide people for want of people being dragged out, or you were told that people were busting up families and that marriage was forever. And these are values that people can hold when it works well. They are not too great when you are being a victim of violence or abuse. So how can you have that positive vision for each other as families and as a society, and what do we do when that vision is broken, and what are the systems we need to make that vision real.

**Virginia Trioli:** On that system point, and just to loop back around, is there any experience you can share with us about what helps organisations work better together or integrate better together in the service of a program or an ideal?

**Karyn Walsh:** Often the sector gets criticised for not being collaborative and not working together. But when you look at the funding that people get, they are not doing a bad job. And I think that we need to lift up the cooperation that people actually do have with each other.

**Virginia Trioli:** Can I ask, how did you do that?

**Karyn Walsh:** Maybe we should talk more about how many services people talk to every day when they are responding to somebody, because that is cooperation. Cooperation is the starting point of collaboration. I think when there are funded mechanisms for collaboration, it can really break through some of the differences that might exist, the conversations, the community work model of having local conversations and local leadership. Government does not have to be the center of everything, and funding should not be the center of everything. I think how we can develop real partnerships and collaboration at a community level, is by recognising that it needs funding without control because you cannot do it without time. And you cannot ask people with lived experience to do it voluntary all the time. You cannot ask elders to do it voluntary all the time. We need to make sure that we are giving diverse voices the resources, not just a central pool of money to collect their voices.

*What are some of the issues that have been identified in research, that have not already been discussed by the panel?*

**Barbara Blundell:** To give a bit of background, I started off as a social worker working in aged care advocacy, which is where I got my interest in this area. And my PhD was around human rights in residential aged care, which seems ironic in a way, because it was such a long time ago now. And then this issue has come up again at the forefront of the Royal Commission. I would agree with a lot of the things that the panelists and indeed everyone has discussed over the last two days. I am sure this is a difficult session for many of you in the audience at the end of two very intense days. We appreciate your attention and patience in being here. Some of the things that have really stuck with me is the importance of designing services around the people who we are trying to help.

Take Maggie and David for example, I was just at a focus group about community participation last week, and it is amazing how many people tell you that they had not heard of any services. But we in service land, we think of course we have been putting the information out there for 20, 30 years. We have all these brochures and community education campaigns, yet the community at large still does not really know about this. I think a lot of work needs to be done in this area, and probably money and resources put into that. Also addressing diversity, diverse experience and vulnerabilities is really difficult. We try to find solutions that benefit the most, that are the easiest way and the most cost-effective. But often that does not work for



the people that are most vulnerable such as the people who do not have phones, who live in rural and remote communities, who might not speak English, who might have dementia and other disabilities. How do we reach those people? And I think community-based services and connections can really play a big part there.

### *Identifying prevention and service provision in rural and remote areas.*

Research found that many of the same things occur, logically enough, in metro areas, but they realised that the way interventional help or service provision should be applied is different in that particular area. Why is the application different?

**Barbara Blundell:** I did a scoping literature review that looked at things that had been done nationally and internationally around elder abuse in rural and remote areas. And we also looked at family and domestic violence because there was not a lot of information about elder abuse in these areas. And forgive me if I missed your work because we only could look at what we could find online. The interesting thing was that a lot of the services and supports are very metro centric. In Western Australia, which is a huge state, we have services that say '... we cover the whole state'. But what that really means is that we have an office in Perth with a phone, and if you need us call us, but only from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.

The responses are very restricted. Workers might make visits and provide education and little drips and drabs. Things that have been done in other areas is to look at community asset mappings. To see what is already in that area? How do you coordinate services to work together in a collaborative way? How can you be creative? Because services are often very restricted in their mandates. You can only do this, but often people can find ways to work around that. How do you fund services to provide quality services in rural and remote areas? That is very expensive. And what do older people in those areas want. There are big gaps in remote areas, especially in Australia. We have lots of remote pockets where there might only be a policeman and a nurse. What do you do in those situations?

