

Inquiry into Elder Abuse in Queensland

Submission No:	97
Submitted by:	Gold Coast Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Inc.
Publication:	Making the submission public
Attachments:	See attachment
Submitter Comments:	



Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc.

10th April 2025

Education Arts and Communities Committee, Queensland Parliament

Via online portal

Elder Abuse Inquiry

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the topic of Elder Abuse.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc. (DVPC) welcomes the Queensland Parliament's commitment to increasing the safety of the community and the opportunity to contribute to the Elder Abuse Inquiry that we hope will create meaningful change for the victim-survivors of elder abuse, a recognised intersection of domestic and family violence.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast Inc. (DVPC) was established in 1992 as a not-for-profit community-based specialist domestic and family violence service. We provide services and supports including crisis intervention and support, counselling for women, children and young people, groups for women, children and young people, court support and assistance, court information and case management for men, men's education and behaviour change programs, community education and training, community awareness activities, as well as being the driver for the Gold Coast Domestic Violence Integrated Response.

Over the past thirty-three years our service has grown and developed and is recognised as a Queensland leader in providing high quality services and supports, and individual and systems' advocacy on behalf of domestic and family violence victim-survivors. Central to this commitment, is our ethos that everything we do is grounded in the lived-experience of victim-survivors, their wants and needs. With such in mind, the content within our submission is based on our practitioners' first-hand experience, working directly alongside women experiencing elder abuse. We also note that any proposed changes, to Queensland elder abuse supports, will only be successful if they are created and implemented with genuine, timely consultation and codesign, particularly with those with lived experience.

Reflective of the [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(2025\)](#) DVPC considers the age encompassing 'elder abuse' to relate specifically to 50 years and older for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Peoples, and 65 years and older for all other peoples.

Elder Abuse Support at DVPC

"I have a lot of elders on my caseload that I speak to on a daily basis ..."

Domestic and family violence is underpinned by ongoing gender inequalities across our society ([Our Watch, 2025](#)). [The Queensland Government \(2024\)](#) defines domestic and family violence as '...where one person in a relationship uses violence or abuse to maintain power and control over the other person'. The *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act (2012)* recognises these relationships to include romantic and intimate partner relationships, family relationships, and informal care relationships ([Queensland Government, 2024](#)). Victim-survivor's risk of domestic and family violence is known to increase with intersecting factors, including older age, commonly referred to as 'elder

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abuse' ([Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2025](#)). Consequently, given that elder abuse often occurs within the context of domestic and family violence, it is imperative that addressing gender inequality is forefront throughout elder abuse prevention, response and recovery, to ensure effective services and supports for victim-survivors, and accountability of people using this violence.

'I think calling it elder abuse creates a bit of an anomaly ... it makes it sound less common than it is ... it minimises men's violence towards women because it's another aspect of predominately male violence towards women, power over ... abuse of power, so I feel like it's not just inappropriate but potentially a term that creates more barriers.'

- DVPC Advocate

We provide daily support to women experiencing elder abuse, through Police Assisted Referrals, our community hotline, and referrals from other stakeholders. We provide our services in a variety of settings including court rooms, police stations, face-to-face meetings and over-the-phone, and have noted an increasing theme in women seeking support for elder abuse.

'I've noticed the increase in it [elder abuse] since I've been working here. I have a lot of elders on my caseload that I speak to on a daily basis ... the prevalence of it for me is quite shocking'

- DVPC Advocate

Tactics of Elder Abuse ***"How quickly it moves ..."***

The tactics of violence experienced by elder abuse victim-survivors include physical, verbal, psychological, financial and systems abuse. The person using violence commonly utilises numerous (if not all) tactics, to gain as much control and power as possible.

The following are common examples of abuse, used against elders in the Gold Coast community:

- Physical abuse – Direct physical abuse, physical neglect and denying the victim any physical supports (including withholding required medications).

'... the son, he refused to give her her diabetes medication ... she almost died'

- DVPC Advocate

- Verbal abuse – Encompassing name calling, utilizing the victim-survivor's age as a derogatory reference, and offensive language.

'... like you're worthless, using derogatory terms like you're an old bag and things like that.'

- DVPC Advocate

- Psychological abuse – Especially isolation, threats and coercive control. Common isolation tactics utilised by the person using violence include limiting the victim-survivor's contact with their loved ones and community (often through lies and manipulation), taking the victim-survivor's phone, and denying the victim-survivor required supports to leave the home. Prevalent threats include threats of significant physical harm to the victim-survivor and their home and belongings. Use of Coercive control is also widespread, often overlapping with systems abuse.

