

BUILDING BRIDGES

COMMUNITY FORUMS ON THE PREVENTION OF ELDER ABUSE

FINAL REPORT – MAY 2011



**BC CENTRE FOR
ELDER ADVOCACY AND SUPPORT**

The *Building Bridges – Final Report* was compiled by the staff of the BC Centre of Elder Advocacy and Support (BC CEAS). This report includes information shared by panelists and participants at three community forums hosted by BC CEAS. BC CEAS cannot guarantee that all information provided by panelists and participants is accurate.

This report can be found on BC CEAS' website at: www.BCCEAS.ca

The *Building Bridges Community Forums on the Prevention of Elder Abuse* were made possible by the generous funding of the United Way.



This report provides legal information relating to elder abuse issues. This report does not include legal advice. You should see a lawyer for legal advice specific to your situation.

This report reflects laws in BC as of April 30, 2011. It does not reflect the upcoming changes to the Adult Guardianship Act and other statutes relating to guardianship and advance planning that will take effect in BC on September 1, 2011.

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Introduction

Elder abuse is estimated to affect 1 in 12 older adults in Canada. It is a significant societal problem that affects many British Columbians and their families. As our population continues to age, communities need to work together to prevent and stop elder abuse. The BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support (BC CEAS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing social and legal support directly to older adults in BC who have experienced or who are vulnerable to abuse. In February and March 2011, BC CEAS held community forums in Richmond, White Rock and Squamish. The community forums were made possible by funding from the United Way. The forums explored ways to build community capacity to prevent and stop elder abuse. They were attended by community members, caregivers, older adults, experts in elder abuse and the staff and management of organizations who serve older adults.



At each community forum, expert panelists shared their knowledge with forum participants about preventing and responding to elder abuse. Round table discussions on elder abuse were also held, which gave participants the opportunity to contribute their thoughts, knowledge, and experiences. We thank the expert panelists and forum participants for the valuable insight they provided.

This report highlights the ideas and knowledge shared at the community forums and provides some of the legal, practical and general information needed to prevent and respond to elder abuse. This report has three parts:

- **Part I:** This part discusses the definition and types of elder abuse, and provides a brief summary of B.C.'s laws as they relate to elder abuse.
- **Part II:** This part highlights the knowledge shared by the expert panelists and forum participants. This includes key issues identified by forum participants relating to elder abuse and strategies, programs and services needed to address elder abuse.
- **Part III:** This part provides resources to contact for information and assistance in circumstances of elder abuse and neglect.

The report concludes with eight recommendations to combat elder abuse in BC. These recommendations are based on the input provided by forum panelists and participants.



Panelists

Below please find brief introductions of each panelist who participated in the community forums.

Richmond Community Forum

Amanda Brown, Director, Re:Act Adult Abuse and Neglect Response Resource, Vancouver Coastal Health:

Amanda provides education, consultation and systemic support to Vancouver Coastal Health staff members who respond to situations of adult abuse, neglect and self-neglect. She is the regional lead on issues related to the Adult Guardianship Act and her work includes partnering with community agencies that work with older adults experiencing abuse and neglect.

Kate Buttery, Lawyer, Elder Law Clinic, BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support:

Kate is a staff lawyer at the BC CEAS Elder Law Clinic. Prior to her work with the ELC, Kate completed her LLB at Osgoode Hall Law School. Her previous law practice was in Toronto providing legal services in the immigration and refugee division of a community legal aid clinic, as well as providing representation to children in child protection and custody/access disputes with the Ontario Ministry of the Attorney General.

Norma J. Hill, Regional Consultant, Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia:

Norma has worked for the Public Guardian and Trustee of BC for 15 years, for the past 8 years she has worked in the role of the Regional Consultant. As a Regional Consultant she performs Assessment & Investigations for vulnerable adults and determines if there is a role for the PGT, she also and acts as a Temporary Substitute Decision Maker

to make health care decisions for adults as last resort. Norma has degrees in Economics, Laboratory Sciences and Health Care Administration.

Susan Match, Richmond Addiction Services:

Susan has worked for over 35 years in Health. She received her degree in Psychology from Queen's University and her Master of Social Work degree from Wilfrid Laurier University. In 2004, Susan developed the outreach counselling and prevention program for Richmond Addiction Services which is now known as the Aging Well program.