**Virginia Trioli:** Yeah. Do you want to jump in there, Alexia?

**Alexia Huxley:** Yes. From the experience of the networks, some of which are in rural Victoria, we can say that people will not ring a number in Melbourne to get advice.

What seems to work well, even if the specialist advice is in Melbourne or wherever, is if there are local people and local services that understand enough to help an older person to then feel confident to ring that service. There is a level of triaging needed at the local level that can help bridging that gap. It is not a hundred percent solution, but it is a way that we can help people who live in rural areas work out how they can access the specialist support because there are never going to be the local services due to the sparsity of population.

**Virginia Trioli:** Anyone else wants to jump in before we move off from that area? I did want to come back to David and Maggie, before we leave this area. Given what you have heard, any particular responses that you would like to make to that?

**Maggie Sheehan:** Well, I personally actually went to the vets, doctors, butchers, anything I could think of to propose to advertise the legal service ...

**Virginia Trioli:** You went around with the posters?

**Maggie Sheehan:** Yes.

**Virginia Trioli:** Please tell me the legal service at least printed the posters out for you.

**Maggie Sheehan:** Yes, they did. It was a really bright one that advertised the service and a home telephone number that you could ring. And we had a response. One guy had actually seen an article in the local newspaper about us giving these talks, and he hung on to that from last September and actually got in touch with us two months ago.

**Virginia Trioli:** What was his situation?

**Maggie Sheehan:** I do not really know because we have to refer them to the legal services because we are not experts, we just give our talks.

**Virginia Trioli:** Well, I know you are experts because you have lived it, but ...

**Maggie Sheehan:** Well, yeah, but we do not have the legal knowledge so we will straight away refer to the legal services.

**Virginia Trioli:** Community activism in front of you, right there? You could teach GetUp! a thing or two, I reckon. That is a non-party political comment.

## Question 2

What are the contemporary or collaborative responses to elder abuse that could be supported as part of implementing the federal government's *National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of older Australians*?

The federal government is committed to building a knowledge hub, an online resource to improve community awareness and access to information on elder abuse. If you could allocate the government's elder abuse budget in addition to this, what else would you spend it on?

## Response

**David Sheehan:** Well, you might be pleased, I would genuinely give it to talkback radio.

**Virginia Trioli:** I love this man. Well you can say talkback radio is the engine, it is a meeting place. It is the community hub. It is the well of so many communities around the country, particularly rural communities. It is the starting point of so many of these issues.

**David Sheehan:** It is. We have a 93-year-old lady living next door to us, who lives on her own and her radio goes all day long. So she is listening ...

**Virginia Trioli:** Stop her at that.

**David Sheehan:** Well, we do not stop her, we cannot hear it. But when we go over there her radio is going and she is listening to talk back, to community radio, news-based programs.

**Virginia Trioli:** She would be learning a lot.

**David Sheehan:** She keeps so well informed about current affairs. And so I think that she is not unusual. I think most older people would rather listen to the radio than sit and cogitate in front of the television. She is slowly going about her daily chores while listening to the radio. So I would give the radio a big chunk of the money.

**Virginia Trioli:** Unfortunately, I don't think that will happen but it is a nice idea.

**David Sheehan:** And then you find people like Maggie who cart around posters.

**Virginia Trioli:** You said before that you had a computer so you could google things, but I guess there might be many in your community who do not, or computer literacy is not where it should be.

**David Sheehan:** That is right. Our neighbor does not have a computer. She does not have a smartphone. She has a cell phone, but only for emergencies purposes. So when an emergency happens, she has probably forgotten how to use it. But no bill. A lot of old people do not have access to computers. So the hub is a great idea, but there will be a whole section of people who will not be able to access the hub either.

**Virginia Trioli:** Right. So therefore you need the money allocated in a more direct and connected way to local communities, perhaps to your local library.

**David Sheehan:** And bowls clubs, RSLs and the like.

**Virginia Trioli:** And also the police Vulnerable Persons and Domestic Violence Unit?

**David Sheehan:** Yes. The new unit just started up in the Wide Bay area. Just two or three months ago. And that is a great idea. Terrific idea. So they are going to specialise on vulnerable people. We did get a great service from the local police, but they got plenty of other duties as well. I think having more of this unit around would be a terrific idea.