'... she required walking aids, but [the] person using violence actually damaged those and she wasn't able to use them.'

- DVPC Advocate

- Financial abuse – Removing the victim-survivor’s financial autonomy, for the person using violence’s own means, frequently occurring through technology and systems abuse wherein control is obtained under the guise of assisting to navigate complex processes, such as online portals and significant financial decisions.

‘... he was then getting every single last bit of money out while she was left with nothing.’
- DVPC Advocate

- Systems abuse – Coercing the victim-survivor to enable the person using violence as a co-signatory on key documents, including financial accounts and within medical decision making, and as their authorized carer or power of attorney. Similarly to financial abuse, persons using violence are recognised to often obtain this power by initially pretending to be supporting the victim-survivor to navigate complicated systems, such as Centrelink, health departments, and other support services.

‘How quickly it moves from pay your bills because you can't work with internet, [to] it's too difficult and I don't have time to take you to the bank, to signing over all these huge life decisions.’
- DVPC Advocate

Of these tactics, isolation is the most prolific, leaving the victim-survivor further dependent on the person using violence and thereby expanding their opportunity to utilise other forms of abuse, with no accountability.

Persons Using Violence in Elder Abuse ***“... they’re just stuck”***

Through victim-survivors’ engagements with us, family members, intimate partners, and recognized carers have all been identified as examples of persons using violence against elder people. However, adult children, specifically sons (and in some examples grandsons), are considered the most frequent perpetrator. In some instances, adult sons perpetrate abuse together, alongside the women’s intimate partner, or in-place of the intimate partner after separation or death.

‘I've noticed that often if the husband has passed away, the child steps in and takes up his role of being that aggressor.’
- DVPC Advocate

Adult family members using violence, particularly adult children, frequently live in close proximity to the victim-survivor, often residing in the same property or a neighbouring property. They also commonly have reported co-occurring intersectionality such as mental health concerns, that entwine the victim-survivor’s sense of responsibility to their abuser.

Similarly, for women experiencing elder abuse from their intimate partner, victim-survivors often report co-occurring concerns including the physical or mental health of their partner. Dementia and trauma (specifically, post traumatic distress) are common intersections, wherein victim-survivors’ feel an innate sense of responsibility of care to their abuser. Whilst in some such scenarios violence prior to the onset of the diagnosis will be disclosed, in other situations no prior violence is reported, although the target of the abuse may be specific to the woman alone.

‘And it's quite often that the male is losing their control because they're deteriorating in their own health, and then they just get more and more angry and want to control more.’

- DVPC Advocate

Wider family members, including stepchildren, are also recognized to perpetuate violence towards elder people, often including systems abuse and resulting in significant risk of homelessness for the older person.

'... the stepson whose abusive to her and has power of attorney is kicking her out and making her homeless at 80.'

- DVPC Advocate

We also note the immense difficulty when the victim-survivor's recognised carer, whether formal or informal, is the person using the violence. In these situations, the victim-survivor is particularly vulnerable to abuse due to the complex barriers in obtaining support and justice, including lack of opportunities to access services and report the behaviour.

'... her husband died ... the son sold the house, you know, took control of the money, was her carer (so was also getting paid for that) ... and just like pretty much refused to care for her, feed her, she didn't leave the house for months, like 6 to 7 months'

- DVPC Advocate

'... we do hear of stories with women's experiences, when it's their children have got power of attorney over them, and they're just stuck ...'

- DVPC Advocate

The Impacts of Elder Abuse "So much fear"

We have observed the impacts of elder abuse to be substantial, having ongoing and often life-changing impacts on victim-survivor's lives, and the lives of those in their wider networks.

Shame has been repeatedly highlighted by our Advocates as prolific in victim-survivors experience, preventing them from seeking support and furthering the person using violence's ability to inflict power and control.

'... she kept a lot of the abuse secret from people in her life, especially people that she met so she would, when people would ask her about herself ... she would just tell them that she doesn't have any children because she couldn't bring herself to explain what's actually been going on for her. Because she said that she felt ashamed by it.'

- DVPC Advocate

The inherent isolation that comes with this shame, often alongside the tactic of isolation harnessed by the person using violence, is recognised to greatly contribute to victim-survivor's mental and physical health decline, and in some cases leads to a first disclosure detailing decades of abuse.

'... It's really impacts their self-esteem but also the social impact ... hiding things from those closest to them, their colleagues ... changing of routines or things like that because of the impact of the violence ... so much fear.'

- DVPC Advocate

Victim-survivors often express feelings of reduced self-worth, use self-blaming language, and a sense of hopelessness, and at times suicidal ideation, as a direct result of the abuse.

