

DISCUSSION RESOURCE

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PROJECT OF  
5TH NATIONAL ELDER  
ABUSE CONFERENCE

HOSTED BY SENIORS  
RIGHTS SERVICE



# ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION AND POLICING

ROBERT CRITCHLOW





## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

In February 2018, Seniors Rights Service hosted the 5th National Elder Abuse Conference, which brought together more than 500 delegates from a broad range of backgrounds. The conference culminated in an announcement by the Commonwealth Attorney-General, Hon Christian Porter MP, that a “National Plan” would be developed to ensure the protection of older people in Australian society.

To further the conversations generated by the conference, Seniors Rights Service engaged Ellen Fanning to conduct a series of interviews with experts who attended the conference. These videos, along with a discussion sheet for each video, are freely available to community members, professionals and students of all sectors, to enable engagement with the content using suggested discussion questions and to follow up with further reading.

### IMPORTANT! READ THIS BEFORE HOLDING A DISCUSSION GROUP

Many people will share and benefit from participating in study and discussion on the topics.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics, however, group leaders should ensure they are prepared to support individuals to find qualified assistance in a timely manner, should a topic generate personal concerns or issues for individuals.

As a minimum, group leaders should have available information sheets and phone numbers from the relevant seniors' legal rights service and/or elder abuse prevention service in your state or territory (on page 5 and current as of 2018).

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

### SHORT DESCRIPTION

Supt Critchlow explains how policing has changed over time and how policing must challenge community views that elder abuse is a matter “to be dealt with privately”. Supt Critchlow discusses the importance of police officers engaging with communities and working with third parties such as human services and health. He argues that hospital emergency departments can provide a window of opportunity for early intervention in suspected elder abuse. He also discusses the view that laws specific to elder abuse could help raise awareness that elder abuse is unacceptable behaviour.

### FOCUS AREA

Elder abuse prevention and policing

### RELATED TOPICS

Elder abuse prevention, elder abuse intervention, policing, victim-centred practice, victim support, laws, legal response, domestic

violence, emergency departments, health system, ageism, CALD communities

### AUDIENCES

Legal professionals, police officers, community members, health workers, aged-care workers, community workers, researchers, students, advocates, policy officers, bi-lingual support workers, bi-lingual educators

### MATERIALS FOR FURTHER READING

WA Police, Submission # 90, Australian Law Reform Commission Elder Abuse Inquiry, accessed from [www.alrc.gov.au/inquiries/elder-abuse/submissions](http://www.alrc.gov.au/inquiries/elder-abuse/submissions)

Geir Aas (2017) The Norwegian Police And Victims of Elder Abuse in Close and Familial Relationships, Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect, 30:1



## ROBERT CRITCHLOW

**SUPERINTENDENT/  
COMMANDER,  
THE HILLS LOCAL AREA  
COMMAND, NSW POLICE**

### BIOGRAPHY

**Superintendent Robert Critchlow is Area Commander of The Hills Local Area Command, with 28 years of police service experience as commander and investigations coordinator. He has a keen interest in the rights of victims and within his command he promotes active community engagement to increase public confidence in the police, and ultimately to ensure victims receive professional and dignified treatment. Supt Critchlow is on the NSW steering committee against abuse of older persons and has undertaken studies at a graduate level to enhance his knowledge in the area.**

## ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION AND POLICING

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*How does Supt Critchlow compare identification of, and response to, elder abuse with other crimes such as domestic violence or child abuse?*

Supt Critchlow says many people, and in the past perhaps even the police, may have seen elder abuse as a “private family matter”. He explains some similarities with domestic violence exist where the perpetrator is most often a family member. But Supt Critchlow says the view that these issues are private is “really out-dated”. However, he says there are still “enormous challenges” for older people to come forward, as they may feel shame or conflicted about their children, who they raised and gave their values, being the perpetrators of the abuse. Supt Critchlow says there can also be the issue of older people not being believed, just as children were not believed when they raised issues about abuse.

Supt Critchlow argues that sometimes health settings – such as a hospital – may “ask the younger person what happened to the patient or the client. They don’t ask them [the client]”. He says this is ageism. It is “assuming the younger person knows what’s going on and the older person doesn’t”. He regards this as “disrespect” and the “same misuse of power” as situations like domestic violence or child abuse. Supt Critchlow also says the pressure to “turn people over and move them through the ward ... shouldn’t take primacy over the needs of the older person.”

