

Workshop summation

Discussion questions: If we agree that an integrated statewide approach to aged care and abuse prevention is necessary, what does this mean? How would a good integrated system look? Can we learn important lessons from other integrated system models?

Value of an integrated approach

There were a broad range of views across the workshops regarding the value of an integrated approach. Concerns were expressed regarding what the net benefit to the aged care and domestic violence sector would be of integrating more than they currently are and how will it benefit both groups of clients. Integration between the domestic violence and aged care sectors takes a lot of resources, make connections and then staff leave, difficult to do integration in an effective manner, fragmentation of services. Some workshop participants felt that the sectors work well individually but not together, so that integration needs to improve where clients cross between sectors in order to support them better.

A state wide approach

Participants discussed the need for a state wide approach to responding to abuse of older people. There was some discussion of the value of a state plan in delivering an integrated approach and the role of a group like Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse has played in prompting a government response in South Australia. One group considered the Victorian integrated family violence system as a model and its adaptability to abuse of older people.

One question arose regarding how a robust state wide approach with monitoring systems can retain enough flexibility for services to not push the issue when an older person does not want intervention? A formal approach may not always work. Mature and calm development is needed.

Participants argued that a state wide approach needs to be responsive to regional differences. An integrated approach is important but local and individual issues need to be recognised within that. Resources available in regions can vary dramatically. Local government also has a key role to play in implementation. Sometimes states or territory government will need to resource local government to implement integration. Terms of reference and MOUs were identified as important to facilitate integration. Participation in an integrated approach to addressing violence against older people needs to be broad - e.g. including Meals on Wheels, RSPCA.

Participants discussed whether a national approach rather than statewide approach would be beneficial but there was also concern around how to get agencies on board. Uniform advanced cared directives across the country are needed because there are differences in states and territories.

Legislation reform

While there was some discussion of legislation, legislative reform was not necessarily seen as the way of engendering change. Monitoring and accountability around existing legislation were

considered to be more important. There was some discussion of the legislative reform around domestic violence as perhaps offering some guidance to legislation change regarding abuse of older people.

Protocols

Considerable discussion around the value of protocols took place. There was a general scepticism around the take up of protocols currently in place. Monitoring, accountability and some form of compulsion were seen as critical to their implementation. Protocols as seen as needing to be implemented from the top down and needing to be feasible for the people on the grounds. There needs to be acknowledgement that it takes a lot of effort and commitment. Local government was identified as possibly playing a role in enforcing and implementing protocols.

Information

Participants indicated that a good system would need to be accompanied by information about services available and what they provide. Workers and advocates need knowledge of the sector and information would need to be multi-layered. Preparation of such information may include some mapping of services (to identify unmet need as well as services available).

A common language around risk, abuse and violence is needed so that workers and advocates from different sectors are talking about the same thing.

Data is needed about people at risk and their take up of services and interventions, to help target services. Data needed was considered to be the kind of data of value to government for determining funding and for service delivery. Moving to greater uniformity in data collection was seen as of value. Who collects data was also a point of discussion. It is not always appropriate for services and advocates to collect data because of privacy issues. ACAT might be a service that could collect data.

Information sharing was considered to be important and may require some protocols or agreements.

Screening and risk assessment tools

Screening and risk assessment tools were discussed as possible crucial aids in identifying and responding to abuse. Screening for abuse is of limited use without appropriate response, follow up and referral.

Training

Training was considered an important component of an integrated response to abuse of older adults. It was suggested that training be provided by one agency to offer consistency throughout the sectors and be offered regularly because of staff turnover; ie. at least annually. Some good examples of cross sector training were discussed. Short term funding was considered a barrier to training effectiveness by hindering people building relationships over the longer term.

Prevention and early intervention

There was broad support for awareness raising in the community, including among medical and legal professionals and clients about abuse of older people. Community education was seen as important to overcome ageism. The public awareness campaign run in SA recently was cited as having increased referrals to the Aged Rights Advocacy Service by around 50% each month from radio advertisements and articles in the paper.

It was suggested that older people need one case manager and or advocate to help them negotiate the service system. GPs were seen as an important service area to detect abuse and make referral.

Delegates raised issues about the many forms of financial abuse that older people may experience. For example, there was some discussion of the need for education regarding enduring powers of attorney and responsibilities of that role. Discussion also touched on the need for greater monitoring of and accountability by enduring powers of attorney. There was a suggestion of registering powers of attorney to assist with combating financial abuse.

Discussion also identified isolation of older people as a contributor to the risk of older people being abused. Strategies were seen as needing to address the isolation of older people.

Resources

Any change and improvement in the system is dependent on funding and resources to run appropriate services. Services are currently experiencing a shortage of funds to meet needs of older people experiencing abuse.

Client centred

Whatever integration process is developed, delegates felt it needs to be client centred and must support older people to resolve the problems. Frailty of the older person needs to be considered which is often not a factor in the domestic violence sector. The possibility of a Charter of Human Rights was discussed as a means of protecting older adults but would need money to fulfil aspects of the charter. Confidentiality was considered an important issue in responding to abuse of older people but a complicated one.

Political leadership

There was general agreement that any integrated response to abuse of older people needs political leadership from a Minister or a high level bureaucrat, and needs to be lead by a particular department. Leadership and a champion are critical to implementation because they bring other services and agencies to the table and ensure organisations take responsibility for different roles. The process needs to be a whole of government exercise.