

Abuse Prevention Program (APP)

The Aged Rights Advocacy Service (ARAS) advocates for older people whose rights and entitlements are at risk. ARAS works across several programs including residential aged care, community care, abuse prevention and Aboriginal advocacy. ARAS advocates can represent the older person or support them to speak for themselves.

The ARAS Abuse Prevention Program (APP) assists older people living in the community, who are experiencing, or at risk of, abuse from those with whom they are in a relationship of trust, such as family or friends. (The ARAS Residential Care Team can support residents of aged care facilities who are experiencing abuse.)

Abuse might include one or more of the following forms: financial, psychological/emotional, physical, sexual, social and/or neglect.

Rights of Older People

In supporting older people to uphold their rights, APP is guided by the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (1991) that include the following:

- **Independence** - includes access to basic needs, health care, work, education programs, the right to live at home as long as possible in supportive, safe environments
- **Participation** - in social activities and opportunities to share their knowledge and skills with their community
- **Care** - that maintains their optimum level of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and includes access to social and legal services
- **Self-fulfilment** - to realise their potential and access educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources
- **Dignity** - to be treated fairly, to be valued in their own right, to live in dignity and security, to be free of exploitation, physical and mental abuse, to be able to exercise personal autonomy.

When an Older Person or their Representative Contacts the APP, an Advocate will:

- Listen to and clarify their story
- Refer them to a more appropriate agency if ARAS is not able to assist
- Identify the issues and desired outcomes for the older person
- Provide them with information about their rights and responsibilities
- Suggest options and explain the possible consequences of different actions
- Provide support, as needed, to implement the desired plan of action
- Only act on their behalf with their permission
- Suggest ways to safeguard their future, maintain control and improve their quality of life.

Aged Rights Advocacy Service Promotes the Following:

- Older people have rights
- Abuse of these rights is NOT OK
- Help is available
- Good planning can protect their rights.

Education Sessions

ARAS provides informative interactive education sessions for consumers, community groups, staff and students. To book a session please call the number below.

Further Information

ARAS is a free, statewide, confidential and independent service.

For more information or support to protect and uphold your rights, please contact ARAS:

16 Hutt Street, Adelaide SA 5000

PO Box 7234, Hutt Street SA 5000

Telephone **8232 5377** or **1800 700 600** freecall for country callers

TTY **13 36 77** or SSR **1300 555 727**

Translating and Interpreting Service **13 14 50**

Facsimile **(08) 8232 1794**

Email **aras@agedrights.asn.au**

Website **www.sa.agedrights.asn.au**

This fact sheet provides general information only and is not intended to substitute for legal advice. Whilst care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the material, no responsibility can be taken for any errors or omissions.

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Abuse of Older People Risk Factors and the Effect of Abuse

The Aged Rights Advocacy Service Inc. (ARAS) advocates for older people whose rights and entitlements are at risk. ARAS has four programs: residential aged care, community care, abuse prevention and Aboriginal advocacy.

The ARAS Abuse Prevention Program (APP) assists older people who are at risk of, or experiencing abuse from those with whom they are in a relationship of trust such as family or friends. Abuse may include one or more of the following forms: financial, psychological, physical, sexual, social and/or neglect.

Awareness of the risk factors that can contribute to the abuse of older people may assist individuals to consider safeguards to maintain control over their lives. The risk factors may involve one or more of the following:

Family conflict/dynamics - This includes a history of family violence, conflict between siblings, changing dynamics as older people become frail and there is a shift in their role within the family.

Dependency - Can involve either the older person or the alleged abuser, or be mutual. These dependencies can be physical, psychological, emotional or financial, for example:

- The older person may have a dementing illness with greater reliance on others for making decisions about their care and financial affairs.
- The older person may rely on the alleged abuser for transport or social contact; the alleged abuser may rely on the older person for accommodation, money.
- The older person may be dependent physically or emotionally on the alleged abuser and feel very distressed that their son/daughter is mistreating them.

Isolation - This can include geographical isolation and/or being restricted socially due to physical disability or frailty.

- Older people who maintain a connection with their community, appear to have a decreased risk of being abused.
- In rural or remote areas, local support and resources may be limited and people may be reluctant to discuss personal issues with service providers living in the same community.

Alcohol and substance abuse - This may be a pattern of dependency for either the older person or the alleged abuser and can influence the ability to make decisions, protect themselves or stop abusive behaviour.

- The older person may need to be supervised when taking medications so that incorrect dosage or the wrong medication is not consumed.
- For the alleged abuser, dependency on drugs and/or alcohol may cause inappropriate or violent behaviour.

The Effects of an Abusive Situation on the Older Person

Older people may be reluctant to admit that they are experiencing mistreatment of any kind, particularly from a close family member. They can experience shame and disbelief and keep hoping that the abuse will stop.

Older people may be reluctant to confide in anyone due to fear of retribution not only from alleged abuser but also from other family members.

Older people may want to protect the alleged abuser from getting into trouble. This may occur when the abuser has a mental illness or other disability.

It is important for older people to know that abuse is not OK and that they should talk to someone about it. What finally prompts an older person to approach ARAS, is the realisation that if they do not seek help, their circumstances may not change. If necessary, ARAS advocates can travel to regional areas to assist a consumer.

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Abuse of Older People How Service Providers Can Assist Older People

The Aged Rights Advocacy Service Inc. (ARAS) works to uphold the rights and entitlements of older people through an advocacy process. This involves supporting the older person to speak for themselves or representing them with their permission. We can also liaise with and support service providers who are working with older people.

In situations where older people's rights are at risk of abuse by someone they trust (including family or friends), it may be useful to confide in a service provider. The following 'Principles for Assistance' can act as a guide for the type of assistance the service provider can give.

Principles for Assistance

- Uphold the rights of the older person
- Do not escalate the situation
- Do no harm - the course of action is legal, moral, what the older person wants
- Respectfully listen to and accept what the older person says
- Identify significant others in the older person's formal/informal relationships
- Maintain relationships important to the older person, wherever possible
- Increase the control the older person has over the abuse e.g. strategies and options for action
- Be aware of possible conflicts of interest
- Do not be co-opted into other's agendas.

What is the Priority?

The safety and well being of the older person is always the initial concern.

- If there is danger, the older person should be encouraged to talk to the police.
- Any intervention must be at the older person's direction and at their pace. This may involve working with someone the older person trusts.
- If the older person is unable to give direction due to mental incapacity, it may be necessary to consider an application to the Guardianship Board.

Service Providers must know their 'Duty of Care' for their Organisation

- Duty of care issues can include the obligation to ensure the rights of an older person are safeguarded, upheld and considered alongside physical safety, the right to take risks and confidentiality.
- Service providers should follow their organisation's policy and seek advice from a supervisor, or refer the matter to someone able to deal with the situation. Not taking action, may amount to a failure to meet service provider obligations or duty of care.

Contact an Advocate in the Abuse Prevention Program (APP)

Older people or service providers can contact an APP advocate for information about options and safeguards. This may include information about other available support services.

If Abuse is Suspected, Service Providers should:

- Be cautious about making judgements too early
- Consider whether the person has the capacity to make their own decisions
- Try to find out whether the person wants things to change
- If there is a risk to the person's physical safety or there is an emergency, contact the police (ideally with permission)
- Be careful not to make the person's situation more difficult
- Encourage the person to seek support from appropriate service providers or to contact ARAS
- Consider the 'Principles for Assistance' overleaf
- Be aware that each instance of abuse is unique
- Provide continuing support as needed.

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