

Public Consultation

National Plan to end the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2024-2034

Introduction

COTA Tasmania welcomes the opportunity to respond to the National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2024-2034 Public Consultation Draft.

In preparing our response we have participated in forums with:

- COTA National Policy Network/COTA Alliance (23/1).
- EAAA National Members Network (30/1).

We have contributed to the submissions made by our key partners above.

Our response to the National Plan has been guided by our organisational mission, which is to challenge ageism and promote the rights, interests and value of all Tasmanians as they age.

Background

Intent

The second National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2024-2024 (the Plan) is intended to be the key national framework to end the abuse and mistreatment of older people, building on the initiatives delivered under the first *National Plan 2019-2023*.

First National Plan

There is little information available on the implementation of the range of initiatives, successors and challenges from the first National Plan. The independent evaluation of the first National Plan is yet to be published; however, the second Plan indicates that further work is needed including a focus on the needs of First Nations Peoples and other Priority Groups, and on prevention efforts.

National Plan structure

The Plan commits to:

- Giving a voice to the diverse needs and aspirations of older people and advocating for their rights.

- Providing national leadership and direction to governments, service providers and community organisations to elevate the issue of the abuse and mistreatment of older people and ageism and working to end it.
- Delivering improved governance, strong systems of accountability and robust evaluation mechanisms for the implementation of its commitments.
- Addressing gaps and outstanding priorities from the first National Plan.

There are six key principles and four focus areas of the Plan. Priority Actions in each Focus Area inform the more detailed activities in two five-year Action Plans (TBC - First Action Plan 2024-25 to 2028-29, Second Action Plan 2029-20 to 2033-34).

Principles

1. Taking a human rights approach.
2. Combatting ageism.
3. Listening to and learning from the experiences of older people and diverse communities.
4. A strong focus on prevention and early intervention.
5. A person-centred and trauma-informed approach.
6. Supporting individual decision-making, autonomy and dignity.

Focus Areas

1. Increase a whole of community awareness, education and engagement.
2. Enhance legal frameworks and adult safeguarding responses.
3. Strengthen the capacity and capability of services, including through targeted education and training for professionals.
4. Address gaps in evidence base and increase collaboration.

Governance and Accountability

The Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG) will oversee the implementation of the Plan and subsequent Action Plans through the Implementation Executive Group (IEG). Four reports will be produced during the life of the 10-year plan to provide accountability and detail effectiveness of the initiatives being undertaken.

COTA Tasmania Lifelong Respect Program

COTA Tasmania is funded by the Tasmanian Government through the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) to provide awareness and prevention programs to help end the abuse of older people. The service has been funded on a year-by-year or annual basis over the past twelve years. Recently, our current contract was changed to a two-year funding commitment from 2024 to 2026. In summary, the program:

- ☐ Coordinates and provides Statewide Community Awareness and Education programs and key priority projects.
- ☐ Provides direct referrals to key service partners.

- ☐ Facilities a Lifelong Respect Community of Practice (CoP) with key referral services.
- ☐ Facilitates and supports a lived experience Older Voices for Change Program.

COTA Tasmania Submission – reflections for considerations

COTA Tasmania is a member of the COTA National Alliance. We support the key concerns, commentary on action areas of the Plan, and the recommendations outlined in the National Alliance Submission – in particular, the adoption of an approach that prioritises addressing ageism, embeds lived experience at every stage, and ensures robust measures for implementation and accountability.

Additionally, COTA Tasmania submits the following commentary and recommendations for improvement.

Actionable and measurable language

- The key principle *listening and learning from* should critically also include *involving the experiences of older people and diverse communities*, if the Plan is to meet its objective that older people are heard.
- In line with language used throughout the second Plan, replace any use of the term ‘perpetrator’ to ‘person causing harm’ – e.g. change this in last demographic paragraph on page 20 of the Plan.
- Include A Respectful, Age-Friendly Island: Older Tasmanian Action Plan 2025-2029 on page 17 of the Plan (launched on 22 January 2025).

Addressing funding gaps and service demand and ensuring sustainable, long-term funding

- COTA Tasmania continues to call for a less siloed model and more strategic long-term approach to funding. As a relatively small state, we can better collaborate under a model that strengthens our individual service capacities and capabilities.
- Sustained funding for prevention and response is critical for Tasmania. Coordination of prevention activities involving older people and priority groups, support to navigate available options, along with safeguarding and advocacy services, could logistically be funded under a targeted and complementary dedicated hub and spoke model such as a Tasmanian Lifelong Respect Awareness and Response Hub. This Hub will require cross-agency collaboration as well as support from Federal Government to ensure its viability. Such a model would need to be mindful of any conflicts of interest between victims and persons causing harm, which is likely to be of particular concern in smaller localised communities.

