

MEDIA RELEASE - National elder abuse awareness campaign shines light on gap in much-needed funding for support services

Relationships Australia, one of Australia's largest family services providers, is raising the alarm that Australians responding to a new elder abuse awareness campaign may be unable to access overstretched support services.

Over the weekend, the Australian Government [launched a new campaign to raise awareness of elder abuse](#). The campaign, named *Ending the abuse of older people begins with a conversation*, is aimed at increasing awareness of elder abuse, and of available support services. While welcoming the campaign, Relationships Australia is calling for urgent funding for specialist elder abuse services to ensure the necessary supports are available to those in need.

For nearly a decade, Relationships Australia has delivered services to assist older people in Australia who are suffering, or at risk of suffering, from elder abuse and neglect. Research commissioned by the Australian Government shows that at least 15% of people aged over 65 experience one or more types of elder abuse in a calendar year, and that specialist services are important to response and recovery.

Despite this, specialist services for older people experiencing abuse and neglect are scarce across Australia, and chronically under-funded. Relationships Australia is funded by the Australian Government to deliver specialist elder abuse services in only four states and territories, and in those four states and territories, only in tightly bound geographic locations.

Speaking about the Government's new advertising campaign today, Nick Tebbey, National Executive Officer of Relationships Australia said, "we welcome the Government's commitment to eliminate abuse and neglect of older people, which is often hidden. Those affected by it may be embarrassed or scared to talk about it and ask for help."

"Relationships Australia supports initiatives that raise awareness, and that support people to seek help – and to offer help – without shame, fear, stigma or embarrassment," said Mr Tebbey.

"Relationships Australia is deeply concerned, however, that older victim survivors of abuse who take up the offer of this awareness campaign will be forced to play postcode lottery to get the help they seek. They will also be forced to play funding lottery, because services are struggling to meet existing demand."

Mr Tebbey noted that while the 1800ELDERHelp phone line and compass.info website give people somewhere to go when they, or someone close to them, are experiencing elder abuse or neglect, these situations are often very complex, and one phone call or visit to a webpage will not be enough.

"If this \$4.8 million campaign works, more people will start the conversation, for themselves or for others. But without additional funding to meet the increased demand for services, many will be left stranded," Mr Tebbey said. "This campaign risks raising awareness without ensuring that services will be there and able to provide that help."

Relationships Australia is calling on the Australian Government to honour its commitment to ending abuse and neglect of older people by urgently increasing funding for specialist elder abuse services to meet demand and end the postcode lottery.

“Relationships Australia is ready and available to work with Government on increasing the availability of support for older people experiencing elder abuse and neglect. We urge the Government to speak to us and other service providers about how additional support could be rolled out to ensure this awareness campaign can make a long-term and transformational impact,” Mr Tebbey said.

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Media contact: Nick Tebbey, National Executive Officer, Relationships Australia
Phone: 0422 415 987; Email: media@relationships.org.au

Relationships Australia is one of Australia’s largest family services providers, and promotes the importance of respectful relationships for both individual mental health and general community outcomes. In addition to providing front-line service support to people experiencing separation, family violence, elder abuse and other family conflicts, Relationships Australia advocates to influence policy, systems and services to empower everyone in Australia to build and maintain respect in all their relationships.

Relationships Australia also provides research that is relevant and purposeful, and informs continuous improvement in the services and supports provided across Australia.