Preventing Abuse of Older People in Melbourne's East

A PRIMARY PREVENTION FRAMEWORK AND GUIDE

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Acknowledgments

Eastern Community Legal Centre (ECLC) acknowledges the contributions of the Eastern Elder Abuse Network (EEAN) to shape and guide the development of the Preventing Abuse of Older People: A Primary Prevention Framework and Background Paper.

Member organisations involved in the development of this document include:

· Better Place Australia
· Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
· EDVOS
· Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria
· Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP)
· Knox City Council
· Manningham City Council
· Maroondah City Council
· Swinburne University
· Victoria Police
· Whitehorse City Council
· Women's Health East (WHE)
· Yarra Valley Water

Special thanks to the sub-working group members including WHE, IEPCP, Knox City Council and Whitehorse City Council who provided direct feedback into the development of this Framework and Guide.

The Framework draws on evidence from the Older People: Equity, Respect & Ageing (OPERA) Project (ECLC & Swinburne University 2019). ECLC acknowledges the generous input and contributions of almost 300 community members who participated in OPERA consultations. Their stories, and lived experiences of ageing and ageism, together with their aspirational vision of 'a world without ageism' has formed the basis of this Framework.

VICTORIA
State Government

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Preventing Abuse of Older People
A primary prevention framework

ECLC in partnership with the EEAN, presents a framework for action (Framework) to address the primary prevention of abuse of older people in Melbourne's east.

By applying the learnings from the *Older People, Equity, Respect and Ageing* (OPERA) project, the Framework seeks to provide consistent messaging and language, and presents a shared framework for action.

The Framework is a high level document that provides a roadmap to guide efforts to address and prevent the abuse of older people.

ECLC and EEAN acknowledge the work of government, national and international collaborations (including United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030), and primary prevention as an emerging area of interest, and continues to advocate for increased resourcing to strengthen the understanding of the drivers of abuse of older people and progress evidence informed practice.

The Framework is designed as a working document that will be reviewed and updated based on emerging data and evidence.

" **A world where older people are safe, valued and respected. Where their contribution is valued.**

How to use this Framework

This Framework is designed to be used by EEAN partners as well as individuals, organisations, community groups and government wanting to see and impact change for a healthier, more equitable future. This work aligns with regional work to promote gender equity and prevent violence against women (Together for Equality & Respect partnership) as well as local councils' role to promote healthy ageing through inclusive and liveable communities.

By addressing the prevention of abuse of older people across the individual, organisational, community and societal levels, the Framework demonstrates the important role *everyone can play* in promoting respectful relationships across the ages. Together, there is a vital opportunity to shift community attitudes and reframe ageing. Together the social norms that excuse or justify disrespect, marginalisation and abuse of older people can be shifted and ultimately eliminated.

Guiding local (and broader) action, the Framework presents a shared understanding of primary prevention and promotes coordinated, collaborative approaches with mutually reinforcing messaging to prevent the of abuse of older people.

The goals, activities and settings outlined in the Framework are not exhaustive, but rather serve as a starting point to prompt conversations, set objectives and bring together diverse and multi-sectoral expertise to challenge ageism and reframe ageing.

The Framework presents an opportunity for partners to commit to addressing ageism and work together to toward a shared vision of 'a world where older people are safe, valued and respected. Where their contribution is valued.'

Preventing Abuse of Older People
A primary prevention framework

VISION: A WORLD WHERE OLDER PEOPLE ARE SAFE, VALUED AND RESPECTED. WHERE THEIR CONTRIBUTION IS CELEBRATED.

