

ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION UNIT REPORT

THE COST OF ELDER ABUSE IN QUEENSLAND: Who pays and how much

KEY POINTS OF THE REPORT

By the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit, Qld. A program of Lifeline Community Care Queensland.

Over \$14million was reported to the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit (EAPU) as being exploited from Queensland's senior's for the 2007-08 financial year, an average of \$242,287 per report.

The EAPU estimates that \$97million is a more realistic figure of financial abuse received through the EAPU Helpline as most notifiers do not provide a dollar amount.

The overall dollar amount of financial exploitation of older people could range between \$1.8 billion and \$5.8 billion per annum if other relevant services such as legal, guardianship and police are considered, although a lot of abuse will remain undetected.

Costs associated with any form of abuse include the physical and mental trauma experienced by the victim as well as costs associated with for example higher hospital admissions which are estimated between \$9.9 million and \$30 million per annum in Queensland.

Other additional costs deriving from elder abuse are associated with police and emergency service call out, access of other health and welfare services and costs associated with lawyers, courts, tribunals and investigations, although these costs are difficult to estimate.

Prevention and early detection and intervention is seen as the most effective means of dealing with elder abuse, both in human and costs terms.

Nationally the elder abuse response requires a mechanism for coordinating and providing a clearing house service for elder abuse initiatives, research and resources. Monetary support for the current voluntary Australian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse is recommended.

Queensland's elder abuse response is seen as innovative and wide ranging but similarly lacking in coordination. An annual planning and review conference is recommended as a cost effective method of achieving greater coordination and effectiveness among services responding to abuse.

Lack of research to determine actual prevalence rates of abuse over time is seen as a major hindrance in providing a benchmark by which to measure the effectiveness and assist in the planning of Queensland's elder abuse response.

Reports of elder abuse will continue to rise due mainly to the aging of the population but also through better detection as service providers continue to be trained in responding to elder abuse. However other factors such as the global economic crisis, may have impact on elder abuse numbers.

Recommendations of the Report

The Queensland Government support Planning and Coordinating a state response by providing seed funding for an annual information, planning and review conference

- That academic institutions and researchers undertake regular studies on the Prevalence of Elder Abuse in Queensland and Australia to provide a benchmark and to determine the effectiveness of the state's elder abuse response over time
- All jurisdictions and agencies maintain a focus on prevention, early detection and early intervention strategies as a way to reduce hardship and as a cost saving mechanism
- The Australian Government provide support for the Australian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse to undertake national coordination of awareness raising activities and to provide a clearing house for research and resources.
- The recommendations from the September 2007 "Inquiry into older people and the law" report by the House Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs be implemented.

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