Cst. Ronda Rempel, Richmond RCMP:

Ronda is a Regular Member of the RCMP and is currently the Mental Health Coordinator and the Adult Guardianship Act Liaison for Richmond Detachment. Ronda is also the Support Coordinator for the BC Crisis Intervention Team Program. Ronda has taught hundreds of police, community personnel and volunteers about mental health and the role police have in supporting persons in crises. Ronda strives to bridge the gap between the police and the mental health community through education and collaboration.

Marnie Stickle, Family Services Outreach Worker, Elder Abuse Team, Vancouver Police Dept.:

Marnie has been part of the Vancouver Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) for 14 years. The DVU is a joint venture of the Vancouver Police Department and Family Services of Greater Vancouver. She recently partnered with Anna Grigoletto to form the Elder Abuse Team. In this



position she and her detective partner do follow-up on high risk, complex cases of abuse against older adults.

White Rock Community Forum

Teresa Baragar, Victim Services Coordinator, White Rock RCMP

Victim Assistance Program: Teresa has worked for 20 years in the field of Victim Services. She started with the RCMP in Quesnel as the Program Coordinator. Seventeen years later she accepted a term position at the Justice Institute of BC coordinating Community Safety programs. Teresa has also been a Provincial Trainer for paid Victim Service staff throughout B.C. and continues to work closely with the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General with respect to training development and delivery.

Kate Buttery, Lawyer, Elder Law Clinic, BC Centre for Elder

Advocacy and Support: Introduction presented on page 5.

S/Cst. Susan Caley, Surrey RCMP:

Susan has been a Safety Officer for the past two and a half years and is stationed in the South Surrey detachment. She has sat on the City of Surrey of Surrey's Focus on Seniors Task Force which addresses issues of elder abuse, neglect and self neglect, for the past 2 years. Under the 2011 District 5 Senior Safety Initiative, Susan works with South Surrey RCMP volunteers and staff to identify seniors at risk and connect them with available resources, to provide safety education to seniors, and to participate with the City of Surrey's Focus on Seniors Task Force to effectively address seniors issues.

Leanne Lange, Clinical Specialist, Adult Abuse & Neglect, Fraser

Health Authority: Leanne Lange joined Fraser Health as the Clinical Specialist, Adult Abuse and Neglect in June 2007. Prior to joining Fraser Health Leanne worked as a Regional Consultant at the Public Guardian & Trustee for 10 years. Leanne has a Masters Degree in Public Administration and 20 over years of experience working in social service programs. As the Clinical Specialist, Leanne is the key contact for Adult Protection related issues across Fraser Health. She provides consultation and support to staff in hospitals, community programs, and residential care who respond to situations of abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults. She also develops resources and provides education to staff. Finally, she assists in solving system level issues which affect vulnerable adults.

Sue McIntosh, Executive Director, White Rock / Surrey Come Share

Society: Sue came to work with the Come Share Society for a 6 month temporary position, 33 years later she is still with the Society helping them make a measurable difference for seniors in the community. Sue has a background in Sociology and Psychology with training in Dementia and Health Care Management. This training and years of experience have helped her expand the services offered through Come Share to meet the growing needs of older adults and their families.

Goran Todorovic, Regional Consultant, Public Guardian & Trustee Office of BC:

Goran has been with the Public Guardian and Trustee since February of 2010. Prior to the PGT, he was employed with the Ministry of Housing and Social Development. Goran has a Bachelor's Degree from Simon Fraser University, where he studied



Political Science and Economics. After university, he volunteered with the Immigrant Services Society of BC and was employed as an ESL teacher at private colleges in Vancouver.

Squamish Community Forum

Sherry Baker, Community

Response Networks of BC: Sherry Baker has owned and operated a private consulting and counselling practice since 1990. Sherry Baker and Associates offers small business, non-profit and boards support, strategic planning and organizational development. After retiring as the Executive Director of Ishtar Transition Housing Society and Aldergrove Neighbourhood Services, in 2006 she started 55pluspros.ca, a web-based employment matching service for people over 50. In July 2011, she became the Executive Director of the BC Association of Community Response Networks. Sherry is the immediate past chair of the BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support and past chair of the South Fraser Family Court and Youth Justice Committee, as well as a founding Board Member of the Minerva Foundation for B.C Women and the United Community Services Coop. Sherry holds a Master of Arts in Applied Behavioral Science from City University in Seattle, a Bachelor of Home Economics from the University of B.C. and a Diploma in Business Administration from Fraser Valley University.