'I find women, I hear a lot like, what's the point? What's the point in trying to get away? What's the point in trying to separate? Like I have women say [with] probably less than 10 years left to live like, what's the point? ... So I think that's a big one and that like lack of hope and the impact that has on their mental health, suicidal thoughts ... that's the biggest one I hear is ... that hopelessness ...'

- DVPC Advocate

The sense of isolation has been recognised to increase in instances where the victim-survivor is holding the contradiction of the abuser requiring care from the victim-survivor themselves, or the abuser being the victim-survivor's recognized carer (as mentioned above).

'... our clients [where] the person using violence will be the full-time carer, like they're getting NDIS payments ... if they leave, they don't have anyone to care for them.'

- DVPC Advocate

In these common examples, women's wider relationships may be adversely impacted, increasing her isolation and dependence on the person using violence.

'... the Mum feels like she's got this ongoing, this inherent want and need to protect her son, and care for him ... this is not the relationship she wants with him and she's obviously got big concerns about it, but she's trying to still manage having a relationship with him. And the wider family eventually essentially cuts them both off because they don't want to also be a part of, to be victim to, this ongoing abuse as well.'

- DVPC Advocate

Ultimately, we have observed that the tactic of isolation, compounded by shame, has devastating impacts for the victim-survivors' connection to their community, their family and friends, and themselves as an individual.

'... [She's] feeling like a prisoner in her own home and also a prisoner in her extended circle because she couldn't be her true self.'

- DVPC Advocate

Moreover, for women experiencing financial and systems abuse, DVPC has observed further barriers to safely leaving the relationship, whilst ensuring their basic needs are met. This is exacerbated by many victim-survivor's intersecting systemic inequalities. For example, women experiencing elder abuse perpetrated by their intimate partner, wherein their financial independence (including superannuation, property ownership and bank accounts) are directly connected to their abuser, noting the ongoing gender pay gap and implications for women's financial security and independence throughout their lives.

In instances of financial and systems abuse (such as co-signature coercion or power of attorney misuse), the victim-survivor's lack of autonomy to make their own decisions essentially renders them invisible as an individual in the system, with little weight for their voice without the person using violence's corresponding point of view, with processes to reverse these powers being both time consuming and complex.

Elder Abuse Response Challenges ***"... it's really a failing of the system"***

We are greatly concerned that current services and supports do not adequately meet the needs of elder abuse victim-survivors.

'... essentially they are forced back into this situation because they have actually put their hand up and said I need help and then we don't actually have anything for them. So, it's a real failing of the system.'

- DVPC Advocate

Accessing safe, long-term, sustainable housing

Regarding accessing safe, long-term sustainable housing, elder women experience increased vulnerabilities due to significant financial restrictions. Alongside the, above mentioned, financial gender inequalities experienced by women, the lack of rental history often experienced by women who have had to leave their long-term home due to the violence and the excessive projected wait periods to access governmental housing, social housing programs are not practical to elder women's needs. Social housing programs generally require participants ability to build their income and subsequently take full, independent responsibility of the lease, however this is not viable for many elder women due to both physicality and time limitations to gain, develop and utilize new skills for employment. We noted a trend in external services suggesting women seek long-term housing within nursing homes, as an alternative option. Yet, nursing homes are not fit for this purpose, typically designed to provide a substantially high level of care, that does not fit the needs of many elder women who are seeking to expand their independence and autonomy, following years of having this denied by their abuser.

'... had women, an unbelievable amount on intake been told to go into a nursing home. But they don't need a nursing home ... a lot of women say like, no, I'm not going to do that, but now I'm stuck.'

- DVPC Advocate

Additionally, aged care communities (such as retirement villages) can be expensive, and therefore unobtainable for many women leaving abusive relationships. Victim-survivors may consider leaving their local area to enter cheaper housing markets, however they worry they will experience increased isolation from both personal and professional supports, including long-standing medical specialists. Essentially, this lack of support specifically for elder women, renders victim-survivors of elder abuse with a significant gap in seeking safe, long-term, sustainable housing.

The gap in housing support is further exacerbated by the current pension rate, which often forces women to continue to reside with the person using violence, especially noting financial inequalities between men and women.

'They're on the pension ... got to that point where they like, I can't afford to leave. I can't afford to get out. I'm stuck here financially.'

- DVPC Advocate

Navigating complex technology, processes and online systems

We also have concerns that the rise in electronic and online resources and requirements across key services and systems, has inadvertently created further opportunity for persons using violence to inflict abuse on elder people. For example, providing evidence of abuse within justice systems often requires images to be included, yet elder people are less likely to own a smart phone and therefore face greater barriers in providing this evidence.