- COTA Tasmania facilitates a Lifelong Respect Community of Practice (CoP) with key referral services. None of these services have long-term funding guarantees. CoP partners include:
 - ❑ Advocacy Tasmania – funded to operate the Tasmanian Elder Abuse Helpline. The Helpline has seen rising demand over the past 12 months with calls to the service between 2023 to 2024 increasing from 354¹ to 492².
 - ❑ Tasmania Legal Aid Senior Assist – funded to provide specialist legal support for older Tasmanians. This service is vital for providing legal advice and case management assistance. Senior Assist has reported to the CoP an increase in people needing the service which places a demand on the availability of legal practitioners and case managers on a very small Statewide team. Additionally, Senior Assist collaborates with COTA Tasmania to operate a monthly legal clinic in Hobart and Launceston. Services such as Senior Assist are critical in preventing, supporting and responding to cases of elder abuse. They need to be able to recruit additional staff to support service demand that is not linked to specific time-limited funding agreements.
 - ❑ Relationships Australia Tasmania Elder Relationship Service – funded to provide mediation and counselling to support older people navigate difficult conversations and discuss important life decisions. Advocacy Tasmania has reported to the CoP that they have made increased referrals to the Elder Relationship Service. Uncertainty of ongoing funding for the Elder Relationship Service is an ongoing concern.
 - ❑ Migrant Resource Centre – funded to provide awareness training to bi-cultural workers, who then provided training to priority groups in language. Unfortunately, this funding was not continued past 2024 and remains a gap in service provision.
- In addition to coordinating the CoP, COTA Tasmania is also coordinating a community of practice awareness campaign to bring all services together to specific communities over the next six months, including the Tasman Peninsula, Flinders Island, Bruny Island, and the West Coast.
- There is also a need for better clarity and inclusion between family violence and elder abuse information and referral, plus as training and support to first responders to ensure they can assist and direct people appropriately, avoiding delays.

¹ [Annual-Report-2022-2023.pdf](#)

² [2023-24-Annual-Report-27-Sept-2024.pdf](#)

Elevating the fight against ageism and incorporating lived experience

- The first focus area priority action should critically include *involving the expertise and experiences of older people* (not just their understanding and how to get help, see page 47) in the awareness-raising initiatives. This will mitigate one of the key inhibitors the Plan identifies in *lack of engagement with/from older people*.
- Implementation and governance section – page 33 should highlight the role of the not-for-profit sector, community services and community leaders in supporting person centred approaches and lived experience programs. In Tasmania we have been developing our Older Voices for Change Advocates over the past two years. We have included a summary of this program as a reference for best practice.

Older Voices for Change Program

This program was established in 2023 to design and deliver a trial lived-experience training program for victim-survivors of elder abuse in collaboration with Engender Equality.

Two trained Advocates graduated from the program and made an immediate impact with interviews in print, broadcast and online media following World Elder Abuse Awareness Day events and activities.

During 2024, the Advocates went on to be involved in eleven (11) community awareness sessions and events. These opportunities for involvement in education and awareness outside of media were not originally foreseen in the trial program. Additionally, the Advocates presented 'in conversation' style at the Elder Abuse Action Australia (EAAA) Conference in Adelaide in July.

These opportunities have created confidence and personal growth for the Advocates and added another critical layer to awareness and understanding of the importance of including people with lived experience in community education to prevent elder abuse.

The Advocates are making a difference. A community education calendar of activities for 2025 has been coordinated with Advocates and the Lifelong Respect CoP referral services.

Expansion of the program is the next step, with another person expressing interest in joining the team.

There is currently no other program we are aware of in Australia, that trains and supports older people with lived experience of elder abuse to be so closely involved in awareness and prevention activities.

Improving implementation and accountability

- The disbanding of the Statewide Elder Abuse Prevention Advisory Committee (SEAPAC) as a dedicated body addressing the abuse and mistreatment of older people in Tasmania is a potential step backwards in strengthening local on the ground implementation and accountability.
- In our view, SCAG through the IEG cannot realistically oversee a national approach to the elimination of elder abuse when each state and territory has vastly different models of funding and legislation and service models.
- There needs to be a better method of communication and reporting from all states and territories. Specialist SEAPACs in each state and territory are better placed to manage this communication and reporting. This approach elevates the principles of the Plan while acknowledging the key inhibitors. Reporting from each state can then influence and support the role of the IEG.
- Funding should be released nationwide to partner with relevant academic institutions as part of integrated grants to address elder abuse and learn from the lived experience of victim survivors of elder abuse.