Kate Buttery, Lawyer, Elder Law Clinic, BC Centre for Elder

Advocacy and Support: Introduction presented on page 5.

Kari Chambers, Elders Coordinator, Tsleil-Waututh

Nation: Kari Chambers has been the Elders Coordinator for the Tsleil-Waututh Nation in North Vancouver for nearly 5 years. She has her Bachelor's Degree in Anthropology/First Nations Studies from the University of British Columbia. Kari is a member of the North Shore Adults Support Network. Kari has taken the Indian Residential Schools Survivors Society Institute Courses and she has a personal and professional passion for the health & wellness of all Elders. Kari was born and raised in East Vancouver and was fortunate enough to grow up with all 4 of her grandparents and is blessed to still have both of her grandmothers, one 89 and one 95! Kari lives in Burnaby with her husband, 3 cats, 2 fish, and 1 dog (animal welfare being her other passion!).

Norma J. Hill, Regional Consultant, Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia: Introduction presented on page 5.

Kim Sayer, MSW, RSW Social Worker, Hilltop House, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority:

Kim holds a Masters degree in Social Work from the University of British Columbia. She has worked over the past 20 years with seniors in various capacities. She began working in the community developing wellness programs and creating a peer run English class for recent immigrants to Canada. She has also worked with seniors at Kiwassa Neighbourhood house, in elementary schools, as a Long Term Care Case Manager, as part of a geriatric mental health outreach team and in the UBC, VGH and Squamish hospitals. Currently she enjoys part time work at Hilltop House in Squamish providing support to the residents and their families.



Part I: Elder Abuse - Background Information

What is Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse is any action taken by a person that causes an older person physical, emotional or mental harm, or loss of assets or property.¹ Elder abuse can take many forms and is often perpetrated by someone close to the older adult, such as an adult child, family member, friend or caregiver. Below are some common types of elder abuse.

Financial Abuse or Exploitation

Financial abuse is the “illegal or improper use of funds or assets” of an older adult.² It may include the misuse of an older adult’s assets or obtaining or using the assets of an older adult without their knowledge and consent.

In the case of an older adult who is incapable, financial abuse can take the form of failing to act in that person’s best interest in managing their financial affairs.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is the non-accidental use of physical force to coerce an older adult or to inflict bodily harm. It may include pushing, shaking, hitting or restraining an older adult.

Psychological and Emotional Abuse

Psychological abuse is any action or comment which causes fear or emotional anguish to an older adult or any action or comment that diminishes the self-esteem, sense of identity or dignity of an older adult.

It includes verbal abuse, taunts, threats, insults, put downs or treating the older adult as a child. It may also include denial of visitors, isolation and withdrawal of affection.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any kind of sexual interaction with an older adult without his or her full knowledge and consent.

Violation of Human Rights

An older adult’s human rights may be violated where they are discriminated against or treated unfairly based on their age.



Neglect or Self-Neglect

There are three main types of neglect:

1. **Active Neglect:** An intentional failure to provide basic necessities of care to an older adult.
2. **Passive Neglect:** A failure to provide the basic necessities of care to an older adult because of a lack of experience, information or ability.
3. **Self-Neglect:** While not a form of elder abuse, it is a person’s inability to provide for their own essential needs.



Legal Remedies for Elder Abuse

The justice system and legislation in BC provide a number of legal ways to deal with elder abuse, neglect or self-neglect.

Adult Guardianship Act

Part 3 of the *Adult Guardianship Act*³ is the key legislation dealing with elder abuse and neglect in BC.⁴ It applies specifically to adults who are unable to seek help on their own because of

- physical restraint,
- a physical handicap that limits their ability to seek help, or
- an illness, disease, injury or other condition that affects their ability to make decision about the abuse or neglect.⁵

There is no mandatory legal requirement in BC to report elder abuse, but the *Adult Guardianship Act* provides that anyone who believes an adult is being abused or neglected and believes the adult is not able to seek help on their own may make a report about the abuse to a designated agency.⁶ The designated agencies are the five Health Authorities in BC and Community Living BC.

