

MEDIA RELEASE

More than 55,200 people in NSW will experience abuse in their older years

Date: June 20, 2016

Preserving not only human rights but the dignity and safety of elderly Australian's is paramount. On June 24, 2016 the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry into Elder Abuse hands down its findings. Seniors Rights Service is positioned to be a key community partner in addressing elder abuse by raising awareness and providing support.

In 2015 the NSW parliament set-up a cross-party committee to examine elder abuse within our community. Key stakeholders were invited to furnish submissions to support the inquiry. Seniors Rights Service supported the inquiry by reporting on: types of elder abuse with a focus on financial abuse; legal issues directly addressed by Seniors Rights Service for members of the community; data regarding the type and intensity of elder abuse; recommendations regarding new services; and law reform matters to help reduce the risk of and minimise elder abuse in our society into the future.

Seniors Rights Service (SRS) has a 30-year history in providing rights-based services to older people in NSW. In the 2014/15 fiscal year SRS provided 5,571 legal services to older people in NSW. The organisation provided individual advocacy services to 2,247 people in NSW who are receiving aged-care services. More than 22,000 people around NSW were reached through face-to-face education sessions regarding elder rights. SRS works at the coalface and receives more than 120 new enquiries every single week of the year. Regardless, there is much unmet need in the community.

In NSW there are 1.2 million people over the age of 65 (ABS). Of these, almost 319,000 receive aged-care services – either residential, home or transitional care. There are approximately 900 aged-care facilities in NSW.

The Elder Abuse National Annual Report (2014) indicates a minimum of 4.6% of older people across Australia will experience elder abuse. The report states: "The figures show a demonstrated need to raise the profile of elder abuse, to reach more vulnerable older people". **In the NSW context a minimum 4.6% prevalence of abuse equates to 55,200 people will experience abuse in their older years. This is unacceptable!**

Craig Gear, President of Seniors Rights Service said: "Now is the time to ensure the rights of all older people in NSW – and across Australia – are protected. We must address this issue strategically and raise awareness across our society. Our elderly deserve the best response we can mount."

"The findings from the inquiry will provide an evidence-based platform to develop services and education that address and reduce the risk of elder abuse", said Russell Westacott, CEO of Seniors Rights Service. "Elder abuse is everyone's issue – we all have older loved ones, older people in our communities and we will all grow older ourselves. Surely we all want a society free of elder abuse?"

Seniors Rights Service

Level 4, 418A Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills (corner Devonshire Street)

For media information contact: Russell Westacott, CEO, Seniors Rights Service 02 9281 3600 or 0404 028 710

CASE STUDY: FINANCIAL ABUSE

This particular client of Seniors Rights Service is blind and lives near a city in Department of Housing accommodation. His family member was his attorney, appointed by an enduring power of attorney. The family member took him shopping over the past two years. He bought the client basic grocery items such as 'Weetbix' and bread, and then allegedly spent the remainder of the client's pension (\$300-400) on himself. A social worker collating bank statements has gathered evidence of the misuse of funds. She will work with our client to highlight the many unauthorized transactions. Seniors Rights Service will assist the client with a letter of demand to the nephew requesting reimbursement. The matter has also been reported to the Police Vulnerable Person Liaison Officer to better understand if charges can be laid. Evidentiary problems have to be considered as it is difficult to prove beyond reasonable doubt the specific amounts taken and to counter a defence that the family member may raise such as the shopping is expensive or client was not aware of all that was purchased.

FOR immediate release