*Ageism is a structural problem requiring systemic and institutional remedies.*

*What are the areas that we could focus on more intentionally and collaboratively to address these?*

**Marlena Krasovitzky:** When I think of ageism and what we can do about it, I think about the three interrelated aspects of what ageism is. The first one is attitude. All the things that we carry in our heads and things that we ascribe to older people. I think about behaviors, which is the second tier. The exclusion, the discrimination, the marginalisation, the infantilisation. I think there is work to be done there. And then I think about the services, the policies, the programs that have embedded in them those ageist norms about how people access systems, how under-resourced they are. In terms of responses to ageism, all of those areas and tiers require activity. And the key thing is coalition and a collaborative effort. None of us can do this on our own. And whilst the campaign is not a service perspective that I am offering here, there are so many touchpoints in what everybody else on the panel has been describing where I can see how we can and should collaborate. My message is always, join us, follow us, sign up. But the key thing that we need to do around tackling ageism, apart from the research and the political advocacy and all of that, is to build a social movement. We need to get active and hand those pamphlets out at the local butchers and libraries. And within our own spheres of influence, start to get active. Because once we become aware, we become agitated and we become concerned. And we need to get active, and each of us and the organisations we work in can and should respond to ageism.

**Virginia Trioli:** Yes, I think it is really interesting, and I suddenly remembered with horror, that the family violence discussion really only kicked off nationally because of the experience of Rosie Batty. And I think your challenge is to get this going as the discussion before you get another Rosie Batty.

**Marlena Krasovitzky:** Indeed.

**Virginia Trioli:** Because Rosie knows what she did and why she did it. And she says day after day that I wish I did not have to. I wish I was not put in a situation where I lost my son, and now I am the poster girl for family violence.

**Marlena Krasovitzky:** And what a terrible situation that is. And yes, it is interesting when we talk to people in the Australian community about ageism, they say, 'oh, is that a thing? What is that?' And then when you start to probe, often the first experience of ageism for people, who may never have experienced prejudice or discrimination in their life, is often when they are applying for jobs or when they are in the workforce. 'What do you mean I am too old? What do you mean my application has been binned?' That is where often for many people it starts to emerge.

**Virginia Trioli:** Yes. Bronwyn Bishop. I know she herself has been the butt of some jokes from time to time, but she said something very important to me a number of years ago when I was interviewing her. She said, if you want to deal with ageism

in the workplace, she said, start in the HR department. She said, your HR departments are staffed with people who are 35 and younger, sometimes 25 and younger, and they will get the CV across their desk and it says 60 or 65. Not that one. You need to start there, because they are the ones starting the whole process of hiring or employing or not for that matter.

**Marlena Krasovitzky:** Oh, yes. All I wanted to say is if we can get more people to get active around this and to become the poster people about their particular issue, without the tragedy most definitely, we can start to really activate a social movement.

#### *What further work needs to be done to understand and evaluate elder abuse prevention interventions?*

The first national prevalence study on elder abuse is expected to provide a platform for identifying future research priorities that can be addressed through the National Plan.

**Alexia Huxley:** What we did over a 12-month period was research with five of the networks, and our report will be on the Seniors Rights Victoria website, called Older, Better Together. It includes a series of recommendations from the research that we did. Some of the research looked at what the drivers of elder abuse are. At the macro level, I think we agree with what Marlena was saying about ageism being a really important driver. Also, gender inequity. We cannot ignore the statistics of services like SRV that two thirds or 70% even of the people who come in with cases are women. And that is not just because women live longer.

It is clearly the case that there is also a gender component to elder abuse. It may be around intimate partner violence or it may not. I think intimate partner violence for older people is an area where we need a whole lot more research, and we need people who understand how to respond, because I think it is often ignored. The other things that we have seen is the kind of drivers people talk about at the community level. They are, if you like, manifestations of ageism in different ways, but they are things like a misunderstanding about capacity. The kind of assumptions that we are all going a bit gaga after we turn 65. Particularly, if you have a diagnosis of dementia; it is like a door you have gone through and now you are on the other side and you cannot make any decisions.