Themes for Action	GOALS		
	Individual	**Organisational / Community**	**Societal**
Promote positive images and role models Popular language, images and narrative celebrate and embrace the life journey across the ages	Attitudes, language and behaviours foster **age pride** and **challenge ageism** in the everyday.	**Workplace policy, systems and practices promote diversity** and encourage positive modelling and representation of older people. Workplace **communications promote positive images of older people** where the journey of ageing is normalised and embraced, and traditional age and gender stereotypes are challenged.	**Increased capacity** to understand and **address ageism** as a driver of elder abuse. **Voices** of older people in Melbourne's east are sought and elevated to inform the work of policy makers and decision makers.
Identify and eliminate barriers to participation Structures and systems enable adults to participate fully according to their capabilities and ambitions at all stages of life	**Expectations of older people are mutual and respectful**, where personal freedoms are not restrained by 'shoulds' or heavy caring responsibilities.	Ageism and **unconscious bias are identified and redressed** to enable the participation of all community members across the key settings where people work, live and play. Older people from diverse backgrounds are involved in **decision–making** and co-design processes.	Systemic advocacy continues for **systems, policies and practices that support older people to participate fully in the community.** Support systems are in place for adult children going through difficult life stages, mental health or personal crisis. **Urban design** promotes social connection and healthy, active lifestyles for all ages.
Foster positive attitudes and behaviours towards ageing Community members demonstrate mutual respect and empathy towards older people, and ageing is embraced as a natural process	Attitudes and behaviours demonstrate **respect and empathy** in all relationships across the ages. **Intergenerational approach** to life that embraces the diversity and experience of ages across different settings where people work, live and play. Encourage **courageous conversations** about ageing, future planning and death.	Programs promote and celebrate the **unique and valuable contribution of older people** to families, community and organisations. The prevention of elder abuse **work is aligned with the regional plan to prevent violence against women** (Together For Equality & Respect). An intersectional approach to ageing informs policy and practice, including the gendered nature of ageism.	**Policy, programs and systems foster intergenerational communities and interdependency** (moving from individualism to interdependency). Activities that foster meaning and social connection are promoted through opportunities such as the arts, volunteering, education, employment, faith communities, connection to land/nature, pets, relationships, hobbies and sport.

POPULATIONS

- Children
- Young People
- Adult Children
- Tertiary Students
- Older People
- Families
- Aged Care Sector
- Employers
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/ Gender Diverse, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+)
- People with Disabilities

SETTINGS

- Workplaces
- Homes
- Social media / Technology
- Community / Community services
- Education institutions
- Aged care / Health care
- Faith based
- Disability sector
- Retail / Hospitality
- Recreational
- Justice / Legal system
- Journalism / Media
- Local Government – some including open spaces, transport, infrastructure, engineering and communications

ACTIVITY EXAMPLES

Individual	Organisational / Community	Societal
Call out ageism with friends, family and work colleagues	Develop and conduct an age equity audit on organisational processes and policies	Further research and evidence on the drivers of elder abuse
Be informed about the issue	Strengthen current family violence policy to include elder abuse	Further research and evidence on the intersection with other forms of family violence
Reflect and challenge attitudes about ageing, including internalised ageism	Build capacity in organisation/community groups to understand ageism and its impacts	Advocate for and implement:
Initiate conversations about ageing, future planning and death	Take an intergenerational approach to programming	• A national longitudinal survey to better understand ageist attitudes and beliefs in Australia
Acknowledge and celebrate the journey of life and contributions of older people	Promote and normalise the use of images of older people in all communications	• A national longitudinal survey to be used as a benchmark for evaluation purposes
Model and foster respectful intergenerational relationships	Create opportunities for co-designing with older people	• A national framework for the prevention of elder abuse
	Advocate to State and Federal Government bodies for increased funds to extend the evidence base for the primary prevention of elder abuse	• A boost in funding for action-based research with a focus on intergenerational programs and systems
	Contribute to regional work to challenge rigid gender roles and promote gender equity across the ages	
	Adopt age-friendly practices that foster healthy and active ageing (eg. WHO Age-Friendly Cities)	
	Build financial capabilities of women and girls across the ages	

Download a printable version of the framework at **www.eclc.org.au/elderabuse**

Framework Background

Abuse of Older People

What is abuse of older people?

The abuse of older people, also known as 'Elder Abuse,' is a form of family violence (State of Victoria, 2016). The World Health Organisation (WHO 2018) defines abuse of older people as 'a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.' It can include physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse; financial and material abuse; abandonment and neglect. Preventing abuse is necessary to protect the human rights and dignity of older people.

The prevalence of abuse of older people in Australia is unknown, and like other forms of family violence, many cases go unreported. An international study cited by The World Health Organisation (2018) estimates that one in six people aged 60 years and older were subjected to some form of abuse over a one year period (Yon, Mikton, Gassoumis & Wilber 2017).

