

*Select Committee into Elder Abuse — Final Report —
“I Never Thought it Would Happen to Me’: When Trust is Broken” — Motion*

Resumed from 25 September 2019 on the following motion moved by Hon Nick Goiran —

That the report be noted.

The CHAIR: Members, when we last were interrupted in our consideration of this report, the motion put was that the report be noted, and we were receiving the remarks of Hon Kyle McGinn. I give the call to Hon Kyle McGinn.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: Thank you, Mr Chair.

It has been a while since we have spoken on this report. The last time I was on my feet, I spoke a bit about retirement and lifestyle villages and some of the difficulties the committee found in looking into that matter. I found when I went into the electorate that there is quite a bit of interest in this matter, and there were discussions with community members and the local media about issues of concern. I think they mainly picked up on the comments I had made about how both previous governments and the current government are building aged-care facilities in regional and remote areas. That goes with the times, with people wanting to die in the small towns in which they live. It is interesting that one of the journos said to me that there is a lot of choice of providers in the metropolitan area, but in regional areas, half the time they are just begging for someone to come out and operate a facility, which in turn leaves open some questions about whether the laws and regulations in place are sufficient. That matter needs to be looked at further down the track, whether that be through an inquiry or some other avenue. Although regional areas might not have the same number of provider options, we need to ensure that people in general areas are given a fair trial of what those providers are offering. One of the concerns that the committee could not look into, but I know dabbled with a bit, was the ability of a provider to take a person’s pension and use that to pay for their accommodation and food, but who is measuring whether the person is getting a bang for their buck out of that deal?

I now want to move to page 29 of the report and the heading “Aboriginal communities”. I touched on that briefly last time before my remarks were cut off. I found this part of the report quite concerning. To give some context, many departments, and many governments at all levels, whether it be local, state or federal, are working in the Aboriginal community space. I would have thought that the committee would have had the opportunity to get information about elder abuse in Aboriginal communities. However, I believe that after what I have heard was quite an effort to get submissions, the committee was unable to get much more information on this subject.

The report states in paragraph 3.19 —

The Committee notes that in many Aboriginal cultures, the status of being an ‘Elder’ has different connotations than the use of the word in describing an older person generally. An Aboriginal elder is usually a recognised community representative and can be a custodian of culture and history; a person may be recognised as an Elder in their community at an age younger than 65 years of age ...

That is interesting. The more I travel around my beautiful electorate of Mining and Pastoral Region, the more I see the many differences in culture of the many Aboriginal groups. Everyone has a different culture and understanding of what is happening and where it is heading. One of the concerns that I had around elder abuse comes back to when the federal government introduced the welfare card in the Kalgoorlie–goldfields region. My concern is simply—in case members are not aware, and we have had debates about that in this chamber—that people on the welfare card have 80 per cent of their funds restricted to the card, and get only 20 per cent in cash. I do not think the federal government has addressed the issue of seniors on pensions—elders—who still receive 100 per cent of their pension in cash. I do not think anyone has thought about or monitored the effect of taking cash off younger people when an elder within the house or family unit is still receiving cash. I can tell members that the flow-on effect is, “Give me the money, grandma”, or, “Give me the money, grandpa”. That, to me, is elder abuse.

One of the problems with the welfare card that has not helped the situation is that the federal government consistently made promises that more resources would be chucked in with the trial and that would help take up the slack on any issues that came out. No extra resources have been allocated. The welfare card is designed to stop people from buying alcohol. However, no extra Alcoholics Anonymous services have been provided and all that sort of stuff. One area that garners, in my view, the need for extra support and services is that Aboriginal culture has a sharing mentality. That is particularly the case when the elder within the family unit is not subject to the welfare card. I reckon I would be quite shocked if we were able to find out statistics around how many people have suffered elder abuse under the welfare card system. We need to remember that Western Australia currently has two trial sites, one in the East Kimberley, and one in the goldfields. From what I can gather, the federal government has taken the view that it will roll this out further. I know there is some strong opposition to that. Some changes have been made to enable people to get off the welfare card. If the federal government is looking at continuing to head down this path—which I do not agree with, and I do not think it is garnering the results that everyone out there is praising, because there are no reports that show us any results—I would urge it to look into this aspect, particularly in

Indigenous communities. It is important to understand and take on board that Aboriginal family units face different challenges from what other families face. That is particularly important when we consider that the two areas in which the welfare card is being trialled are high-density Aboriginal communities. I would have thought the federal government would have taken this on board and focused a bit more time on it, rather than just rolling this out.

