

Day to put elder abuse in spotlight

No one deserves to be abused, no matter their age, writes **Brigid Wilkinson**

Many Tasmanians will have banded together this week wearing purple, dressing their communities and businesses in purple and taking part in statewide activities including long lunches at Rosebery and St Helens, and statewide walks, as part of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. The campaign is raising awareness of a growing issue of concern within our communities.

It's timely to focus on elder abuse and why it's so important to speak out and support those who may be suffering in silence. Elder abuse is a serious issue that affects one in six older Australians living in our community every year. It is often perpetrated by an adult family member or friend. The most common types of elder abuse are psychological abuse and neglect, followed by financial and physical, then sexual abuse.

The loss of trust, dignity and self-esteem caused by elder abuse have a significant impact on the quality of life of older people, and it is essential to provide support and care to end the abuse and help them regain their sense of self-worth.

What is particularly disturbing is that older people often suffer in silence, feeling invisible and ignored. This makes it all the more important to raise awareness of the issue and encourage people to speak out against ageism, which can drive elder abuse.

WEAAD has been an opportunity to do just that. Tasmanians took part in statewide walks and other purple-themed activities to highlight the issue and encourage people to seek help if they or someone they know is experiencing elder abuse. The annual Walks Against Elder Abuse are supported by the Tasmanian government and local councils, and they provide a platform for people to come together, raise awareness, and take action.

It's important to understand that elder abuse is not just a problem for

older people. It's a societal issue that affects all of us, across all walks of life, in business, in the community, in our homes, and can compound other forms of discrimination and injustice.

It's also important to recognise that although elder abuse is never excusable, it is not always intentional. Sometimes, the abuse can be the result of a caregiver's lack of knowledge or resources, rather than malicious intent. This is why education and raising awareness of the available support are so important.

By providing caregivers with the tools and resources they need to care for older people, we can help prevent some elder abuse from occurring in the first place.

One of the most effective ways to prevent elder abuse is to have open and honest conversations about the issue. By talking openly about elder abuse, we can help reduce the stigma surrounding the issue and encourage people to seek help when they need it.

That's why events like the Tasmanian walks on a worldwide day that highlights abuse of older people help to shine the light on the issue and encourage conversations.

If you or someone you know is experiencing elder abuse, help is available. The Tasmanian Elder Abuse Helpline 1800 441 169 is a confidential service that can provide information on what elder abuse is and options for support. They can also refer people to free services such as Legal Aid's Senior Assist and Relationships Australia Tasmania's Elder Relationship Service.

It's important to remember that no one deserves to be abused, no matter their age. We all have a responsibility to speak out against elder abuse and to ensure that older people in our community are treated with respect and dignity.

The statewide walks in Hobart, Burnie and Launceston are taking place today, June 14.

Brigid Wilkinson is chief executive of Council on the Ageing Tasmania