

Scope of Service – Abuse or Mistreatment of Older People

Purpose

ARAS provides free, independent and confidential information and advocacy support to older people who are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, abuse or mistreatment.

Definition

The World Health Organisation (WHO 2026) defines elder abuse as

“A single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.”

The WHO identifies several forms of elder abuse, including:

- Physical abuse: Inflicting physical pain, injury, force, or physical/chemical restraint.
- Sexual abuse: Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind.
- Psychological and emotional abuse: Inflicting mental anguish, verbal assaults, humiliation, or harassment.
- Financial and material abuse: The illegal, unauthorized, or improper use of an older person's funds, property, or assets.
- Neglect: The failure or refusal by a caregiver to meet a dependent older person's basic needs (such as food, shelter, health care, or protection).
- Abandonment: Desertion of an older person by a caregiver or person with a duty of care.
- Serious loss of dignity and respect: Actions that undermine an older person's self-worth, privacy, or autonomy.

ARAS service

Our service supports older people who are experiencing, or are at risk of, abuse or mistreatment. We listen to what matters to an older person, assist them to understand their rights and options, and work alongside them to make their own decisions and pursue the outcomes they want.

In responding to elder abuse, we respect the older person's independence, autonomy, choices, dignity and right to supported decision-making. Where the concern relates to aged care, our approach is also guided by the Aged Care Act 2024 and its Statement of Rights.

Where an older person is alleging abuse or mistreatment by a guardian, administrator, power of attorney or substitute decision-maker, they may be able to seek a review of the arrangement, appoint a different decision-maker, or access advocacy and legal support. The older person's views, wishes and preferences remains central to any review process and decision-making arrangements.

ARAS can support you to:

- understand what abuse and mistreatment is;
- understand what is happening to you, and offer you options to mitigate further risk;
- receive clear information and support so you can make informed choices;
- have your voice, wishes and choices heard and respected;
- receive support that respects your identity, culture, background, and experience;
- choose the information and advocacy support you want from ARAS;
- understand and deal with aged care and safeguarding services including My Aged Care, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission and South Australia's Adult Safeguarding Unit;

- lodge a complaint on your behalf with your consent;
- explore practical ways to protect your safety and wellbeing, and reduce the risk of further abuse;
- connect with other services and specialist support when needed;
- communicate with aged care providers, government agencies and other services at your direction;
- use a professional interpreter at no cost, if needed; and
- build your confidence to speak up for yourself, where appropriate.

Safety, consent and the older person's voice

ARAS will seek the older person's consent before taking action on their behalf and will support them to be involved in decisions as much as possible. Where appropriate, ARAS may also work with a legally authorised representative while continuing to respect the older person's views, wishes and preferences.

If ARAS believes an older person may be at risk of serious or imminent harm, it will carefully consider the person's safety, wishes and circumstances. Where permitted or required by law, ARAS may raise a concern with an appropriate safeguarding or regulatory body, such as the South Australian Adult Safeguarding Unit, or the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, including in limited circumstances without the person's consent.

If an older person is in immediate danger or needs urgent assistance, ARAS will call emergency services.

What ARAS cannot do

ARAS cannot:

- provide legal or clinical advice;
- make general decisions on behalf of an older person;
- clinically assess an older person's decision-making capacity;
- conduct an investigation into allegations of abuse or mistreatment;
- recommend particular aged care providers or services;
- ask a service provider to terminate a staff member's employment;
- become involved in a service provider's employment arrangements;
- investigate the cause of a person's death; or
- confront an alleged abuser, particularly where doing so may increase risk to the older person or ARAS staff.

ARAS is the South Australian member of the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN), which is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing to deliver the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP).