

Question on Notice

No. 275

Asked on Tuesday, 6 March 2007

Mr Kevin Lingard MP asked the Minister for Communities, Minister for Disability Services Queensland, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Minister for Seniors and Youth (**MR PITT**) -

With reference to the financial abuse of older Queenslanders in the care of others –

What security and accountability mechanisms has the Government implemented to minimise the risk of such abuse being committed by public care providers and/or privately employed carers when dealing with clients' finances and assets?

ANSWER:

As the responsibility for aged care facilities run by the government throughout Queensland lies within the portfolio of the Honourable Stephen Robertson MP, Minister for Health, it is suggested that the Member may wish to redirect his question accordingly.

Regarding the implementation of accountability and security mechanisms for older Queenslanders at risk of financial exploitation, in so far as the scope of the portfolio lies, the Department of Communities funds a number of services that assist seniors statewide who are at risk of experiencing elder abuse and financial exploitation. Community education and the provision of information is considered one of the most effective methods of empowering older people to make choices on the way they respond to issues of abuse and exploitation.

The Elder Abuse Prevention Unit provides information and support via a statewide Helpline. The service assists older people experiencing abuse, concerned family members, friends, service providers and members of the public. The Elder Abuse Prevention Unit is funded to provide information and referrals to seniors and support them to deal with elder abuse, including financial exploitation.

The Queensland Government also funds the Seniors Enquiry Line which offers an up-to-date information and referral service to Queensland seniors, their families, friends, carers and service providers. The service works to ensure that seniors are empowered with information to make informed decisions on a broad range of issues that impact their lives, including potential or actual abuse.

The *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 1989* was amended in 2003 and, for the first time, familial (non-spousal) relationships and informal care relationships are provided protection under the Act. This is significant given that statistics on perpetrators of abuse of the elderly include sons, daughters, grandchildren as well as informal carers. The option is now available for seniors experiencing elder abuse to seek protection through an application for a Domestic Violence Order. Older people affected by domestic and family violence can also access services across the state, funded to provide support to people affected by domestic and family violence.

The Seniors Advocacy Information and Legal Service, operated through the Caxton Legal Centre, offers seniors legal information, advice, support and counselling via telephone. While the main focus of this service is older people currently living in the Greater Brisbane region, it is able to offer telephone support to older people who live outside the target area. The service has been allocated \$55,000 to develop a resource for seniors that will address the prevention of financial abuse and other legal issues.

The Government allocated \$50,000 in the 2005-06 State Budget to establish the Redcliffe Community Demonstration Project to develop best practice principles and training resources to help prevent financial abuse of older people. It is anticipated that these resources will have applications in other regions.

The Department of Communities has allocated \$1.9 million this financial year to fund a 12 month trial of specialist Seniors Legal and Support Services for older people who are at risk of elder abuse and financial exploitation. These services will be established across five sites in Brisbane, Hervey Bay, Townsville, Toowoomba and Cairns and will be auspiced by Community Legal Services, allowing the department to build on existing legal infrastructure and expertise. The services will be staffed by a mix of solicitors and social workers and this multidisciplinary approach will help promote a tailored and holistic response to elder abuse and financial exploitation. It is anticipated that the first of these funded organisations will start providing these services by as early as April 2007.