

Support for older people across Australia

The past year has seen the continued impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable older people. Many have had to deal with restricted movement and limited access to care provisions which protect their health and wellbeing. Those unable to use technology or connect socially online, found themselves further isolated. In many homes, pandemic-related financial blows caused shifts in living arrangements – in some cases family members moved into the home of elderly parents, in others, couples faced lengthy confinement together without relief or support. In this environment, we saw a worrying escalation in reports of elder abuse – be it financial, psychological, physical, social or sexual abuse – or the neglect of older Australians.

Our Let's Talk Elder Mediation and Support Service provided an opportunity throughout the year for older people and their families/carers to come together in a safe, respectful and confidential environment. Supported by practitioners trained in Elder Mediation and Counselling, this targeted and effective intervention supports them to have mediated conversations on issues ranging from intergenerational relationship challenges and safety concerns, to future care, living arrangements and end of life planning.

Since its launch in June 2019, we have supported over 400 families across 10 regions throughout NSW, with generous funding from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice - Domestic and Family Violence Innovation Fund.

Reconnect was another program which supported our older Australians throughout the year. A one-year initiative funded by the Central and Eastern Sydney PHN, it was designed to support older people who were isolated from social activities and supports as a result of the pandemic. The service delivered individualised and targeted case management using a person-centred multidisciplinary approach. Working in collaboration with the Older Persons Mental Health Hospital and Outreach Teams, Allied Health Professionals, GPs and other services, Reconnect offered client-focused, high-quality and personalised support and service referrals to help older Australians feel more connected and empowered following the impacts of lockdown and the pandemic.

Throughout the year, we worked closely with the NSW Ageing & Disability Commission (ADC). Referral pathways with Seniors Rights and the Legal Aid Elder Abuse Project in Gosford developed strongly. A collaborative pilot between RANSW and Carers NSW, Exsitu and Autonomy First is working to develop a best practice model for supported decision-making for older people. As key contributors and members of Elder Abuse Collaboratives in both Sydney and the Bathurst region, we also assisted the creation of Elder Abuse awareness videos and information collateral in multiple languages thanks to regional grants from the ADC.

Our work continues to raise awareness of the challenges faced by older Australians and those who love and care for them.