



14 November 2017

The Hon Nick Goiran MLC
Chairman
Select Committee into Elder Abuse
Legislative Council
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

RE: Greysafe submission - Select Committee into Elder Abuse

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission into the Legislative Council's inquiry into elder abuse.

Greysafe is a not for profit organisation that works to prevent the abuse, neglect and exploitation of older Australians. Greysafe aims to prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation of older Australians by:

- Raising awareness of the issues through high impact campaigns and advocacy
- Developing initiatives to help end the social isolation of older Australians
- Empowering and supporting victims of abuse, neglect and exploitation by acting as an advocate and voice for the victims.
- Providing a range of programs and services to assist older Australians to feel safe and valued.

VISION

Our vision is for Australia to lead the world in the protection and empowerment of its older citizens, no matter their health or social status.

MISSION

- to investigate, expose and raise awareness of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation of older Australians.
- to educate the community of the need to take action to prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation of older Australians.
- to act of behalf of older Australians at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation through strong representation to Government

Focus of this submission in relation to the Terms of Reference

Greysafe sees its role as doing more than just highlighting the problems and issues. We aim to put forward ideas and initiatives to help protect and empower older Australians. We take seriously our role as a trusted advocate for older Australians that have experienced, or are at risk of abuse, neglect or exploitation.

For this submission, we have focussed our attention on items h) and i) in the Terms of Reference.

National summit to develop elder abuse action plan

We believe there is an urgent need to convene a national summit on elder abuse in order to develop a national action plan and timeline for implementing a range of urgently needed reforms, many that were highlighted by the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) in their June 2017 report into elder abuse in Australia.

There is undoubtedly much good work taking place behind the scenes across state based agencies in response to the ALRC review. However, it is imperative that in the interests of transparency and getting the community engaged in helping address elder abuse in this country, the summit should be attended by all heads of Australian Governments, elder abuse legal and financial experts, regulators, advocates representing impacted families and victims, community service group leaders and key industry leaders.

We believe that any action plan can only succeed if there is input from political leaders, public and private sector experts and grass roots advocates with on the ground experience of elder abuse who can help lead the change needed at a local community level. To that end, Greysafe stands ready to work alongside governments, agencies and sector specialists to ensure the community is brought along on the journey to stamp out elder abuse.

For our part, we have already spent time developing some key recommendations that could help shape an agenda should you proceed with the idea of a national action summit.

This includes:

- The need to toughen laws to protect older Australians suspected to be at risk of or the recipient of elder abuse. This includes making elder abuse a criminal offence.
- The establishment of a National Elder Abuse Taskforce made up of prominent legal, finance, medical and social welfare experts and charged with the responsibility of overseeing new national standards and laws to help identify and stamp out elder abuse in the home and in aged care.
- The need for an urgent and definitive study to take place to determine the actual number of Australians being subjected to elder abuse and those at risk of elder abuse. At present, we have no idea of the exact number of older Australians being subjected to elder abuse.
- The creation of an ongoing national public awareness campaign, funded by government, on recognising the signs of elder abuse and how to help those at risk.
- The establishment of a twice yearly forum where elder abuse victims, families and advocates are brought together with legislators and National Elder Abuse Task Force members to check progress of initiatives and discuss practical solutions to eradicate elder abuse.
- The implementation of two 'End the Social Isolation' trial programs in each state of Australia. One trial to take place in the city and one in a rural/regional area. Social isolation and exclusion is a factor in elder abuse. To be able to begin to address elder abuse in the home, where possible, we need to encourage victims to get out of the house and away from perpetrators and towards individuals and organisations that can help. The pilot program would see GPs, lawyers, financial advisers, counsellors and service clubs come together and meet with potential victims and socially isolated older Australians on a regular basis at a venue provided by local councils.
- The establishment of ongoing professional development, training and educational seminars to highlight the signs of elder abuse. These education modules would become mandatory

and be undertaken by bank staff, medical professionals and other organisations that have regular interactions with vulnerable older Australians.

