

## **Inquiry into Elder Abuse in Queensland**

**Submission No:** 24  
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**Submitter Comments:**

## Submission to EACC inquiry into elder abuse:

I would like to draw attention to two subtle areas of elder abuse in Queensland which are systemic.

I am a retired physiotherapist who has worked in aged care, have a deep interest in the welfare of the elderly and currently support, long distance, an older person who is struggling with abuse and difficulty negotiating the system, as well as some nearby.

1. Many elderly people have found it difficult or impossible to adapt to modern electronic communications and it is a source of anxiety and frustration for these people. This silent unseen group will not be heard by your Inquiry, because they did not get the email and are therefore largely invisible to Government. The Australian Bureau of Statistics suggests that 44% of adult Australians are 'functionally illiterate', and 38% of older Australians (65+ years) are computer illiterate. Despite this, the Federal Government is allowing the banks, large corporations and tech giants, often foreign, to drive the direction and changes which disadvantage, distress and fleece the elderly. Many older people say that they feel abused by society because their lives are now so difficult. For instance, cheques have been discontinued by many banks despite the fact that many elderly cannot use internet banking and have difficulty safely or confidently managing a card. Discontinuing cheques may be viewed as an operational decision, but Government should oversee banking decisions that significantly disadvantage technologically challenged older citizens. Another example is of a friend who wanted to buy foreign currency for a trip, was told to purchase it online (with steep charges) or to get a TravelCard. She is not able to do either herself.

I ask that both State and Federal Governments take action to ensure that the elderly are not trampled by the changes being driven by big corporations, and recognise Government responsibility for protecting the way of life of citizens, especially those who are vulnerable, and especially those in regional areas.

2. The second area of hidden elder abuse is the level of corruption and the free hand that local and area councils enjoy, combined with the lack of effective legislation to curb unfairness and abuse. Here I need to be more specific to make my point. For example, an elderly man living alone was informed by the Rockhampton Regional Council that his toilet system was 'too old' to meet current specifications, and he was obliged to replace it. Then he was charged \$24,000 by the Council for approval and inspections of the new one. Further, some Councils employ 'Compliance Officers' to ensure that their arbitrarily imposed rules are obeyed and these enforcers turn up armed with a revolver, regardless of whether the property owner is elderly, alone or afraid. This has been reported by two elderly individuals in the Rockhampton area.

Heavy-handed standards, exorbitant fees, and peremptory enforcement are intimidating, demoralising and distressing for old people, especially those without family support, living alone and/or already suffering some other form of elder abuse.

The Local Government Act 2009 does not appear to have sufficient teeth to control the unfairness, profiteering and bullying of the elderly that Councils indulge in. Please ensure that some watchdog be set on Councils, that their conduct, standards and fees are reasonable and they may be subject to legal action if necessary. And old people must be able to call out the perpetrators of abuse without needing to do so online.