

One of the worst manifestations of ageism and inequality in our society is elder abuse.

On World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (15 June) the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is drawing attention to the marked increase in cases of elder abuse being reported across Australia.

AASW CEO Cindy Smith said that as COVID-19 restrictions ease we are seeing older people returning to activities that are sadly leading the incidence of abuse to coming to light.

“With older people beginning to return to GPs, community health services, aged care services and other supports, social workers are reporting that many more cases of elder abuse are now being picked up by these services across the country.”

“Social workers are also reporting an increase in the severity of cases, particularly for older people who were in COVID lockdowns with abusive family members. A trend which is very concerning.”

Ms Smith said that awareness campaigns, such as Victoria’s Respect Older People: Call it out campaign, have also led to a greater recognition of the types and impacts that elder abuse can have on an older person.

“The more people who know this, the better equipped we are as a society to end elder abuse. However, we also need more funding for frontline elder abuse services, and we need more aged care staff, whether they work in residential or in-home care, to be better trained to pick up on signs of elder abuse and to be able to respond effectively.”

“As we have seen with the final report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety elder abuse is far too common, but now that a light has started to shine on its prevalence, we need to take the opportunity to ensure that no older Australian ever experiences abuse again,” she said.

Elder abuse is any act which causes harm to an older person and is carried out by someone they know and trust such as a family member or friend. The abuse may be physical, social, financial, psychological or sexual and can include mistreatment and neglect.

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