To find the contact number for the designated agency in your community, visit the Public Guardian and Trustee's website:<http://www.trustee.bc.ca/pdfs/STA/abuseneglect.htm>.



By law, a designated agency must investigate and respond to all reports of abuse, neglect or self-neglect of an adult where there is reason to believe the adult is unable to seek help or assistance on his or her own.⁷ The investigation may include visiting the older adult at their residence and speaking with people in the older adult's life.⁸ After investigating, the designated agency may determine the adult needs no further support and assistance and take no action, or it may take further steps to protect the adult.⁹

If the designated agency determines the adult does need support or assistance, they may take a number of actions, which may include:

- Referring the older adult to healthcare, social, legal or other services;
- Developing a support and assistance plan that specifies services needed by the adult;
- Reporting the case to the Public Guardian and Trustee or another agency;
- Assisting the older adult in obtaining a representative; and
- Applying to court for a restraining order against the alleged abuser.¹⁰

The *Adult Guardianship Act* mandates that the adult be involved to the greatest extent possible with making decisions about how to seek support and assistance and what support and assistance services are necessary to prevent abuse or neglect in the future.¹¹



Criminal Remedies

There is no crime in the *Criminal Code*¹² called “elder abuse” or “senior abuse”.¹³ However, the behaviors and actions of those who commit elder abuse or neglect may be crimes. Following are some (not all) *Criminal Code* offences that may apply in situations of abuse or neglect:

- **Financial Abuse**
 - Theft;
 - Extortion;
 - Fraud;
 - Criminal Breach of Trust;
 - Forgery;
 - Misuse of Power of Attorney.
- **Neglect**
 - Breach of duty to provide necessities;
 - Criminal negligence causing bodily harm or death.
- **Physical Abuse**
 - Assault;
 - Assault causing bodily harm;
 - Forcible Confinement.
- **Psychological and Emotional Abuse**
 - Criminal harassment: Repeated unwanted conducted that makes a person fear for his or her safety.
 - Making threats to cause death or bodily harm to an individual or to damage someone’s property.
- **Sexual Abuse**
 - Sexual assault.

If a formal report of abuse or neglect is made to the police, the police will investigate the complaint. If the police believe the person under investigation should be charged with a crime, they will make a report to Crown Counsel, who

will determine whether to lay a criminal charge.

Peace Bond: Under the *Criminal Code*, a peace bond may be ordered by a court for up to one year where a person reasonably fears that another person will cause them personal injury or will damage their property.¹⁴ In a situation of elder abuse, if a peace bond were ordered the abuser would be given conditions they must obey, which could include that they not communicate with the older adult and that they not attend the older adult’s residence.

Civil Remedies

An older person who has experienced abuse or neglect may wish to visit a lawyer to discuss potential civil legal remedies, such as suing the abuser or pursuing a restraining order. There also may be family law, property law or other legal issues that result from the abuse or neglect that require the assistance of a lawyer. If this is the case, a lawyer should be consulted to ensure the older adult’s rights and interests are protected.

Restraining Order: Depending on the circumstances, an older adult may be able to seek a restraining order against an abuser if they are harassing, annoying or communicating with the older adult against the older adult’s wishes.

For more information on peace bonds and restraining orders, refer to the brochure *For Your Protection: Peace Bonds and Restraining Orders*. To receive a copy of this brochure, call the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor Victim Services and Crime Prevention program at 604-660-5199 or visit: <http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/victimservice/publications/index.htm#peacebonds>.



Part II: Building Bridges Community Forums

In 2011, BC CEAS partnered with the United Way and local communities to host three community forums on elder abuse. The forums events were held in:

- **Richmond, BC - February 22, 2011 at the Richmond Cultural Centre:** Presented in partnership with the City of Richmond and Vancouver Coastal Health. Special thanks to the Richmond Cultural Centre for their assistance in hosting this event and to Mayor Malcolm Brodie for offering opening remarks.
- **White Rock, BC - March 2, 2011 at White Rock Community Centre:** Presented in partnership with Fraser Health. Special thanks the White Rock Community Centre for their assistance with hosting this event. Special thanks to Joyce Schmalz for attending and offering her experience and insight.
- **Squamish, BC - March 10, 2011 at the Squamish Seniors Centre:** Presented in partnership with the District of Squamish and Vancouver Coastal Health. Special thanks to the Squamish Seniors Centre for the assistance in hosting this event.

