

Inquiry into Elder Abuse in Queensland

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City of Gold Coast

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Committee Secretary
Education, Arts and Communities
Inquiry into Elder Abuse in Queensland
PARLIAMENT HOUSE QLD 4000

Via email: eacc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Secretary

CITY OF GOLD COAST SUBMISSION – INQUIRY INTO ELDER ABUSE IN QUEENSLAND

Thank you for the invitation to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Elder Abuse in Queensland. The City of Gold Coast submission outlines the nature and extent of elder abuse and the effectiveness of current systems in supporting older Queenslanders. The submission is based on the details of the inquiry as expressed in the terms of reference.

Introduction

The City of Gold Coast (the City) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Queensland Parliament's Education, Arts and Communities Committee as part of the Inquiry into Elder Abuse in Queensland. The City strongly supports this important work.

The City prides itself in being a safe and liveable city and is committed to working closely with the State Government and local services to prevent and raise awareness of elder abuse. The City acknowledges that preventing and reducing elder abuse is a shared responsibility and acknowledges the significant harm it causes individuals and the broader community.

The Gold Coast has a substantial and growing population of older residents, expected to make up 20.7% of the city's population by 2041. As of 2021, the Gold Coast had a higher proportion of older people compared to both Queensland and Australia overall and it had the second highest population of residents aged 65 and over among Queensland local government areas following Brisbane.

Research and feedback indicate that the Gold Coast has a high rate of elder abuse. According to the Elder Abuse Prevention and Support Service (EAPSS), the Gold Coast receives the highest number of elder abuse cases, compared to other locations where this service is offered. Additionally, the Gold Coast is the second highest location for calls to the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit Helpline. Feedback from EAPSS, also informs a rise in elder abuse has been likely impacted by factors such as cost of living, housing and mental health.

The World Health Organisation describes elder abuse as a violation of human rights and a significant cause of illness, loss of productivity, isolation and despair. It is an issue that affects not only the person who is impacted directly but also the broader community. The increasingly growing older age profile of Australians makes it particularly important to address elder abuse now, to prevent it from becoming a more substantial issue in the future.

Older people are among the most vulnerable of all Australians. There are unique characteristics and social structures at play for older demographics, with additional stressors associated with ageing. This includes hardship when seeking help, ability to access services and being able to safely separate from an abusive relationship. Further, it can limit the participation of older people in communities and prevent those communities from the benefits contributed by engagement with older people.

The City encourages consideration of increased investment, funding and support services for older people on the Gold Coast, increased community education and awareness and additional research to assist in informing initiatives and other activities to prevent and reduce elder abuse in our community.

Nature and extent of elder abuse

The City acknowledges the prevalence estimates are likely to underestimate the true extent of elder abuse due to reluctance to disclose ill-treatment by a family member, dependency on the perpetrator for care, and/or barriers with technology. Older people with cognitive impairment (for example, dementia) or other forms of disability may also be unable to report abuse.

Elder abuse can have serious physical and mental health, financial, and social consequences. These include physical injuries, premature mortality, depression, cognitive decline, financial devastation and placement in nursing homes.

The City recognises the national statistics (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2021) indicating one in six older Australians report experiencing elder abuse, with almost two thirds of older people not seeking help and perpetrators most commonly being adult children. The number of older people in Australia experiencing abuse is likely to increase over time with Australia's ageing population. In 2021, people in Australia aged 65 or over accounted for 17% of the population. This is estimated to increase to 21% of the population by 2066.

It is understood each state and territory in Australia has a dedicated helpline for elder abuse. The City acknowledges that in 2021-22, the Queensland helpline received the highest calls about abuse of older people (3,841), with Queensland receiving 10.2% more calls than Victoria (3,487), being the second highest. The Elder Abuse Statistics in Queensland: Year in Review 2023-24 report indicated that there were 4,458 calls to the helpline in 2023-24, indicating an increase of 16% when compared to 2021-22.

Elder abuse in the Gold Coast

The Gold Coast is a rapidly growing city. In 2021, there were approximately 111,000 residents aged 65 years and over. Gold Coast had a higher proportion of older people (17.7% of the total population), compared to Queensland (17.0%) and Australia (17.2%).