While family violence against older people can be perpetrated by intimate partners, it can also be perpetrated by adult children and grandchildren, or other relatives and carers. A recent report entitled *Seven Years of Elder Abuse Data in Victoria* (Joosten, Gartoulla, Feldman, Brijnath, & Dow 2020), found that of the advice calls made to Seniors Rights Victoria (SRV), almost all reported abuse (91%) was perpetrated by a family member, most commonly sons (39%) or daughters (28%). Over this period, SRV also noted a steep increase in the number of advice calls including 72% from women and 28% men.

The scope of this Framework is specifically on preventing abuse of older people within community settings and therefore does not address abuse within Residential and Aged Care settings.

Intersectionality

It is important to recognise the diversity that exists amongst older populations, and factors such as ability, gender and gender identity, sexuality, race and ethnicity, Aboriginal and Torres Islander status, faith, class and geographical location, can intersect to shape one's experiences of ageing and ageism, and further compound experiences of marginalisation and disadvantage.

Victoria's Free From Violence Strategy (2017) notes that abuse, or violence against older women and men, is caused in part by society's marginalisation of older people that affords them less power and social status - seeing them as less able to make decisions for themselves. The Strategy (Victorian Government 2017) identifies gender inequality as a key factor that intersects with ageism to drive violence against older women. For example, a lifetime of lower wages, part-time work and time out of the workforce to raise children means that women face cumulative financial disadvantage in older age. This can increase their dependence on others and the probability of abuse and violence.

91% was perpetrated by a family member

Two-thirds of abuse **perpetrated by son or daughter** of the older person

(Seven Years of Elder Abuse Data, 2020)

> " a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.

Background to the Framework

A case for action

While there is a growing understanding and acceptance of elder abuse as a form of family violence, current frameworks addressing family violence prevention, such as *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth 2015), are focussed on the gendered nature of violence, and gender inequality as the key driver that enables a social context in which men's violence against women occurs.

No such framework currently exists for the abuse of older people. To date, work to prevent the abuse of older people has primarily focused on taking action on the early signs of abuse (secondary prevention or early intervention) and intervening after abuse has occurred (tertiary prevention or response).

In November 2019, Eastern Elder Abuse Network's (EEAN) Prevention Working Group recognised, that to effectively work in this domain and progress primary prevention, there was a need for:

● Consistent messaging around primary prevention of the abuse of older people

● Shared understanding of primary prevention (in plain language)

● A shared framework/document to guide primary prevention action

Given the current evidence gap, this work has been built on research from the OPERA Project (Older People: Equity Respect & Ageing) and the broader recognition of ageism as a driver of the abuse of older people.

Tertiary prevention
Intervening **after** abuse has occurred
e.g. litigation, police, courts

Secondary prevention or early intervention
Taking action on **early signs** of abuse
e.g. awareness raising events, community education, Wills/Power of Attorney