**Virginia Trioli:** Like going into the land of illness from wellness.

**Alexia Huxley:** Well, exactly. It is assumed now you will not be able to make any decisions. I think we have to say that education about topics such as capacity and dementia are actually really important in terms of elder abuse prevention. Another thing that came up as a driver is the very topical fear of the aged care system. Particularly fear of residential aged care is actually a driver of elder abuse, because people will tolerate a lot rather than going to aged care. It is infinitely important to get some credibility around our aged care system again. As well as those things, I think I have already talked about the importance of exploring ways, at the community level, of how to respond and undertake primary prevention. I think that is also important. And what we need is government support to do this because you cannot do this without some money. These networks have operated with very small amounts of money and a lot of ingenuity, but you do need to be able to do something. But you have to let people get on and explore and experiment for themselves.

**Virginia Trioli:** A couple of comments coming in, following our family violence reference. Angela Depew, she said the Margaritas are the Rosie Battys, but they are more frail, how can they be heard beyond this conference. And Dominica Sparks says, 'I feel sad that we seem to have forgotten about Cynthia Thorensen. She died because her informal carers neglected her to the point where she died. Please discuss. And in saying what I did, I don't mean to diminish the fact that yes, clearly there have been many victims of elder abuse, that's evident. We know that the horrific thing about Rosie Batty was clearly it took an act of absolute monstrosity, done in the public eye, for suddenly that issue to coalesce. There were many, many women and children and others who had died as a result of family violence before. The horror of Rosie Batty and her beautiful son simply making that point. But yes, not in order to downplay the reality of other horrors involved with elder abuse'.

*What are the tailored responses needed to strengthen our services, and how can the broad range of agencies offering support collaborate more effectively?*

**Antoinette Libertone:** We would say that elder abuse does not discriminate. That it does not just target frail older people in residential care. We never know what is around the corner. I can see someone in the audience who said to me at a meeting a few weeks ago that any of us can be at risk of elder abuse, someone might have a stroke and then they become vulnerable and then things start to happen. It does not discriminate. The other thing about elder abuse is that it is everyone's business. It is not one person's business, it is the business of the community, the sector and government. This has been spoken about, but recognising diversity, the cohort that we work for is diverse. One size does not fit all. The biggest thing is about respecting older people and their preferences. And how do you reach older people when they are not coming to you? Understanding family work. Because in the Royal Commission we talked about Rosie Batty and a lot of people gave evidence. One of the things that older people said is that they want to restore and repair their relationship with their families. Understanding family work is so important, but again that does not mean that we do not hold perpetrators to account.

I think the other thing is understanding legislation and policy at a state level and a Commonwealth level in Victoria. We would say elder abuse is a form of family violence, and we would use the Family Violence Act and the Guardianship Act, which are probably the biggest pieces of legislation. My advice when working with providers is that it is important to provide evidence for the work that you are doing. When the 10 prevention networks, that have been talked about again today and that are managed by the department, put forward their project plans, they need to provide us with evidence so we can write memos and send the message out about the work that they are actually doing to get success. And again, elder abuse is complex and not one service response can own it all. We have to work together and collaborate. So that is probably how I would end it.

*What can universities bring to the table in terms of developing collaborative responses to elder abuse?*

**Barbara Blundell:** Well, hopefully, a lot. What I have found great about this conference is seeing and hearing about what other people do in such different ways. Universities, academics, researchers and educators can really be part of that picture. I do not know if it is known to many of you, but because there has been lots of cuts in university funding over the last few years, there has been actually a strengthening focus in industry collaborations and demand-driven research. We are focused and seeking out those partnerships, and we are trying to make sure that our research is really relevant and informative for community, society and organisations.