'... they have the flip phones, they can't take a photo and things like that....sometimes that's really hard trying to get evidence when a lot of evidence, these days, is with photos and videos and they don't have access ... or they don't quite understand it.'

- DVPC Advocate

The ever-increasing service developments for appointment booking, banking purposes and submitting documentation to be completed online, has been observed to be overwhelming for many elder people, who subsequently require support to navigate these changes: for elder abuse victim-survivors who do interact with technology and online systems, the processes themselves are recognized to be complex, often requiring a support person to assist as they work through these steps.

‘... navigating that phone call was quite difficult and I had to assist with that to advocate ... I found that there were a lot of questions that were quite difficult for the older person to answer, and there was quite a wait time as well ...’

- DVPC Advocate

In not addressing these challenges, our society is currently complicit in the abuser’s choice to use violence, by compounding ingrained societal considerations of elder people’s lack of worth, sense of shame and invisibility, and thereby informing the community’s hesitations to intervene in potential instances of abuse.

‘I think we as a society we push that shame as well ... so it’s still in the dark and behind closed doors’

- DVPC Advocate

Each of these challenges are not specific to the current elder generation alone – inadequate housing support, the insufficient pension rate, and fast changing technological advancements and complex processes will continue to impact each generation as they reach the elder age bracket, unless targeted action is taken to safeguard both the current and future generations.

Elder Abuse Response Strengths ***“... some of the strongest women”***

Whilst recognising the multiple and complex challenges of women experiencing elder abuse, it is also important to acknowledge victim-survivor’s resilience. We witness daily the ongoing acts of resistance victim-survivors harness to maintain their dignity and sense of self, despite the ongoing violence used against them, from attending gym classes, to speaking with support services, to secretly putting away small amounts of money.

‘... these women are some of the strongest women ...’.

- DVPC Advocate

Current services and supports across Queensland are not sufficiently meeting this need, as discussed; It is therefore vital that the Queensland Government provides the resources and policies required to support victim-survivors and hold those using violence accountable.

Improving Elder Abuse Response ***“... answers the needs of the victim-survivor ... ”***

Based on decades of work within the domestic and family violence space, we have significant insights and knowledge to address gaps within current state-wide service delivery, including:

Elder Abuse Specialist Education and Response Framework

Ensuring that Advocates are educated in the specific needs of elder people, and their intersecting experiences, is critical to ensure that elder abuse is effectively identified and addressed. However, requirement for elder abuse specialist education is not limited to front-line domestic and family violence practitioners, given the significant rates of systems abuse, all professionals intersecting in this space require specialist training. These professionals include (but are not limited to) lawyers (noting concerns for legal abuses, including power of attorney misuse), financial institution staff (noting concerns for financial abuse) and medical and allied health staff (noting concerns for systems abuse within medical settings, and the prevalence of elderly people in these spaces). Coinciding with this training, is the need for a standardised and evidence-based response framework, including risk assessment and referral pathways for further support, and strengthening reporting processes to report persons using elder abuse specifically, to ensure that professionals identifying elder abuse can respond effectively.

Fit for Purpose Referral Pathways

Services specific to elder abuse response must be fit for purpose in their design, to meet victim-survivor's needs.

'And that, you know, there is discussion about education – I just don't think that's enough, even if the magistrates are aware, the lawyers are aware, police and doctors, the people they interface with, they can be more aware of the signs but what are they going to do then?'

- DVPC Advocate

Currently, many elder people's services across Queensland require that the victim-survivor call directly, with referrals not able to be made on their behalf. This process is problematic and counterproductive to ensuring trauma informed care, as it requires victim-survivors to re-start the intake process from scratch, a recognised engagement barrier. Notably, this barrier also intersects with the vulnerabilities of many elder people in utilising every-changing technology, as described above.

It is imperative that services providing support to elder persons are developed with the client's needs front-of-mind. Greater outreach and face-to-face options for support, as opposed to reliance on technology or victim-survivors actively contacting or travelling to access support, would further strengthen service engagement.

Specified referral pathways need the resourcing to ensure they can meet victim-survivors requests for assistance in a timely manner. In the context of housing, specific allocation of properties for elder women seeking safe, long-term and sustainable housing is essential to ensure that victim-survivors are not forced to continue to reside with the person using violence, due to inadequate service systems.