*What does Supt Critchlow mean by “victim-centred” and “support-focused”?*

Victim-centred and support-focused policing is about putting the person experiencing the abuse at the centre of the process of responding. This means putting the “sufferer’s needs first”. Supt Critchlow gives the example that “If that means the person has trouble communicating their needs, then that comes first. Assisting the communication. If the person has cognition difficulties, it means taking the time to collect a detailed history and engage the person thoroughly.”

*What are some of the “nuances” and “complexities” Supt Critchlow mentions in relation to the police service addressing elder abuse in the community?*

Complexities Supt Critchlow describes include working in multicultural communities where elderly parents may have been encouraged to move to Australia to be with their family and grandchildren, “which is a very desirable and wonderful thing”. When these parents come to Australia, they may have liquidated their assets. “(They) bring the cash, inject that into the family funds in Australia and then, before you know it, they’re unpaid helpers in the house or they’re basically consigned to a back shed or a small room somewhere, which happens far too often.”

*Continued next page*



## DISCUSSION SHEET INFORMATION

The elderly parent may “have functional English at best, or no English at all. So they’re cut off from their social groups.” They are afraid to speak up because they fear losing valued relationships with their children and grandchildren. In some countries, also, newspapers publish all details about a crime, the victims, the perpetrators. Supt Critchlow cites an example where a man asked if the police publish names and addresses of victims and perpetrators. Supt Critchlow says Australian police preserve the dignity and privacy of complainants. He explains “their cultural paradigm is brought to Australia. So, it’s a matter of having an empathy and understanding all your client group.”

Supt Critchlow works closely with “champions in the community” and makes a point of being present at community events and being very visible and trusted in the community so that people feel more comfortable coming to the police service for assistance. This has proved to be very effective.



STATE/TERRITORY	AGENCY CONTACT	CONTACT
<b>AUSTRALIA-WIDE</b>	<b>Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)</b>	1800 700 600 Connects you with aged-care advocacy services in your state or territory
<b>NEW SOUTH WALES</b>	<b>Seniors Rights Service</b>	1800 424 079
	<b>NSW Elder Abuse Helpline</b>	1800 628 221
<b>AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY</b>	<b>Older Persons Abuse Prevention Referral and Information Line (APRIL)</b>	(02) 6205 3535
	<b>A.C.T. Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS)</b>	02 6242 5060
<b>NORTHERN TERRITORY</b>	<b>Elder Abuse Information Line</b>	1800 037 072
	<b>Seniors and Disability Rights Service of Darwin Community Legal Service</b>	1800 812 953
<b>QUEENSLAND</b>	<b>Elder Abuse Prevention Unit</b>	1300 651 192
	<b>Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia (ADA Australia)</b>	1800 818 338
	<b>Caxton Legal Centre</b>	(07) 3214 6333
<b>SOUTH AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>Aged Rights Advocacy Service</b>	(08) 8232 5377 (Adelaide)
	<b>Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse</b>	1800 700 600 (rural)
	<b>Legal Services Commission of South Australia</b>	1300 366 424 (08) 8111 5555
<b>TASMANIA</b>	<b>Tasmanian Elder Abuse Helpline</b>	1800 441 169
	<b>Advocacy Tasmania Inc. (ATI)</b>	(03) 6224 2240
	<b>Legal Aid Commission of Tasmania</b>	1300 366 611 (03) 6236 3800
<b>VICTORIA</b>	<b>Seniors Rights, Victoria</b>	1300 368 821
	<b>Elder Rights Advocacy (ERA)</b>	(03) 9602 3066 1800 700 600 (rural)
<b>WESTERN AUSTRALIA</b>	<b>Advocare Inc.</b>	1300 724 679 (Perth) 1800 655 566 (rural)
	<b>Older Persons Rights Service, Northern Suburbs Community Legal Centre</b>	(08) 9440 1663 (Mirrabooka) (08) 9301 4413 (Joondalup)

## DISCLAIMER

This is information only, not legal advice. If you have a legal problem, call our service directly or see your lawyer. The views expressed in the video are the views of the individual making them, not those of Seniors Rights Service Inc.