Social work has always been a bit that way, but other departments are like that as well. I have done some great research with Advocare and the Older Persons Advocacy Network into things that we both wanted to focus on. Hopefully we can use and translate the research to get that information out there. There is a lot of research being done in different organisations, and we have spoken about it on this panel. The thing that I hope the knowledge hub will be successful at is to help disseminate that to everyone, because we are all doing our little bits and pieces across the different jurisdictions.

Having a national idea of what is going on and what we can learn from each other is very important. And the other thing is education. A lot of us teach students as well as do research, and I try to bring those industry links and focus into my teaching. I get Advocare to come and speak to my social work students every year about elder abuse, about rights of older people in aged care and what services and supports are out there, which I think is a really great thing. I just like to see that in other disciplines as well. I know there is a little bit of work done separately, so having something joined up would be great and more consistent. Eileen Webb mentioned today about law students not really learning about working with older people. In social work, it is only a relatively recent area that I teach a unit in social work with older people. And that has only been around for about eight years. When I was a student we did not learn about older people at all. The age wave is coming, as we all know, it is really important that older people are recognised in education systems, in services and in so many ways in society.

*Trauma-informed practice is very important to working in this space.*

**Karyn Walsh:** Well, I think we all have to remember that people are seeking assistance when they are in trauma. They are not going to use the language that we use, and they are not going to have a little pathway mapped out about what they want us to do. And sometimes ...

**Virginia Trioli:** They are just crying out for help.

**Karyn Walsh:** Well yes, and sometimes it is not consistent and sometimes it is fragmented. People's experiences are evolving, and what people say one day might differ from what they say next week. And we should not be judging that and say, 'Oh, I am not sure if this fits our eligibility criteria. I am not sure whether we should wait or whatever services do'. I get very upset when I hear some of the elements of why people are rejected from services—because of a lack of clarity when they have just described an attempted strangulation. Our language is really important. I think elder abuse and family violence need their own narrative even though they are intricately linked. But most people do see elder abuse as happening in residential or to people in their home. But family violence needs a lot more work in our system. We get calls about domestic and family violence all the time, and the gendered nature of that violence, the care and the type of relationship all need to be taken into account. I would like to acknowledge the 82-year-old woman who died this week from family violence in Queensland. People are often living in total isolation and having enormous burdens of care that no one seems to know about. And when you reflect on the situation or review the deaths, conduct different kind of analyses or research, there is that recurrent theme of people living in such isolation that no one observed that they needed help or needed some intervention. The Vulnerable Persons Unit, we are involved within Brisbane, do get called out, and a lot more people ring police to do welfare checks because they think something is not quite right next door. It is great that we can now choose the right system to go to, and the response will be tailored to whether it is domestic violence or family violence.

If there is a family member with a mental illness who is suddenly not taking their medications or something has changed in an episodic nature, people tend to struggle and try to work it out themselves. How can we create respectful ways of intervention that are not judging, that respect people's privacy, and that do not judge people because they have let something happen. People feel a great sense of shame in coming forward to talk about that violence has occurred in the family. It is not as clear cut as the literature might think it is. I think we always have to be prepared to have those conversations, we have to listen and unravel what it is people want to do, what resources are available, what the legislation says. But sometimes people just cannot jump to it and then they get forgotten, and then it all escalates when we probably could have prevented that escalation. We need to not just be trauma-informed when we are working in areas of abuse and violence. We actually need to be trauma-sensitive and really understand that in the moment people are in an experience of trauma when telling their story.

## Questions from the audience

**Audience member:** Thank you. My father got married at 95. And when I visited, he was sedated with amitriptyline, and I know this because I am a GP and I knew the lady's medication. He also had old batteries in his hearing aids. Another time I visited, he was wearing a jumper on one of the hottest days in Tasmanian summer. Another day he was so cold in the morning, he refused to go anywhere. So I had to deal with that, I did not realise it the whole extent for a year. The only time I actually knew something was going on was when I called unannounced and worked out the real situation. I would say to everyone, it would really be nice if someone could drop in on the clients at a time when they are not expected to get a good overall view of what is really happening because I think that is so important. Thank you.