Primary prevention
Preventing abuse **before** it occurs.
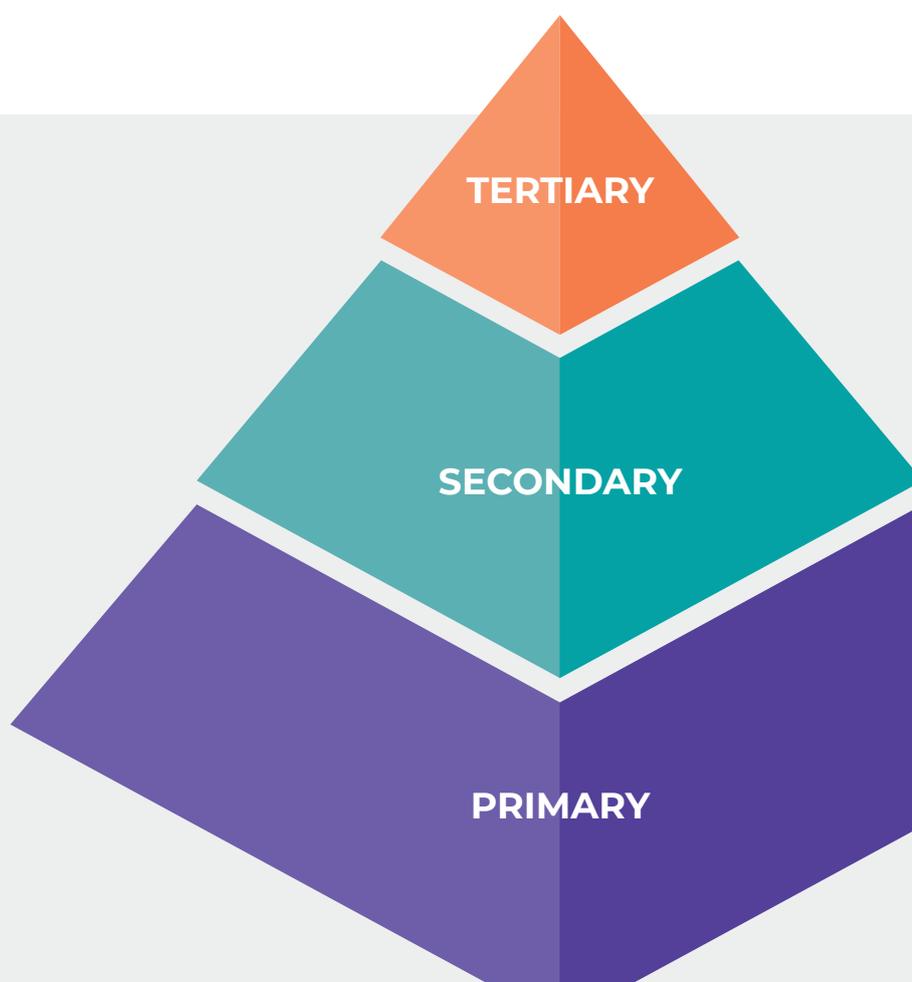Addressing the root cause of elder abuse, including ageism.

Figure 1. Scale of Prevention
(ECLC, 2019, based on Our Watch, Change the Story, 2015)

Using a primary prevention approach to address abuse of older people

A primary prevention approach is about preventing the abuse or violence from happening in the first place.

Primary prevention involves seeing the bigger picture by looking at the environments, systems or social constructs that result in a behaviour. It is about understanding these underlying drivers of abuse and addressing the root causes.

In relation to the primary prevention of abuse against older people, it is about understanding how social structures, attitudes and beliefs feed the myth that 'young' is better than 'old' and that some groups or individuals should be afforded greater value than others. This includes considering what *drives* negative attitudes, beliefs and behaviours around ageing and older people, and enables or condones ageist attitudes or the mistreatment of older people.

While there remains much to learn about the drivers, there is general consensus that ageism is a contributing factor or driver of the abuse of older people.

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...it is about understanding how social structures, attitudes and beliefs feed the myth that 'young' is better than 'old' and that some groups or individuals should be afforded greater value than others.

Ageism

The World Health Organisation (WHO 2020 defines **Ageism** as the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age. Ageism refers to how people think (stereotypes), feel (prejudice) and act (discrimination) towards others or oneself based on age. It can be institutional, interpersonal or self-directed (WHO 2021).

Disrespect of older people can start in small, seemingly insignificant ways, from birthday cards filled with ageist humour, or jokes about having a 'senior's moment' when you misplace the keys. It is known that ageism has serious and far-reaching consequences for people's health, well-being and human rights (WHO 2021). It affects confidence, quality of life, job prospects, social connectedness, health, wellbeing and life-expectancy (The Benevolent Society 2017; WHO 2021). At the extreme, it can lead to abuse of older people.

It is acknowledged that ageism is a social phenomenon that can be experienced at any age. In this context, the term ageism is used to explore the experiences of older people.

Policy
and Law

Education
Interventions

Intergenerational
Contact
Interventions

In the first Global Report on Ageism (2021), WHO identifies three strategies to reduce ageism that have been shown to work: policy and law, educational activities and intergenerational contact interventions. These strategies are reflected in the Framework themes, goals and activities.

Policy and Law
They can include policies and legislation that address age discrimination and inequality and human rights laws.

Educational Interventions
Educational interventions to reduce ageism help to enhance empathy, dispel misconceptions about different age groups, and reduce prejudice and discrimination by providing accurate information and examples that challenge harmful stereotypes.