Paragraph 3.20 of the report is also interesting. I like the fact that the committee has taken on board the culture and strong tie to kin in Aboriginal communities, which is both a positive and a negative to elders in the community. It states, in part —

Strong family relationships may dissuade an older person from viewing negative behaviour towards them as elder abuse, which can increase their vulnerability. The Committee has heard that many Aboriginal cultures are matriarchal and ‘it is nearly always women who shoulder the burden’.

Paragraph 3.21 states —

The Committee has heard evidence that any response to elder abuse must be ‘culturally safe’ and be delivered by culturally competent professionals or else older Aboriginal people will not access the services.

That is a very good point. I praise the committee for making that point. The report goes on to quote somebody’s evidence. I do not know whose evidence, but it states —

Cultural safety is to do with recognition of what is culturally appropriate. There are certain aspects to services that are delivered, for instance, to non-Aboriginal people but are not appropriate for Aboriginal people ... in some Aboriginal communities there are certain family members who cannot be in the same room, cannot interact together, because of their particular family relationship ... it is important to remember there are all sorts of Aboriginal nations and countries and languages.

Wow! That is really powerful because it is so true. I was very lucky to do a cultural competency course at the Goldfields Aboriginal Language Centre, and although I grew up in areas in which heaps of Aboriginal people lived, I never really understood how in-depth their culture is, in particular the make-up of families and how people marry in. There can be four different families but how that all works is very complex. As it states in the report, in some families, people cannot be in the same room. That would be very challenging, particularly in small towns. I suppose another challenge would be around who is the protector within a family and who keeps the peace and stops elder abuse happening. It is intriguing to note the findings in the report. Finding 12 states —

There is a lack of formal research on the prevalence and forms of elder abuse that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Western Australia.

I would love something to be done about that. It is a great finding, but there are departments and not-for-profit organisations in all three tiers of government operating in this space.

The CHAIR: The question is the report be noted. Hon Kyle McGinn.

Hon KYLE MCGINN: It is interesting that that finding clearly states a lack of any formal research into the prevalence of elder abuse within the Aboriginal community. That is scary because from the top to the bottom of Western Australia there are many different organisations operating in the Aboriginal services space and we know nothing about the damage elder abuse is causing. That tells me that the left hand is not talking to the right. It is integral within this space that we take a bipartisan approach, particularly between the state and federal governments so we can be on the right page to improve the circumstances of Aboriginal people. When inquiries like this are done, we should be able to access resources that give a snippet of the issues Aboriginal communities are facing. Finding 13 states —

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people face a greater risk of experiencing elder abuse and it may occur at a younger age than other older people in the community.

Again, that is very interesting, because there could be the dynamic of an elder, who potentially is a young person who has taken a role of leadership within that community, who is subject to, by the normal phrase, “elder abuse” but is under the age of 50. I will be very interested to see how that is approached as well.

Finding 14 states —

Any support service that is offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people must be culturally safe, developed in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and acknowledge the unique circumstances in which elder abuse can occur.

That is another great finding, and it has two recommendations, which state —

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Department of Communities commission research into the prevalence and forms of elder abuse and the unique challenges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people face in Western Australia.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Government develop an action plan that is culturally safe, developed in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and acknowledges the unique circumstances that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people face in Western Australia.

It has been interesting to go through the report. I have to say that the area I found most interesting was the Aboriginal community space. I can see that the committee has put some thought into what it has written in this space. It has not just said, “We didn’t get submissions; it’s too hard”; it acknowledged that there are key issues that need to be looked at. It is also an achievement to make two findings after not getting any submissions. I am a little concerned, however, and I have to put it on the record, that not many submissions were made in this space, because, as I said, it is astounding, considering there are not-for-profit organisations and government departments working in and around this space every day. I would have thought that this would have been a great opportunity for those organisations to contact the committee and to air their issues. I am intrigued to know what those challenges were, if any committee member wants to touch on that, to gain an understanding of where we are lacking so that we can fix up those spots and so that the community can be in a better position down the track. I am intrigued by the recommendations and I appreciate the committee’s work in this space. I look forward to the rest of this debate.

Committee interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 339.]

Sitting suspended from 4.15 to 4.30 pm