



# COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT **ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION**

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism)

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# INTRODUCTION

Elder abuse continues to be a community, social, health, workforce, and legal issue, with the World Health Organization (WHO) estimating its prevalence in high and middle-income countries from 2 – 14%.

In South Australia, the Adult Safeguarding Unit has statutory responsibility and accountability for receiving and responding to reports of actual or suspected abuse or neglect. Its legal remit extends to all adults (aged 18+) who may be vulnerable. A steady rise in the number of calls to its **1800 372 310** number since it opened on 1 October 2019, reflects increasing awareness and demand for its services. Approximately 60% of calls are related to abuse or mistreatment of older South Australians.

Older people have the right to safety, dignity, and autonomy and to be treated with respect.

When, through ageist attitudes and discrimination, these rights are not upheld, there is the risk of abuse, mistreatment, and neglect of older people.

In 2021, approximately 50% of older people who responded to a self-perception survey as part of the Elder Abuse Prevention Campaign community consultation, said they did not feel valued in their community.

This Communications Toolkit provides information and materials about the links between ageism and elder abuse, and how to raise awareness across a range of communication channels, including websites, intranets, social media, electronic and printed newsletters.

Use this toolkit to learn what you and others can do to tackle ageism, starting with this reflection: **‘How do you treat the older people in your life?’**

## WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

Elder Abuse is any deliberate or unintentional action, or lack of action, carried out by a person, often in a relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes distress and/or harm to an older person.\*

Elder abuse or mistreatment can occur once or many times. It can be financial, physical, psychological, social, neglect, sexual or chemical, with financial and emotional abuse often occurring together.

The National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study published in 2021, found that 1 in 6 older Australians (15%) experienced some form of abuse or mistreatment in 2019-2020.

The study found that two-thirds of older people do not seek help when they are experiencing abuse or mistreatment (61%).

In South Australia, Adult Safeguarding Unit phone line data from 2022 shows:

- > The most reported abuse was emotional (45%) followed by financial (40%).
- > Older women were most likely to be experiencing abuse (67%).
- > Most commonly, alleged abusers were adult sons (27%) and daughters (18%).

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) on 15 June each year, is a global occasion used by individuals and organisations to draw attention to the mistreatment of older people which violates their human rights, and can cause illness, loss of productivity, isolation, and despair.

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\* World Health Organization (WHO), 2023, Ageism - Retrieved from Abuse of older people (who.int)

## WHAT IS AGEISM?

Ageism or age discrimination is a combination of how we think about age (stereotypes), how we feel about age (prejudice), and how we behave in relation to age (discrimination). The World Health Organization says age is often used to categorise and divide people in ways that lead to harm, disadvantage and injustice and erode solidarity across generations.<sup>†</sup>

Many older South Australians find themselves unfairly treated because of their age, which impacts their confidence, job prospects, financial situation, health and quality of life.

Media and popular culture can present stereotypical characters and situations and use language that reinforces negative community beliefs and attitudes towards older people.

Ageism is pervasive, creating a barrier to living and ageing well, negatively affecting the way services and care are provided, and making it harder for older people to participate in the workforce.

Ageism takes away older people's rights – the right to make their own decisions, be safe, and be treated with dignity and respect.

Ageism works against inclusion, creating a society that does not value the input of its older members.

Tackling ageism means breaking down the barriers and busting myths and stereotypes so that South Australians, no matter their age, can live well.

Office for Ageing Well is committed to tackling ageism – an Enabling Factor of **South Australia's Plan for Ageing Well 2020-2025** – through its work to safeguard the rights of older South Australians, create age friendly communities where people remain active and engaged as they age, and respect diversity.

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<sup>†</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), 2023, Ageism - Retrieved from Abuse of older people (who.int)

## COMMUNITY AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

In October 2015, South Australia began an annual elder abuse prevention awareness campaign – helping the community to recognise the signs and focussing on how to prevent elder abuse – as part of implementing the Strategy to Safeguard the Rights of Older South Australians 2014-2021 and Action Plan 2015- 2021.

The first Stop Elder Abuse campaign was launched to:

- > raise public awareness of the rights of older people, what Elder Abuse is, what the signs are and where to go for information and support; and
- > enable South Australians to feel confident about seeking help and information if they believe an older person’s rights are not being respected.

Subsequent campaigns, while continuing to be community-focussed, have also engaged groups and sectors specifically connected with older people such as women aged 40+, carers and volunteers, health, legal and financial professionals, banking and real estate representatives and hair and beauty consultants.

All were identified as potentially developing close relationships, and being in regular contact, with older people, making them well-placed to spot behavioural and other signs of elder abuse and do something about it.

South Australia’s Adult Safeguarding Unit runs a community awareness campaign in October each year, promoting its confidential advice and support phone line number **1800 372 310**, and website – [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/adultsafeguardingunit](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/adultsafeguardingunit).

In 2022, recognising the importance of identifying and calling out ageism as an upstream way of preventing mistreatment and neglect of older people, Office for Ageing Well refocused the community awareness campaign on ‘tackling ageism’ to highlight the links between ageism, rights, and abuse.

The annual Elder Abuse Prevention campaign now carries the tagline ‘Ageism can lead to abuse. How do you treat the older people in your life?’ linking infringements of older people’s rights through ageism and elder abuse.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- > **Share materials and resources** – we have created materials that you can download from our webpage, to help promote the Elder Abuse Prevention campaign messages. If you need larger quantities of resources order them via [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism).
- > **Include in your communications** – we have drafted text about the Elder Abuse Prevention campaign you can share in your communications.
- > **Post and Tweet** – you can use our social media text to help with promotions on your social media platforms. Use the hashtag #tacklingageism. You can also like and share our posts.
- > **Link to us** – we encourage you to link your website to the Tackling Ageism webpage – [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism).
- > **Share this document** – we welcome your support and encourage you to send this toolkit to any individuals and organisations who may like to share information about the Elder Abuse Prevention campaign.
- > **Keep us in the loop** – we would love to see any communications you distribute through your networks. Email us: [officeforageingwell@sa.gov.au](mailto:officeforageingwell@sa.gov.au).