Intergenerational Contact Interventions
Intergenerational contact interventions that foster contact between people of different generations have been shown to help reduce intergroup prejudice and stereotypes. These interventions are noted among the most effective interventions to reduce ageism against older people and also show promise for reducing ageism against younger people.

To see the full report:
Global Report on Ageism (WHO)
visit www.who.int.

Further to this, the United Nations *Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020–2030)* presents a unique opportunity, in bringing together all sections of society to improve the lives of older people as well as future generations (WHO 2020). Its key goals include promoting global action to combat ageism, create more age friendly cities and communities, and secure integrated health care and long-term care so people of all ages can enjoy healthy and active lives (Dixon 2021; WHO 2020).

Socio-ecological approach

The abuse of older people occurs within a complex interplay of individual, interpersonal, community and social factors. The socio-ecological model is used to understand the framework for prevention.

In order to change the cultural conditions that enable family violence and the abuse of older people to occur, initiatives should:

- Be targeted at individual, organisational, community and societal levels – working across the three levels (shown in the ecological model).

- Include coordinated strategies and messages that are mutually reinforcing across different settings and across the different target groups.

- Reflect a whole of community approach.

SOCIETAL

COMMUNITY / ORGANISATIONAL

INDIVIDUAL / RELATIONSHIP

Figure 2. Socio-ecological approach to understanding a framework for prevention (WHE 2013, p11; VicHealth 2007)

PART 02
Building the Evidence Base

In 2018, ECLC in partnership with Swinburne University led the OPERA Project to increase understanding of the drivers of the abuse of older people.

OPERA's key purpose was to engage and consult with older people in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne (EMR) to explore how ageism is expressed and experienced in the community and promote positive attitudes to ageing.

With the strong support of Eastern Elder Abuse Network members, ECLC led consultation with almost 300 community members across the EMR (Phase I). Participants included older community members (aged 60 years+ and 50+ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) together with sector representatives. Community groups included a diverse representation of gender, ability, and cultural and faith backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members. Data collected from these consultations, including community experiences of ageing and ageism, and a vision for 'a world without ageism,' together form the basis for this Framework.

The OPERA Phase I Consultation Report can be viewed online. The OPERA website (www.opera.eclc.org.au) also includes links to videos that challenge ageism (developed by Swinburne University 2019).

While OPERA contributes to the evidence base, this work sits alongside a range of other significant action in the eastern region challenging ageism. It also complements State and Federal Government initiatives, along with national work such as EveryAGE Counts and International campaigns and resources produced by the World Health Organisation, FrameWorks Institute and renowned activist, Ashton Applewhite.

Key findings from OPERA

Findings from the OPERA Project highlighted individual experiences of ageism and age discrimination of older people living in the EMR. These are explored below and form the basis of the Framework for Action.

Expressions of ageism

- **Negative images and stereotypes of ageing** from depictions in the media and movies to ageist birthday cards. Negative associations of ageing included a sense of decline, vulnerability, dependence, loss of identity and irrelevance.

- **Barriers to participation and accessibility** through the built environment, public transport and technology, along with barriers in obtaining and maintaining employment.

- **Negative attitudes and behaviours from community or family members** including disrespect, impatience, feeling invisible and heavy expectations on their time.

Under the latter theme community members identified that the trajectory and impact of rigid gender roles that set men up as 'breadwinners' and women as 'nurturers' have implications for an individual's financial autonomy, agency, social connection, and sense of value/relevance. This has the potential to lead to increased vulnerability to elder abuse.

Many older community members felt that the 'why' behind their experiences of disrespect and age discrimination related to the sense that in society, a person's 'value' is directly linked to their income and capacity to contribute economically through an earned wage.

While outside the scope of this Framework, greater research is required around broader systems that fuel a social mentality around consumption, individualism and greed, and the social context in which ageism occurs.