BC CEAS invited community members and service providers in each community to attend to learn more about elder abuse and the legal rights of older adults. The forums were attended by a mixture of older adults, community members, caregivers and service providers to older adults. The service providers included those who provided direct health, social and legal services to older adults and those who manage and develop programs and supports that are aimed at older adults. BC CEAS also invited expert panelists to provide their insight and expertise on elder abuse issues.

Format of Building Bridges Community Forums

Each forum began with the video *Finding a Future for Ellen*. This video tells the story of “Ellen”, who after being hospitalized leaves her own home to live with her daughter. Once she is living with her daughter she is isolated and her daughter gains access to Ellen’s money against Ellen’s wishes.¹⁵ Following the video, panelists provided information about the role their organization might play in assisting Ellen and the social, health and legal implications of Ellen’s situation. Forum participants were then provided an opportunity ask panelists questions.

The forum concluded with roundtable discussions about the community, social and legal supports that may be available to a person in Ellen’s circumstances. Volunteer note takers, who included post-secondary students, older adults and interested community members, took notes during these round table discussions. Following the round table discussions, a brief large group discussion was held where important points discussed at each table were shared. BC CEAS would like to thank all those organizations and individuals who contributed their time and energy to making each forum a success.



Panelists Presentations

At each community forum, panelists provided information and insight on elder abuse and their organization's role in combating it. The panelists included police officers, social workers and victim service workers from local police departments and the RCMP, representatives from Vancouver Coastal Health and Fraser Health, representatives from the Public Guardian and Trustee, representatives from various community agencies and support services and a lawyer from the Elder Law Clinic at the BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support. Brief biographies of each panelist can be found in the Introduction of this report. Below are some highlights of the information provided by panelists. The views expressed are not necessarily of any specific panelist or of all of the panelists.

Capacity of Older Adults

Panelists discussed the importance of respecting the rights of older adults to make decisions, and of not assuming that because an adult is older that he or she is incapable. In this context, the terms "capacity" and "capability" refer to a person's ability to understand and appreciate the consequences of his or her decisions. Panelists emphasized that according to BC law, all adults are presumed to be capable. Adults have the right to make decisions, even if those decisions are risky, as long as they are capable of understanding the risks and potential consequences of their decisions.

Where it is suspected an adult's capacity has declined and they can no longer manage their affairs, a formal assessment of the older adult may take place. Whether a person is capable is a legal determination that is made based on medical evidence and other assessments. It should not be assumed that because an adult is undergoing an assessment that they are incapable.

Often, an adult may be incapable of making certain decisions but capable of making others. For example, an adult may be unable to manage his or her financial affairs, but still able to make

decisions about health and personal care. Panelists also indicated that it is important to remember that a person's capacity can fluctuate over time, due to illness, stress and other factors. Adults may temporarily lose the capacity to manage their affairs or make personal decisions, but may later regain this capacity.

Barriers to Disclosing Abuse

The panelists indicated that it can be extremely difficult for an older adult to disclose they are being abused or neglected. Factors which may make seeking assistance difficult include:

- Having a disability;
- Living in a remote location where services are difficult to access or where services do not exist;
- Fear of not being believed;
- Guilt about potential consequences for a family member;
- Embarrassment or shame about the abuse, neglect or self-neglect;
- Fear of abandonment by family or friends;
- Financial dependence on the abuser;
- Fear of the loss of the older adult's home if he or she lives with their abuser; and
- Fear of losing family relationships.



Signs of Abuse

Panelists emphasized it is important to know and recognize signs of abuse, neglect and self-neglect. Signs of abuse may include, but are not limited to, situations where someone:

- Controls the finances of the adult;
- Controls access to the adult;
- Isolates of the adult;
- Alienates the adult from his or her support network; and
- Threatens or intimidates people who try to assist the adult.

Awareness of Elder Abuse

Below are some key points panelists made about raising awareness and tackling elder abuse in our communities:

- Anyone can be the victim of abuse. It can be a friend, or a neighbor. You may be experiencing abuse yourself. It is not something a person should blame themselves for and seeking support and assistance should be encouraged.
- There is a continuing need for education and awareness-raising about the problem of elder abuse in our communities.
- All adults need education about the importance of advance planning. Advance planning involves having legal documents prepared, such as a representation agreement or power of attorney, that designate whom a person wants to manage their affairs and make decisions on their behalf should they become incapable of doing so. When making advance planning documents, older adults need to know their legal rights and the legal responsibilities of the people that they choose to make decisions on their behalf if

they become incapable of making decisions on their own.

