

SENATE INQUIRY INTO ELDER ABUSE
OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL INTERESTS (OMI)
SUMMARY NOTES

CONTEXT

- OMI's Strategic Plan 2018–22 identifies seniors as one of the specific groups requiring focus in relation to equitable access to government and non-government services and to achieve full participation by CaLD communities in social, economic, cultural and civic activities.
- According to the 2016 Census:
 - One-third (32.2 per cent) of Western Australians were born overseas.
 - Almost one-fifth (16.6 per cent) of all Western Australians were born in non-main English speaking (NMES) countries and a similar proportion (17.7 per cent) spoke a language other than English at home.
 - There were 108,339 people born in NMES countries aged 55 years and over, an increase of 16.3 per cent since 2011.
 - The percentage of seniors born in NMES countries aged between 55 and 64 years decreased from 46.3 per cent to 41.7 per cent while the proportion of those aged 65 years and over increased from 53.7 per cent to 58.3 per cent, reflecting the trend in the ageing of the population in general and the ageing of CaLD communities which migrated to Australia during and after World War II.
 - The top 10 countries of birth of seniors aged 55 years and over were: **Italy, Scotland, India, Malaysia, South Africa, Netherlands, Germany, Singapore, Ireland, Vietnam, China, Myanmar and Philippines.**
 - Since 2011, the numbers of seniors born in Asian countries such as the Philippines, China, Vietnam and Singapore, and South Africa have increased rapidly while those born in European countries such as Italy, Germany and the Netherlands have declined.

DEFINITION

- OMI supports the World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of elder abuse, that is:

...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.
- The term 'elder' or older or senior needs to be broad to accommodate different age groups and cultural connotations involved.

PREVALENCE

- At the international level, the prevalence rates of elder abuse in high or middle-income countries ranges between two per cent and 14 per cent.
- In Australia there is very limited research and data relating to the incidence and prevalence of elder abuse. Available evidence suggests that 'neglect' could be as high as 20 per cent for older Australian women.
- Elder abuse is often hidden or at best under-reported mainly because the perpetrators are most commonly family members.
- For many CaLD communities that have a collectivist orientation, inter-generational expectations, financial dependence, fear of shaming the family or community or even deportation can lead to underreporting.

FORMS OF ELDER ABUSE

- Forms of elder abuse include **financial, emotional or psychological, physical, social, sexual and neglect**. Seniors often experience multiple types of abuse concurrently
- Among the various forms of abuse, financial abuse is the most widespread—ranging between 74 per cent and 81 per cent for Western Australia.

RISK FACTORS

- Gender—women are more vulnerable than men.
- Age—increases with age.
- Physical disability or cognitive impairment—older people from CaLD backgrounds, particularly women, can be vulnerable due to higher prevalence of disability and dependence on family members for care and support.
- Social isolation—the risk of social isolation is even greater for CaLD seniors due to low levels of English proficiency combined with low levels of education, low socio-economic status, and dependence on family members for care and support
- Ageism—negative perceptions, beliefs and community stereotyping of the natural ageing process as frailty or vulnerability can contribute to the risk of elder abuse.

INITIATIVES / GOOD PRACTICE

- **Empowerment and advocacy**— such as the role of Aged Rights Advocacy Service Inc. (ARAS) in South Australia.
- **Active service model or wellness approach** established predominately by Home and Community Care (HACC)—funded agencies throughout Australia, the **Silver Chain 'Home Independence Program' (HIP) and the Wellness Approach to Community Homecare (WATCH)** are examples in WA. Such services are under-utilised by CaLD seniors and more culturally appropriate strategies to educate and inform these communities are required.
- Initiatives to address social isolation such as the OMI-funded **Community Dementia Champions program** and Befriend's **eFriends** project.
- OMI's **Multicultural Aged Care Consultation Cafés** organised in collaboration with its partners in the Aged Care sector since 2015 which provides an opportunity for CaLD seniors, carers and relevant service agencies to receive information about aged care programs and services and to have their voices heard regarding CaLD seniors' needs and the issues affecting them.

NEW PROPOSALS/INITIATIVES

- ensure that CaLD seniors in general, and those with dementia, depression and other cognitive impairment can maintain their language, culture, and have access to family and friends, volunteers and support services, through initiatives such as the Community Visitors Scheme, subsidised social activities and/or individualised support programs
- provide more resources to bridge cultural, language and funding gaps in aged care facilities and home care programs
- ensure that CaLD seniors have access to appropriately trained interpreters and bilingual workers where appropriate
- offer incentives such as awards and bonuses to encourage trained interpreters and bilingual workers to work in aged care
- explore and capitalise on the opportunities offered by ICT to connect seniors with family and friends at home and overseas and with locally available services and supports
- prioritise organisations that demonstrate effective strategies to address the needs and preferences of people from CaLD backgrounds, and have a good track record for delivering services and promote these types of facilities.

FEDERAL BUDGET INITIATIVES

- OMI notes the announcement in the Federal Budget of \$22 million over five years from 2017–18 to protect the rights of older Australians and protect them from abuse. This will support:
 - expansion and evaluation of trials of three types of specialist support services: specialist elder abuse units located in legal services; health-justice partnerships; and family counselling and mediation services
 - an Elder Abuse Knowledge Hub
 - a National Prevalence Research scoping study
 - development of a National Plan to address elder abuse, to be agreed between the Commonwealth, States and Territories, in consultation with industry and community groups.
- OMI will advocate for consideration of CaLD issues in relation to each of these initiatives.