A future without ageism

When asked about aspirational values/goals for a world where older people are safe, valued and respected, the community identified:
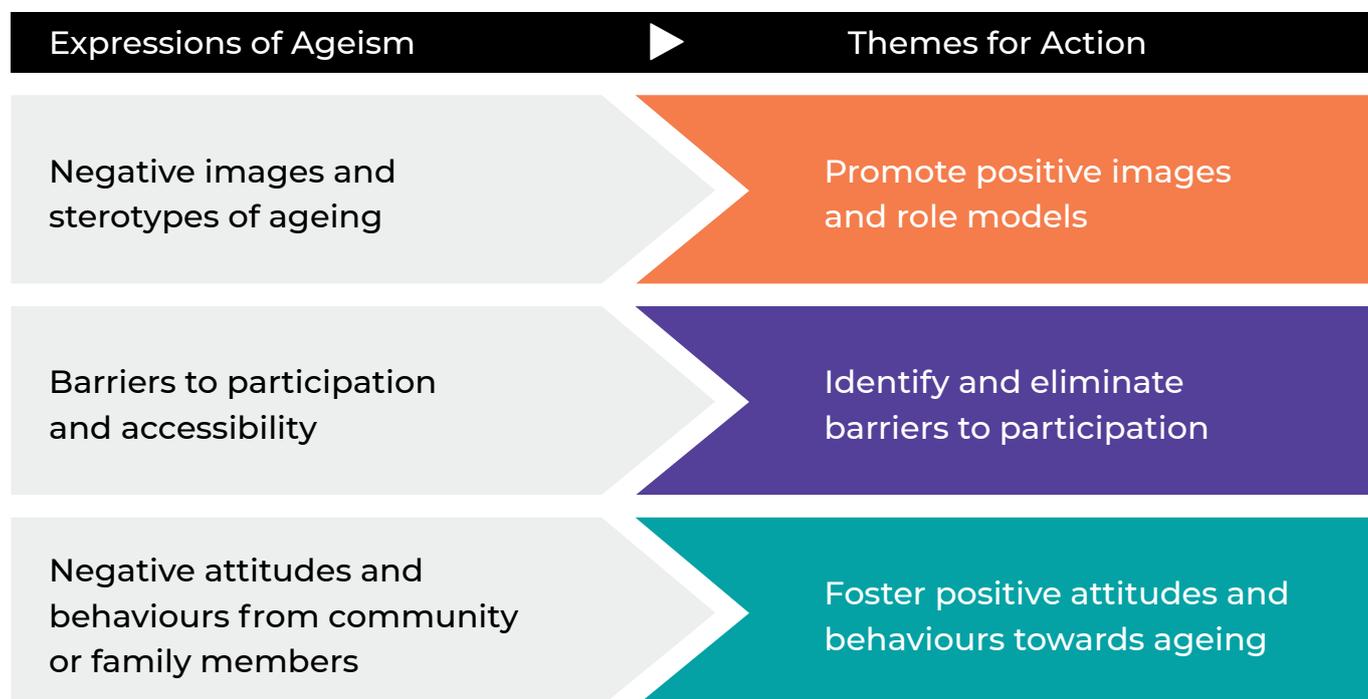
- Everyone is afforded respect and value beyond their perceived economic 'value.'

- A holistic approach to health and wellbeing is one that gives meaning to and enriches lives through social connection, intergenerational programs, physical activity, volunteering, connection to nature, the arts, enjoyment of pets, and cultivating community, belonging and sense of meaning.

- Society and services are geared at looking after the most vulnerable community members, including adult children going through difficult times, which can relieve the care 'burden' from ageing parents.

- Courageous conversations are embraced – normalisation and celebration of ageing in all its forms, planning for second half of life and addressing the stigma and fear around end of life.

- Interdependency is fostered – shifting from individualism to being more community minded with a shared value of looking out for and helping those in need.

To view the full report
OPERA Phase I Findings (ECLC 2019)
visit www.opera.eclc.org.au/resources

Framework:
Themes for Action, Goals and Activites

Expressions of Ageism	▶	Themes for Action

Negative images and sterotypes of ageing

Promote positive images and role models

Barriers to participation and accessibility

Identify and eliminate barriers to participation

Negative attitudes and behaviours from community or family members

Foster positive attitudes and behaviours towards ageing

The Preventing Abuse of Older People Framework (see page 3) builds on evidence from the OPERA Project by revising the three expressions of ageism into strengths-based 'themes for action' to represent the aspirational goals to be achieved.