The population of the Gold Coast is ageing, following national trends. The number of older residents is expected to increase to 195,734 persons or 20.7% of the city's population by 2041. In 2021, the Gold Coast LGA (109,879) had the second highest population aged 65 years and over in Queensland, following the Brisbane LGA (166,463). The Queensland Government population projections (2023 edition) indicated that when excluding Greater Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast are projected to have the fastest growth in the number of older persons, both with an annual average increase of 2.7% between 2021 and 2046. In comparison, the projected average annual growth of persons 65 years and older in Queensland is 2.5%, with other areas in Queensland ranging from 1.3% per annum.

There appears to be a lack of data for elder abuse incidences in the Gold Coast. In the Elder Abuse Statistics in Queensland: Year in Review 2023-24 report, data collected from calls to the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit Helpline identified the victim location in 85.8% of cases. Of these cases, 272 victims were from the Gold Coast. When comparing to the previous year, 250 victims were reported to be from the Gold Coast, indicating an increase of 8.8%. In Queensland, Gold Coast had the second highest victim location (272), following Brisbane.

In the City's 2024 Safe City Survey, a 3-yearly survey introduced in 2021, 61% of respondents reported feeling safe in their neighbourhood. This was a decrease of 11.7% who reported feeling safe in their neighbourhood when compared to the 2021 Safe City Survey. The Survey received a total of 4,723 responses representing the highest response rate for any City survey during the 2023-24 period. Of the 4,723 respondents, 25% were aged over 65 years. Domestic and family violence (DFV) was communicated as a top safety concern by 14% of respondents.

Feedback from the EAPSS, a partnership between Relationships Australia Queensland and the Gold Coast Community Legal, highlighted issues impacting the Gold Coast including:

- High incidences: The Gold Coast reports the highest number of elder abuse cases managed by the EAPSS.
- Types of abuse: Majority of clients experience financial and psychological abuse.
- Family dynamics: Many clients wish to remain with the perpetrator, necessitating a comprehensive family response.
- Increasing incidents: There is a rise in elder abuse incidents, influenced by factors such as the cost of living, housing and mental health.
- Homelessness: There is an increase in homelessness among older women and a lack of accommodation options when trying to support older clients.

Based on Mayoral correspondence received from the Hon Leeanne Enoch, MP in April 2022 and data from the ABS, Census of Population and Housing 2021, the Gold Coast is facing a shortage of social and affordable housing, with demand far exceeding supply. Rising rental prices and long waiting lists for public housing are making it increasingly difficult for low-income residents to secure stable accommodation. Key factors include:

- The Gold Coast has 50% fewer social housing dwellings per capita compared to Brisbane, requiring at least 5,000 additional social housing units per capita to be on par with Brisbane.
- The Gold Coast Housing Service Centre has over 2,000 households on its waitlist, the third highest in Queensland, with 40% classified as very high need.



- The Gold Coast now has:
 - The highest median rent in South East Queensland (SEQ).
 - Lowest number of social dwellings per household in SEQ.
 - The highest average waiting time for social housing in SEQ.
 - Only 0.4% of rentals affordable for very low-income households.

Addressing housing supply is complex and extends beyond increasing land availability and construction. Individuals with complex needs require diverse housing options, often with support services to help sustain tenancies.

Responses to elder abuse

Overview of City initiatives

The City delivers a range of initiatives to support the reduction and prevention of elder abuse, acknowledging that it plays a pivotal role in community awareness, education and engagement.

Community safety initiatives are captured through the City's 2027 Community Safety Program. The Program provides a strategic framework to guide City initiatives and programs to strengthen community safety outcomes and increase actual and perceived safety in the community. The Program is currently under review, with the review recognising that a key focus area for the City is supporting the reduction in DFV. Opportunities for City support include:

- Community awareness and education – City support to the State Government's DFV Prevention Month, and the United Nation's 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, through delivery of key messaging and other activities to raise awareness and support residents to seek assistance if required.
- Community partnerships – attendance at relevant network meetings including the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Interagency Group, chaired by the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Prevention Centre. The group works together to share knowledge, solve problems, cultivate best practice, and foster innovation that effectively supports victims of abuse and DFV violence across the Gold Coast. Elder abuse has been a focus topic at recent meetings.
- As a local employer – as one of the largest employers in the Gold Coast, the City recognises its responsibility to support staff who may be impacted by DFV and committed to providing associated support, resources and training.