Comprehensive community education campaigns

- COTA Tasmania has established a comprehensive model of community education and is running several collaborative campaigns involving our Older Voices for Change Advocates and CoP referral partners. These need to be funded long term, with Government resources committed.
- Additionally, we are funded to innovate in this space from an intergenerational perspective over the next two years through exploring new and existing initiatives that focus on younger people, raising awareness of abuse, promoting intergenerational value and the harm of stigmatising language and attitudes.
- Let's not reinvent the wheel. A community led approach to highlighting what education and awareness programs already exist, and building on this nationally, would be a good approach. We have included some examples of the collaborative campaigns we have coordinated.

Raising Tasmanian LGBTIQ+ People's Awareness of Elder Abuse

This project was a collaboration with Working It Out (WIO) Tasmania's gender, sexuality and intersex status support and education service. We worked together during late 2024 to recruit a diverse number of LGBTIQ+ community members across Tasmania to co-design potential elder abuse awareness messages and mediums.

Eight people worked with us and directed the development of updating existing resources to promote the Elder Abuse Helpline (bookmarks and business cards) and develop new resources (a suite of postcards) and a social and written media campaign for 2025.

Elevating the awareness campaign, was beautiful artwork featured on all the resources by one of the co-design participants who is also an artist.

Business and Community Services Awareness

This project aimed to connect with Neighbourhood Houses Tasmania (NHT), Local Government Authorities (LGAs) and the Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (TCCI) to promote the awareness of abuse of older Tasmanians, the drivers, prevention and response.

To meet this aim, we worked with our CoP referral services, Older Voices for change Advocates, Local Government and Neighbourhood House representatives to develop a series of four short films. The films will launch during 2025 through all business and community service networks.

Pharmacy Script Back Campaign

Pharmacies are a trusted and safe space for many in the community and especially for older adults. Providing awareness and referral messages on script backs about respecting people as they age and preventing the abuse of older people was a way to reach the wider community outside of traditional education campaigns.

We worked on messaging with our referral partners and together with the Pharmacy Guild of Australia Tasmanian Branch developed and delivered 100,000 script backs to the 144 Guild member Pharmacies across Tasmania in 2024.

We are currently working on evaluating this project during 2025.

Strengthening legal frameworks and safeguards

- We view national consistency of Enduring Power of Attorney (EPOAs) as a matter of urgency. The language should change from “continue efforts to achieve”³ to “ensure this is achieved” with a solid timeframe determined. This has been an area of national conversation for decades, now is the time for action.

³ See p.53.

- *Strengthening safeguarding frameworks and approaches to clarifying reporting pathways* is diluted language in the Plan. There should be actionable language and methods that seek to solve the balance of dignity of risk and duty of care for older people. The current language does not show how this will be achieved. Especially as there are different legislative and regulatory frameworks across Australia. Tasmania is an ideal state to progress already established options toward Safeguarding Adults legislative reforms.
- The impact of the new *Disability Inclusion and Rights Act 2024* in Tasmania is yet to be tested. Once the Commission is established, tracking complaints that may emerge or be referred on with an elder abuse component will be necessary, especially in lieu of any overall Safeguarding Adults legislation.

Closing remarks

As a country, we are now living longer with more chronic conditions, less economic security, greater issues with family and relationship dynamics, increased reliance on technology. As a result, the incidents of elder abuse are likely to increase and intensify.

We have an obligation as a community to listen more closely to older people and address their concerns and the impacts of their experiences. We need to prioritise their needs and ensure that appropriate supports and legal frameworks are in place to both prevent and address elder abuse, now and in the future. Without this, we are ignoring a key cohort in our community that deserve to have their rights and interests respected and protected.

Tasmania has the highest ageing demographic of all states and territories, and COTA Tasmania continues to strongly encourage our State Government to use demographic data to plan ahead, develop infrastructure, and challenge negative views about the ageing journey. This is critically important around elder abuse prevention and response.

We have an opportunity within these reforms to put the needs of older people front and centre – not just with words, but with concrete actions and commitments.

Elder abuse exists where respect and care do not.

"I really enjoyed myself today...I appreciated your ease working the platform between us, worked so well. You giving me free reign helped with the flow when I had the floor. Great opportunity".

Older Voices for Change Advocate

On co-presenting a Community Education Session with COTA Tasmania