The Framework reflects these higher level themes for action together with Goals set out across the individual, organisational, community and societal levels. The Framework also identifies example activities together with populations and settings, to promote mutually reinforcing strategies and messages across the whole of community.

Overall, the Framework demonstrates the important role everyone can play in promoting respectful relationships across the ages.

Conclusions
and Future Directions

Preventing Abuse of Older People: Primary Prevention Framework **is a high level roadmap to guide primary prevention efforts to address and prevent the abuse of older people.**

The Framework presents an opportunity for EEAN Partners, organisations and the broader community to commit to addressing ageism and working together toward a shared regional vision of 'a world where older people are safe, valued and respected.'

As an emerging area of work, organisations have the opportunity to trial and test activities and contribute to the growing evidence-base around promising primary prevention practice. Organisations are encouraged to draw on and promote Framework goals and activities to influence and inform organisational planning processes.

The EEAN partnership will continue to work together to advocate for ongoing resources and support to build capacity, showcase examples of primary prevention practice, and progress towards a Regional Action Plan to prevent the abuse of older people.

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A world where older people are safe, valued and respected.

eastern community legal centre

OPERA

Acronyms

ECLC	Eastern Community Legal Centre
EEAN	Eastern Elder Abuse Network
EMR	Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne
IEPCP	Inner East Primary Care Partnership
OPERA	Older People: Equity, Respect & Ageing
SRV	Seniors Rights Victoria
TFER	Together For Equality & Respect
WHE	Women's Health East
WHO	World Health Organisation

Glossary

Ageism

Ageism is defined as the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination directed towards others or oneself based on age. Ageism can take many forms, including prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory practices, or institutional policies and practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs.

Abuse of an older person
also known as 'elder abuse'

Abuse of an older person is any act which causes harm to an older person and is carried out by someone known and trusted. Often, abuse of an older person is perpetrated by someone considered to be a family member and is a form of family violence. However, it is not limited to occurring within the family unit and can also be perpetrated by a carer, friend or neighbour, who the older person is dependent upon. It can include:

- **Physical:** Physically hurting, restraining or rough handling, behaving aggressively in their presence or property damage
- **Financial:** Use of money or resources without agreement, living in their home without contributing or pressuring to change Will or Power of Attorney
- **Sexual:** Unwanted sexual advances, using explicit language or viewing explicit material in older person's presence
- **Psychological:** Put downs, criticism or intimidation; threatening to harm the victim, their pet, another person or property; threatening to put in aged care
- **Social:** Preventing visitors, going out or participation in cultural, spiritual or religious activities; withholding mail or phone calls
- **Neglect:** Failing to provide adequate clothing, food, drink, medicine, care, safe supervision, living standards or access to medical care

Eastern Elder Abuse Network (EEAN)

Established in 2010, the EEAN is a network of organisations working to progress regional approaches to prevent, raise awareness and respond to elder abuse in the eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne. It is facilitated and chaired by ECLC.

Family violence

The term family violence refers not only to violence between intimate partners but also to violence between family members, including intergenerational and abuse of older people. Family violence includes violent or threatening behaviour, or any other form of behaviour that coerces or controls a family member or causes that family member to live in fear.

Gender

Gender incudes socially constructed roles behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for a person based on their sex. Gender refers to the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, femininity and masculinity.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a way of seeing or analysing the dynamics of power and social inequality in society. Taking an intersectional approach means recognising the diversity that exists amongst older populations, and how factors such as ability, gender and gender identity, sexuality, race and ethnicity, Aboriginality, faith, class, life stage, and geographical location, can intersect to shape one's experiences of ageing and ageism, and further compound experiences of marginalisation, discrimination and abuse.

Primary prevention of abuse of older people

Primary prevention interventions are those that seek to prevent abuse before it occurs. The focus of a primary prevention approach is on addressing the underlying causes, or drivers, of the abuse of older people.

Although there can be areas of overlap, primary prevention differs from **secondary prevention or early intervention** where initiatives are focussed on taking action on the *early signs* of abuse (eg. awareness raising activities or events, community education, Wills/Power of Attorney). The focus of **tertiary prevention or response** is on intervening *after* abuse has occurred for example litigation, police and response services.

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