- Isolation is a significant risk factor for elder abuse or neglect. To prevent elder abuse and neglect, it is important for older adults to stay connected with their community.
- Seniors centres and community organizations can play a key role in providing support to older adults. They allow older adults to develop relationships and trust through one-on-one talking, sharing and seeing people on a regular basis. These organizations are often able to check in on older adults and can provide appropriate referrals when the need arises.
- Community Response Networks have the potential to play a significant role in ensuring there is a coordinated response to adult abuse, neglect and self-neglect. Community response networks can help facilitate protocols between police, health authorities, community organizations, victim services and other agencies to ensure anyone who wants to report abuse knows where to go and gets an appropriate referral.

For more information visit:
<http://www.bccrns.ca/>



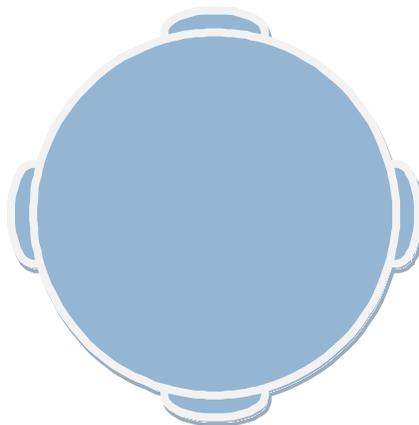
Round Table Discussions

During the roundtable discussion participants were provided discussion questions about the video *Finding a Future for Ellen* which was shown during each forum. As was mentioned previously in this report this video tells the story of “Ellen”, who after being hospitalized leaves her own home to live with her daughter. Once she is living with her daughter she is isolated and her daughter gains access to Ellen’s money against Ellen’s wishes.

The discussion questions were:

- 1. Where could you send Ellen for support and assistance in this community?**
- 2. Where would you like to be able to send Ellen for support and assistance in this community?**
- 3. What legal information or assistance would have helped Ellen?**
- 4. What legal information or assistance for older adults would your community like to see?**
- 5. What would you like to know more about to protect and plan for yourself or to help your clients?**

Below we have highlighted some of what participants shared in response to these questions during the round table discussions. The information presented is a summary of the information provided by forum participants. For some topics, we have provided legal information and academic research to supplement the information provided by participants. The views expressed are not necessarily of any specific participant or of all of the participants in the discussions.



Words Matter - The Language of Elder Abuse

Many at the forums and especially older adult participants indicated that the term “elder abuse” has a stigma attached to it and is not well received by many older people. Older adults indicated that attending an education workshop that focuses on elder abuse may deter people who may be interested in learning about elder abuse. Rethinking the use of the term elder abuse may be required.

Older adult participants suggested that one effective way to reach older adults would be to provide information about elder abuse as part of other events that older adults regularly attend. For example, an older adult suggested playing a video that provides education about elder abuse at the end of a group activity at a seniors centre could be a non-threatening way to reach older adults who might not be interested in attending an event focused on elder abuse.

Older adult participants also shared it would be very difficult to admit that they have been the victim of abuse, especially where family members are involved. This indicates that it is important to develop many different safe and non-threatening ways of describing and talking about the mistreatment and abuse of older adults.



An Aging Population

Participants identified that people are living longer and the social, health and legal services they require is growing. Participants said that many supports and services exist to assist older adults who are being mistreated, abused or neglected. However, participants also emphasized that it is important to recognize that as our population of older adults continue to grow, services will need to be expanded.

Participants also identified that as the population in BC continues to age, the existing shortage of long term care spaces and other supportive living environments will be further exacerbated if other services and supports for older adults are not provided.



Older Adults - A Diverse Group with Diverse Needs

Older adults are a large and diverse group, with a wide range of ages, abilities, needs and backgrounds. Participants identified a number of groups of older adults who may be either be difficult to reach or may be at a greater risk of abuse, neglect, or self-neglect. This list is not intended to be a comprehensive list of risk factors and/ or barriers to asking for help, but rather to document concerns about these issues as identified by forum participants.