- The development of education programs in schools around the theme of 'Respect, Care and Connection with the Elderly'.
- Engage Australia's community service clubs such as Lions, Rotary, Probus and Neighbourhood Watch to work with the National Elder Abuse Taskforce to help lead the community change required to identify and stamp out elder abuse. Service clubs have the connections and volunteers available to be able to help lead the 'End the Social Isolation' and 'Respect and Reconnect with the Elderly' projects through their interaction with older Australians in their local communities.

Greysafe believes the summit should be about coming up with meaningful and tangible actions. It should not be another talkfest where delegates leave the summit only having talked about the problems. We all know the problems, we now need an action plan and timelines put in place to come up with solutions.

Replace failing aged care random inspection scheme with Grey Guardians

For some time now there have been numerous reports in the media about previously accredited Aged Care facilities subsequently being found to have failed to meet acceptable standards of care.

Despite recent changes in relation to the residential aged care accreditation process announced by the Federal Minister for Aged Care, we believe they don't go far enough in relation to improving transparency in the system.

We propose a plan that our organisation believes would go some way to will go some way towards rebuilding community trust in the system.

The plan – that would see retired medical professionals and community advocates undertake random inspections of aged care facilities – is becoming increasingly urgent in the wake of a new emerging battle between bureaucrats and the aged care industry over who will pay for random inspections to check that residents are receiving adequate care.

The power struggle between the aged care industry and the Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (AACQA) is extraordinary at a time when reportable assaults in aged care facilities have increased over the past three years and in the wake of disturbing media reports of abuse in aged care and horrific examples of poor care and standards in accredited aged care facilities.

Not only are we hearing of new reports of accredited facilities subsequently been found to be substandard, but reportable assaults in aged care facilities have increased for the past three years.

You will be well aware, the last publicly available report released by the Federal Government in 2015/16, showed that nearly 3,000 aged care residents were victims of reportable assaults. These figures are distressing enough but clearly, if the media are uncovering poor standards of care at facilities that have been previously ticked off and accredited by AACQA, then the accreditation and random inspection process is broken.

Some in the community and many staff that work in the system have lost confidence in residential aged care. Yet the aged care peak bodies and the regulator's response is to start a slanging match over who should pay for a random inspection that would cost a facility between \$2,000 and \$5,000 once a year, if it took place at all.

Under the new model being proposed by Greysafe:

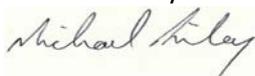
- AACQA would retain control and implementation of the 'tick the box' aged care accreditation scheme but random inspections would no longer be part of AACQA's charter.
- The number of random inspections would increase. The Federal Government would set a minimum quota for the number of inspections needing to take place across all parts of Australia.
- The Federal Government would call for expressions of interest from retired doctors, nurses, social workers and trained professional advocates to form locally based teams of Grey Guardians who would undertake more regular random inspections to both assess and report on the care and condition of aged care residents and the facilities themselves.
- The Grey Guardians would report into an independent office separate from the AACQA.
- Guardians would be locally based in and around their communities, be retired or semi retired and not currently employed as an aged care assessor with AACQA.
- Guardians would be paid a small stipend to cover costs and would be available to conduct inspections, if required, out of office hours and on weekends. (At present, random inspections by AACQA assessors generally take place between the hours of nine to five, Monday to Friday.)
- Interviews with residents, their families and nursing staff would become the first priority for random inspection visits. At present, under the AACQA managed system, discussions with families and residents forms the smallest percentage of an aged care accreditation assessment.

To support the implementation of the Grey Guardian scheme and improve transparency in the aged care accreditation and inspection process, we believe there should be a number of other changes implemented that will go some way towards rebuilding community trust in the system. They include:

- Each quarter, the government would take out advertising space in major newspapers and publish a report card, for the previous three months, of the number of assaults in aged care and the details of aged care facilities that have failed to meet 100% compliance with accreditation and random inspection checks.
- In the newspaper report card, publish the numbers of random inspections conducted during the quarter, including the names of the facilities inspected and the findings.

We believe this new plan is a win-win for the government and age care residents and their families. There would be an immediate and significant increase in the number of random inspections taking place at aged care facilities across Australia staffed by retired professionals with the expertise and availability to be on site more often. Most importantly, by publicly reporting inspection findings quarterly in the national media and seeing immediately where improvements have been made, or need to be rectified, Australians might start regaining confidence in their residential aged care system.

Yours sincerely



Michael Riley
CEO