**Virginia Trioli:** Yeah, that is a really useful statement.

**Audience member:** Hi. It is not a question, it is just a statement. I am Sherry. I work in a community organisation in Redcliffe, and I work with seniors. While I agree with everybody that we do need community collaboration when dealing with seniors, I think there needs to be more of a coalface where people have a hotline to call. But the hotline refers to me. I am not

qualified to actually support these people. I am not a counsellor, I am not a mental health worker. I do not have any kind of medical background. I had a client just last week, which I had to refer on to Caxton because it was more of a legal nature. We need teams of people that have that knowledge and know how to respond adequately, and it needs to be in the home, I agree.

**Virginia Trioli:** Would anybody like to say anything to that, Antoinette?

**Antoinette Libertone:** I think in Victoria we are still learning, but we have tailored our training for people who are intersecting with older persons. We are also training people to refer clients to appropriate services and support them in making contact with those services. For example, in Victoria, you would probably refer clients to Seniors Rights Victoria. It is about connecting with an older person. If they trust you, they will tell you a lot of information. If someone does not trust you, they will not give you the information. But what do you do with that? We are trying to build people's capacity to have that conversation and to be supported with protocols and policies in the services that we are working with.

**Audience member:** Thank you, Maria Barry. Just a general question for everyone here today on community leadership. I completed the community leadership program in a rural area last year and wanted to know more about how we can establish a network or contacts with organisations. Antoinette knows me, I have been stalking her for many years. Any ideas that could come from you today. Thank you.

**Antoinette Libertone:** I would not say you have been stalking me. I have probably learned a bit from you. In Victoria, we can connect you to one of the prevention networks, you can join one of the elder abuse prevention networks and work with them. We would welcome that.

**Virginia Trioli:** And Barbara, you wanted to say something?

**Barbara Blundell:** Yes, I just wanted to respond as part of the research we did looked into that, and we found that one of the recommendations was that community collaboration needs to be funded and resourced. You need to make sure there is a driver and someone to lead that process. Definitely.

**Audience member:** It is about raising awareness about elder abuse and domestic and family violence. Who should be the anchor speakers? Is it a local media campaign? Is that going to be more effective than a state national media campaign or a collaborative CSA, meaning community service announcement? I mean we have seen similar things for all sorts of social-change arguments, usually around family violence. Does anyone have a strong feeling on what might be more effective?

**Alexia Huxley:** In Victoria now we have a CSA, we have a promotional campaign by the government around elder abuse. And I think that is absolutely fabulous. But what we also know is if we are talking at the community level, we need people who have local credibility and local knowledge. And it goes back to what Antoinette is saying about ...

**Virginia Trioli:** And also what Maria was saying about community leadership.

**Alexia Huxley:** Yes. It is important that we are training people and organisations who have that capacity to do awareness-raising at the local level. I do not know about other states, but in Victoria, we do a lot of community education. Seniors Rights Victoria does education across the state. That is a really important process as well. We need multiple levels. Particularly in rural and regional areas, you can get a lot of media coverage around this. And that is really important.

**Virginia Trioli:** Did you want to say something, Maggie?

**Maggie Sheehan:** Yes, please. Over the last 12 months or 18 months, David and I have gone out into the community, giving our talks, and we have had a lot of response. And also the legal services have had a lot to respond to after our talks. So we are spreading the word. The rest of us can do it as well.

**Virginia Trioli:** Did you want to jump in and say something? Thanks, Marlena.

**Marlena Krasovitzky:** From a social change perspective, do it all. Use every lever at your disposal. And what works in one area will be quite different to what works in another area. Just go for it and try and do it as comprehensively as you can, but also in a sustained way.

**Virginia Trioli:** And with that, we are going to thank our final panel for this terrific two-day conference. Please join me in thanking them? David and Maggie, Antoinette, Alexia and Marlena, Barbara and Karyn. Thank you so much. Thank you to all of you, Thank you.

**ROCK  
THE BOAT**