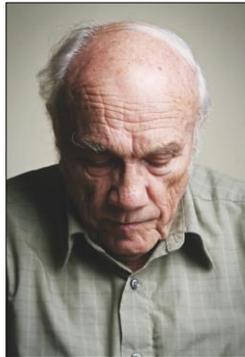
- **Incapable Older Adults:** Incapable older adults may be dependent on a person or facility to take care of all of their needs, from personal care to managing their financial affairs. An incapable older adult may lack the ability or the means to monitor or correct the behavior of those they are dependent on. This may put the older adult at greater risk for abuse or neglect.
- **Older Adults with Dementia:** Older adults with dementia may be at a greater risk for abuse because they are not always able to recall and/or communicate that they have been mistreated or neglected. Like incapable adults, they likely will be dependent on other to take care of some or all of their needs.
- **Older Adults living in Institutional Care:** Older adults living in residential care often have complex care needs and are very dependent on their caregivers. They may lack the ability to report abuse or neglect or they may be fearful of the repercussions of reporting abuse or neglect.
- **Isolated Older Adults:** When older adults have limited contact with others they may be at greater risk for abuse. It may be difficult to find and reach out to these older adults.
- **Aboriginal Elders:** Participants noted that many aboriginal elders live in multi-generational households and may find it difficult to seek assistance and support where there is abuse and neglect. Additionally, many aboriginal elders attended residential schools and the legacy of residential schools continues to effect Aboriginal communities.
- **Immigrant Older Adults:** Older adults whose adult children sponsor their immigration to Canada may be at risk for abuse. The immigrant sponsorship system in Canada requires the sponsor to be financially responsible for the person they sponsor for 10 years. This is a very difficult system that can lead to abuse. Additionally, there may be cultural and language barriers which may make it difficult for an older adult who has recently immigrated to Canada to access programs and resources which may assist them.



Ageism

Ageism was identified by many participants as a central cause of elder abuse. Ageism is stereotypes and attitudes that lead to the devaluing or dehumanizing of older adults.¹⁶ Robert Butler, who introduced the concept of ageism, stated “Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people as different than themselves; thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings.”¹⁷

Ageism is a pervasive, systemic problem in our society.¹⁸ In 2009, the Special Senate Committee on Aging issued a report, *Canada’s Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity*. This report states that ageism “overtly or subtly” limits the possibilities of those viewed as seniors.¹⁹ Ageism is something that can be externally imposed by societal attitudes and by policies, rules and law, and also can be internally imposed by older adults who “try to comply with societal expectations by limiting their own possibilities”.²⁰



“... There is an ongoing need to foster a positive image of older Canadians which more accurately reflects today’s seniors and recognizes their contributions to the family, the community and the economy. This requires us to identify and remove barriers, disincentives, and discrimination [that adversely affect older Canadians]...”²¹

Education and Knowledge of Ageism

Participants indicated that there is a need to educate older adults, service providers to older adults and the general public about ageism as wide spread ageism contributes to the mistreatment and devaluing of older adults.

Older adults need access to education about ageism so that they can recognize when ageist attitudes or policies may be adversely affecting them and so they may become aware of ageist attitudes they may hold which may be affecting their perception of their own abilities and possibilities.

Adults are Presumed Capable

Participants indicated that in some situations, older adults are not consulted about decisions that affect them because it is wrongly assumed that they are unable to make their own decisions. This is a form of ageism. Respect for a person’s autonomy, feelings and values should not lessen as a person ages.

The law in BC recognizes that the process of aging does not necessarily lead to a decline in capacity or the right to make decisions, and that all adults are presumed to be capable unless the contrary is established. Even where an older adult’s capacity has changed or declined, in most cases he or she can continue to make decisions, sometimes with the support of family, friends or caregivers.



Preventing Elder Abuse

Education and Raising Awareness

Many participants identified education and awareness of issues relating to elder abuse as the key to preventing and stopping elder abuse. Participants identified a number of groups that they felt should be targeted for education. These include:

Individuals

- **Adult Children:** Adult children are often those closest to an older adult. They are sometimes the perpetrators of elder abuse but in many other cases they can play a significant role in preventing or stopping elder abuse.
- **Caregivers:** Participants indicated that caregivers needed information about support groups, respite care and other services that are available to them as caregivers. They also need knowledge of how to recognize and react if an older person they are caring for is being abused or neglected.
- **Elementary school children and young adults:** Participants felt that awareness and education needs to begin in elementary school as young people's understanding of aging and older adults will impact the future prevalence of elder abuse. This could include education programs on ageism and on recognizing and responding to elder abuse.
- **Older Adults:** Participants indicated the importance of educating and empowering older adults to advocate for themselves and for each other.

