

UnitingCare Australia Calls for Nationally Consistent Approach to Elder Abuse

The nation's largest provider of aged care services has supported the Australian Law Reform Commission's (ALRC) call for a national approach to combatting elder abuse in its *Elder Abuse - A National Legal Response* report, released yesterday.

UnitingCare Australia National Director Claerwen Little said consistency across the country is a key element in addressing elder abuse and that a national approach, with consistent laws and coordinated responses, will be most effective.

"All UnitingCare services, the Uniting Church and its agencies, regard elder abuse as a serious and repugnant crime. We believe that a national plan can set a clear and strong path towards combatting elder abuse," she said.

"We consider that the scope of a national plan should also extend beyond legal reforms to prioritise other strategies recommended in the ALRC report including national awareness campaigns and elder abuse hotlines, along with training for people working with older people and in financial institutions to recognise signs of elder abuse.

"Overall it is very important to join the service sector with the shared responsibility of all individuals in the community to act to prevent elder abuse.

"It is also vital to ensure that the critical role of aged care workers and carers in the community is appropriately valued within the consideration of the report recommendations," Ms Little said.

In addition, Ms Little said the UnitingCare aged care network advocated a strong focus on promoting respectful intergenerational relationships, combatting ageism and addressing attitudinal problems concerning older persons.

"There is a significant intersection concerning ageism and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes or misconceptions about older people.

"We also express particular concern in relation to older people with disability.

"A national plan must work to address these issues and combat negative stereotypes."

Ms Little said the significance of the ALRC recommendations should now be further considered within the context of the significant existing regulatory environment within aged care to ensure effective and efficient measures are in place to prevent abuse into the future.

"We are committed to doing all in our power to prevent the abuse of older people in our care, to respond swiftly and appropriately when elder abuse does occur, and to raise awareness of the issue and associated risks within the broader community," Ms Little said.

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