Wholistic Support

When disclosing elder abuse, women are often state they are seeking support for the person using violence. This directly corresponds to the prevalence of the person using violence's relationship to the victim-survivor, e.g., as an adult child, or intimate partner, with concern for potential intersecting physical and mental health comorbidities. Currently, the Gold Coast only provides group support to perpetrators of intimate partner violence, not including family violence perpetrators. Offering wrap-around, wholistic supports in this space, for both the person using violence and victim-survivor, would be a significant step in breaching this service gap, and reflecting the needs and wants of those with lived-experience.

'I think in terms of when women are seeking help, it is very much in terms of how do I get help for him? ... they want a relationship with this person, and they want it to be a positive relationship and they're trying to find a way to navigate that and to help him with that.'

- DVPC Advocate

In responding to this gap, services will be seeking to address common misconceptions that domestic and family violence services are not best placed to address elder abuse, another potential barrier to accessing support. Many victim-survivors express they do not feel comfortable working alongside a domestic and family violence service, due to concerns for unintended consequences to the person using violence. This includes concerns that the person using violence may themselves not be able to access supports, if they are labelled a perpetrator. Consequently, offering a wholistic, wrap-around service, that does not collude with the use of violence but likewise recognises the need for collective support, education and approach, is a current gap that may be addressed through developing further service delivery, reflective of victim-survivor's needs and wants.

'The police, they are just getting him into trouble so I don't want to call the police. Or the support services are just going to make me do things that I'm too old for - I'm too old to leave, I don't want to relocate, I like my doctor where I am ... they are making things harder and more unsafe for me it feels. So it just confirms what they already think, further isolates them.'

- DVPC Advocate

Prevention Services

Elder abuse supports are not specific to response alone, as ending elder abuse is not possible without prevention. We recommend increased training and information sessions for the elder generation, regarding their financial, property and human rights, complex government systems, such as Centrelink and navigating in-home care services and online service portals, to ensure that elder people are not reliant on persons using violence to access critical services.

When promoting prevention services, and further awareness campaigns, it is important that both the messaging and platform is again specific to the needs of elder peoples. This includes advertisement in media they are recognised to consume (e.g. free to air television), and relevant settings (e.g., hospitals and aged care facilities) and ensuring that messaging is relevant to their experiences and knowledge of abuse, as a wider cohort.

Prevention also includes developing stronger systemic responsibility, to prevent systemic abuse. This includes misuse of power of attorney, which our Advocates recognise to be rife in elder abuse.

'More training for like all lawyers and solicitors to, if PUV [person using violence] is going in and wanting to get power of attorney ... that they have to have a one-on-one meeting with the actual person. There has to be more standardised testing or inquiry around big decisions.'

- DVPC Advocate

Practical Support

Increasing practical supports both within the home and the community, for example home maintenance services, standardised appointment check-in and follow up, greater transfer opportunities, shopping support, and community groups, serve to both reduce isolation and ensure wider community collective responsibility for elder residents. By increasing the visibility of elder people across the community, alongside greater awareness of elder abuse and pathways for support, we as a community can reduce the risk of elder abuse.

'... there are some practical ways of giving back that control and independence to the person ...'

- DVPC Advocate

Increasing financial entitlements for the elder population, including the pension, would provide greater independence and opportunity, enabling elder people to live independently rather than having to stay in close proximity to their abuser due to financial constraints.

'... to get housing, you need money. We have the escaping violence payment, but that like the eligibility is it has to be an intimate partner and if financial abuse is such a big part of elder abuse, like what support is there for our clients to be able to leave? Like the pension isn't going to cut it.'

- DVPC Advocate

Conclusion

'... a really, really big problem'

Elder abuse is a form of domestic and family violence, of whom predominately women are victims, however, we acknowledge that elder abuse is also impacting the lives of elderly men in the community. Elder abuse awareness, education and services are needed and to be effective this needs to be provided in the context of a commitment to ending the use of power and control of one person over another. Current services and supports across Queensland are not sufficiently meeting this need, as discussed; It is therefore vital that the Queensland Government provides the resources and policies required to support victim-survivors and hold those using violence accountable.

'... elder abuse can't be in the shadows any longer, I think in all ... the experience that I've had, working in this space, where there's been family violence, there's been intimate partner violence, it goes hand in hand and often has been going on for a long, long, long time – and if we are talking about, you know, breaking patterns ... which we know have huge impacts for the individual, for the community, across society ...It's a really, really big problem and we need it to be taken seriously.'

- DVPC Practitioner

Please do not hesitate to contact DVPC for further clarification or to discuss any aspect of this feedback,

Sincerely

Domestic Violence Prevention Centre Gold Coast.