In addition, the City's Gold Coast Homelessness Action Plan 2024 was developed in response to growing concerns about homelessness, increasing public inquiries, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the 3-year plan, the City successfully implemented all 30 actions, leading to enhanced collaboration, stronger support networks, and more effective interventions. With the Plan now completed, the City has embedded its homelessness response into core operations to ensure sustained support and service delivery. Public space management, outreach programs, and strategic partnerships remain priorities, alongside ongoing advocacy for increased state and federal investment in housing and homelessness services. The City will continue to refine its homelessness response in alignment with broader



strategic priorities, including preparations for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Further, the City has a dedicated Seniors Program Officer, who collaborates closely with the community sector to support older Gold Coast residents.

Other City initiatives include:

- *City resources:*

The City is committed to providing essential resources to support community safety and wellbeing. A key resource is the City's Safety Information and Support card which lists contact details for several different support services, such as emergency accommodation and support, domestic, family and sexual violence, seniors and youth. This resource continues to be highly valued to the Gold Coast community, with approximately 5,000 copies distributed annually. Additionally, the City has also previously provided a seniors safety magnet with information and support contacts to keep safe.

Furthering its commitment, the City recently partnered with Relationships Australia Queensland to display the Queensland Government elder abuse information and support brochures in City Libraries. The City also supported community organisations to display flyers for elder abuse workshops in its community centres and libraries and shared this information through its established networks

- *City workshops:*

In partnership with the Queensland Police Service (QPS) and the Office of Fair Trading, the City has delivered Seniors Safety Sessions to equip seniors with strategies to keep safe, including information about elder abuse. These sessions have been held to align with World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in June and the Queensland Seniors Month in October. Community groups identified a benefit in organising independent sessions and therefore the need for the City to facilitate these sessions ceased in 2023.

In addition, City Libraries provided digital literacy and awareness workshops to older persons using the Australia Government's Be Connected resources.

- *Safer Suburbs Forum*

To facilitate communication with key community safety partners, including QPS, the City leads the Mayoral Safer Suburbs Forum. This interagency partnership addresses current and emerging safety issues and determines coordinated actions. Domestic and family violence is a key topic discussed at the Forum.

- *Events*

The City supports Seniors Month each year by hosting community events, linking older persons to support organisations and other seniors and by promoting local events online and in hard copy at various City locations.

The Housing Older Women Movement held a series of seminars and workshops across SEQ as part of the My Home, Your Home, Our Homes Project in 2024. The City provided support through venue hire and promotion. The initiative also enabled



the City to offer professional development to staff through attendance. Discussions focused on innovative and practical approaches to addressing the housing crisis, with a focus on affordable and intergenerational community-led housing.

- *Support for local community legal associations*

The City supports two local community legal associations by providing leased spaces across the city. These leased spaces support the community organisations to engage social workers and conduct outreach to support residents including older persons.

- *Linking older persons with support*

The City continues to support older persons by linking them with key local support services when needed, via regular enquiries and communications.

Local support services and working groups in the Gold Coast

From discussions with local services, the City understands that there is a lack of services for people experiencing elder abuse in Queensland and particularly for older persons residing in the Gold Coast.

The Gold Coast has a Gold Coast Elder Abuse Prevention Network (previously Gold Coast Elder Abuse Reference Group), chaired by Relationships Australia QLD Senior Relationship Services. The group members bring knowledge and expertise from their networks, work and other contexts to further develop understanding of elder abuse and enhance organisational responses to elder abuse on the Gold Coast. These are held quarterly, however in 2024 only one meeting was held. The City has attended one network meeting to date.

Opportunities to improve responses to elder abuse

Given the increasing incidences of elder abuse in Queensland, the increasing older population and the overrepresentation of elder abuse in the Gold Coast, the City encourages consideration of:

- Increased funding and support for older people, particularly in the Gold Coast, including consideration of housing and further investment in support services for both victims and perpetrators.
- Increased community education and awareness with consideration of:
 - the ability to reach the older population not using technology and the need to remove the shame and stigma around seeking support.
 - more education about what elder abuse is, including for perpetrators.
- Additional research to assist in informing initiatives, support and community education and awareness activities.

The City understands the Australian Government has released the Draft National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2024-2034. It is hoped this would guide Queensland's response and assist in guiding local governments.



The City commits to supporting lead agencies and community groups in the prevention and reduction of elder abuse in the Gold Coast, including through community education and awareness raising, and community partnerships.

Should you require additional information please contact Matt Werner, Manager Public Safety Compliance on [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,



**TOM TATE
MAYOR**

