



# COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT **ELDER ABUSE PREVENTION**

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



Government  
of South Australia

# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>What is Ageism?</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>What is Elder Abuse?</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Community Awareness Campaign</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>How you can help</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Who to communicate with .....	8
Key messages .....	8
<b>Resources</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Newsletter article .....	9
Website .....	10
Social Media .....	10
Promotional Materials .....	11
<b>Contact</b> .....	<b>12</b>

# INTRODUCTION

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.

Elder abuse continues to be a community, social, health, workforce, and legal issue, with the World Health Organization (WHO) estimating a global prevalence of more than 15 percent.

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.

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 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.\*

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 and creates a barrier to living and ageing well. It deters older people from staying in the workforce and affects the way services and care are provided.

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.

***Future Directions to Safeguard the Rights of Older South Australians 2023-2027***, establishes a clear statewide approach to strengthening older people's rights, emphasising tackling ageism as fundamental to preventing abuse and mistreatment.

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

## 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.<sup>†</sup>

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 data for the 2022-2023 financial year shows:

- > The most frequently reported concerns related to emotional abuse (38%) and financial abuse or exploitation (20%).
- > Older women were most likely to be experiencing abuse (66%).
- > Most commonly, the people alleged to be carrying out the abuse were adult children (43%).

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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<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 community 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, identify elder abuse, its signs, and where to go for information and support.
- > Enable South Australians to feel confident about seeking help and information if they believed an older person's rights were not being respected.

Subsequent campaigns 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. Through regular contact with older people, they were considered well-placed to spot behavioural and other signs of elder abuse and do something about it.

In 2019, South Australia's Adult Safeguarding Unit was established to provide confidential advice and support and take reports of abuse of older people, later broadening its scope to encompass any South Australian adult who may be vulnerable. The Unit can be reached on **1800 372 310**, with more information available at [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 abuse and neglect of older people, Office for Ageing Well refocused the community awareness campaign to:

- > Reinforce that older people have rights, including the right to make their own decisions, be safe and be treated with dignity and respect.
- > Highlight that ageism can lead to abuse, mistreatment, and neglect.

In 2023, Office for Ageing Well released Future Directions to Safeguard the Rights of Older South Australians 2023-2027, establishing a clear statewide approach to strengthening older people's rights, emphasising tackling ageism as fundamental to preventing abuse and mistreatment. The annual Elder Abuse Prevention campaign carries the tagline 'Ageism can lead to abuse. How do you treat the older people in your life?'

## 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.
- > Check the Age Positive Communication Toolkit for how to recognise and take action against ageism - find it at [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism).
- > Consider using the Bystander Action for Ageing Well training module at your community group or organisation - find it at [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism).
- > **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?
- > Find out more at: [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism).



# RESOURCES

## NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

### **Check your attitude – how do you treat the older people in your life?**

(372 words)

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

But ageist attitudes in our society lead to exclusion and underestimation of older people, making them feel invisible, deterring them from staying in the workforce, making it harder to live and age well, and negatively affecting the provision of services and care.

Persistent and insidious devaluing of older people – when others assume they cannot do something, exclude them, or talk over them – can spiral into abuse or mistreatment. This may involve depriving older people of their rights, like 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 with the World Health Organization (WHO) estimating a global prevalence of more than 15 percent. In Australia, the National Prevalence Study in 2021 reported that 1 in 6 older people experienced some form of abuse or mistreatment in 2019-2020. Fifty percent of older people who responded to a community perception survey in South Australia said they did not feel valued in their community.

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.

Older South Australians who provide feedback through Office for Ageing Well's regular Statewide Conversations, continue to express frustration about their portrayal by media and in popular culture. The stereotyping of characters, presentation of situations such as the inability to drive safely, and the use of language such as 'elderly' reinforce negative community beliefs and attitudes towards older people.

You can check your own attitudes and beliefs about older people, discover ways to challenge ageism using the *Age Positive Communication Toolkit*, and access *Bystander Action for Ageing Well Training* at: [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/tacklingageism).

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

If you suspect abuse or mistreatment of an adult who may be vulnerable, you can contact the Adult Safeguarding Unit on **1800 372 310** or go to [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/adultsafeguardingunit](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/adultsafeguardingunit) to seek free confidential advice and support or to make a report.

## **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

A community perception survey found 50% of older people did not feel valued in their community. 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

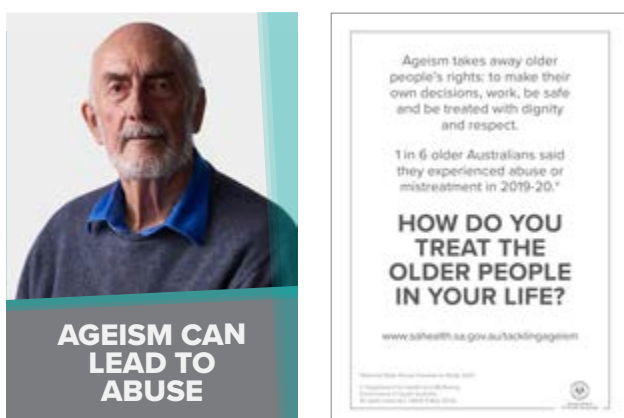
## PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

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 (woman)



Postcard in A5 size (man)



Video thumbnails



# 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

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

Phone: (08) 8204 2420



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