## WHO TO COMMUNICATE WITH

- > Older South Australians
- > South Australian community
- > Staff and management of services for older South Australians
- > Carers of older South Australians
- > Volunteers who interact with older South Australians
- > Family, friends, and neighbours of older South Australians
- > Members of your networks

## KEY MESSAGES

- > Older people have the right to safety, dignity, and autonomy and to be treated with respect.
- > Ageism takes away older people's rights: to make their own decisions, work, be safe and be treated with dignity and respect.
- > Ageist attitudes can shape a society that excludes older people and makes them feel invisible.
- > Consider your attitude to older people, stand up to ageism and help shut down the potential for mistreatment and neglect.
- > Ageism can lead to abuse. How do you treat the older people in your life?



# RESOURCES

## NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

How do you treat the older people in your life? (341 words)

Ageist attitudes can shape a society that excludes older people and makes them feel invisible. Older people have the right to safety, dignity, and autonomy and to be treated with respect.

But in our society, ageism is a pervasive presence that impedes living and ageing well, can negatively affect the way services and care are provided, and is a barrier to older people participating in the workforce.

Through Office for Ageing Well's regular Statewide Conversations, older South Australians continue to express frustration about their portrayal by media and in popular culture. The presentation of stereotypical characters and situations and the use of language such as 'elderly', reinforces negative community beliefs and attitudes towards older people.

Persistent and insidious devaluing of older people – for instance when others assume they cannot do something, excluding them, and talking over them – can spiral into abuse or mistreatment. This may involve depriving older people of their rights, such as making their own decisions about their life, how and where they live, who they spend time with, and how they deal with their finances.

Abuse or mistreatment of older people is a continuing worldwide community, social, health, workforce, and legal issue. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates a global prevalence of up to 14% in high and middle-income countries.

In Australia, the National Prevalence Study in 2021 reported that 1 in 6 older people experienced some form of abuse or mistreatment in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Signs of abuse or mistreatment can be fear, sadness, and neglect. Forms of abuse include financial, psychological, physical, social, neglect, sexual and chemical – such as over or under medication.

If you suspect abuse or mistreatment of an adult who may be vulnerable, you can seek free confidential advice and support or make a report to the Adult Safeguarding Unit on **1800 372 310**.

Consider your attitude to older people, stand up to ageism and help shut down the potential for abuse, mistreatment and neglect.

**Ageism can lead to abuse. How do you treat the older people in your life?**

## WEBSITE

### Text (long)

Older people have rights – the right to make their own decisions, to work, be safe, and be treated with dignity and respect. But when others assume an older person cannot do something and exclude them because of their age, it makes them feel invisible and sad. Ageism takes away older people’s rights and can lead to abuse or mistreatment. How do you treat the older people in your life? Visit: [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism)

### Text (short)

Ageism takes away people’s rights and can lead to abuse or mistreatment. How do you treat the older people in your life? Visit: [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism)

## SOCIAL MEDIA

You can use the text below to distribute Elder Abuse Prevention messages through your own social media platforms.

### Twitter

Ageism can lead to abuse. How do you treat the older people in your life? [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism) #tacklingageism

One in six older Australians said they experienced abuse or mistreatment in 2019-2020. How do you treat the older people in your life? Visit: [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism) #tacklingageism

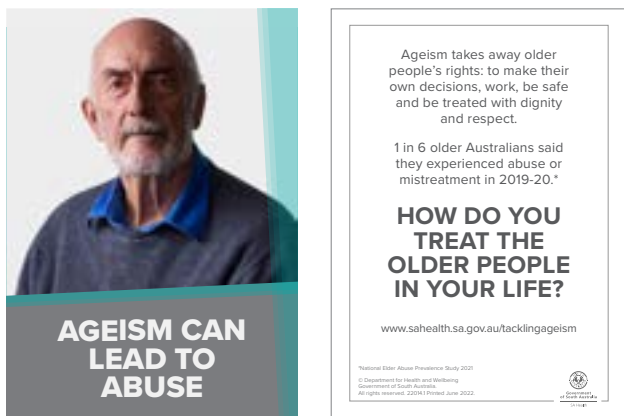
### Facebook and Linked-In

Older people have rights – the right to make their own decisions, to work, be safe, and be treated with dignity and respect. But when others assume an older person cannot do something and exclude them because of their age, it makes them feel invisible and sad. Ageism takes away older people’s rights and can lead to abuse and mistreatment. How do you treat the older people in your life? Visit: [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism) #tacklingageism

## PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

You can download the Elder Abuse Prevention promotional postcard online at [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism). Go to the 'Resources' tab at the top of the page or contact Office for Ageing Well for hard copies. You can also access short videos from the webpage.

Postcard in A5 size (man)



Video thumbnail



# CONTACT

Thank you for helping us to promote the Elder Abuse Prevention message.

If you think you or someone you know is experiencing some form of abuse or mistreatment, call the Adult Safeguarding Unit on 1800 372 310 for free confidential advice and support or to make a report. For more information visit [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/adultsafeguardingunit](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/adultsafeguardingunit)

To learn more about the types of elder abuse and the signs to look for, visit [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/stopelderabuse](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/stopelderabuse)

If you have any questions about this toolkit, please contact:

## Office for Ageing Well

SA Health

Email: [officeforageingwell@sa.gov.au](mailto:officeforageingwell@sa.gov.au)

Phone: (08) 8204 2420



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