Service Providers

Participants identified the organizations and individuals that interact with different older adult groups on a regular basis as a key group that needs education on elder abuse and neglect issues. These service providers need to have the tools and knowledge to act to prevent elder abuse and to respond where it is suspected. They also need information on ageism so they treat the older with respect and model a non-ageist approach to working with older adults.

Participants identified those who work or volunteer at the following organizations and businesses as examples of those who need to be made aware of elder abuse and neglect:

- **Grocery stores**
- **Banks**
- **Real estate agencies**
- **Hospitals**
- **Doctor's offices**
- **Pharmacies**
- **Law offices**
- **Senior's Centres**
- **Religious Institutions**
- **Community Centres**

Participants suggested that anyone who works with older adults as a part of their job or profession should receive training and education on ageism and elder abuse during their university and college education and on the job training.

Participants emphasized targeting specific groups should not be substituted for raising awareness and providing education to the community at large. Many participants emphasized that elder abuse is a community-wide problem and it is an issue that everyone should be made aware of.



Financial and Medical Professionals

Participants repeatedly mentioned that bank and medical professionals are two key contact points to prevent and stop elder abuse. Participants indicated that these professionals need to be aware of potential issues when working with older adults and be aware of how family dynamics can impact a situation.

Some participants called for banks to have specific policies for dealing with older adult clients, particularly with regard to dealing with an attorney acting under a power of attorney and where an older adult has a joint account with someone other than a spouse. Some participants identified that privacy laws can pose a barrier for bank staff and management to act when they suspect financial abuse of an older adult.

Some participants, especially older adults and community members, identified the family doctor as the primary person in the community who they would send a person experiencing abuse to for support and assistance.

A Single Point of Access: One Number to Call

Participants strongly indicated that it is important to have one number to call to get information and advice about what programs and services can assist an older adult who may be experiencing abuse or neglect. Older adults, caregivers, service providers and all community members would benefit from having one number to call.

Many participants identified that it is important for a person to be able to call one place to get help because it can be difficult to understand the maze of available programs, services and supports. Older adults who may be

experiencing mistreatment or neglect need to know that they will be safe and receive support when they call. The specific agencies that were identified that the community should be able to gain knowledge of when making a call are:

- Designated agencies,
- Public Guardian and Trustee,
- Police services,
- Community organizations that assist older adults,
- Victim services agencies and Victim Link.



Advance Planning

Participants emphasized the importance of older adults preparing advance planning documents, such as representation agreements, power of attorneys and advance health care directives. These documents allow an adult to make their wishes known, or to appoint someone of their choosing to make decisions on their behalf, in case they became incapable of expressing their wishes or making their own decisions in the future.

Participants noted that an older adult's support system - usually an informal network of friends, relatives, community members and advocates - can assist the older adult to learn about and put in



place appropriate advance planning documents. Members of the support system can also encourage the older adult to prepare advance planning documents before there is a crisis, such as an illness or sudden loss of capacity.

Participants indicated that advance planning tools are not well understood, and emphasized the need for legal education for older adults and their appointed decision-makers. In particular, there is a need for education about the rights of the person who creates the advance planning document, and the responsibilities of their appointed decision-maker. Participants suggested that legal education for older adults should encourage older adults not to sign documents which they do not fully understand, or which they are being pressured to sign.

Participants also indicated that banking institutions, health care providers, residential care facilities, and other organizations that may interact with older adults or their appointed decision-makers need education about advance planning documents.

Decision Making: Participants indicated that older adults and their appointed decision makers need education about the effect creating advance planning documents has on the older adult's right to make decisions. A person who makes a representation agreement or a power of attorney is **not** giving up their right to make their own decisions or manage their own affairs. They are only designating a decision-maker should they be unable to or incapable of making decisions in the future. These documents can be changed or cancelled at any time as long the

person who made them is mentally capable of doing so.

Participants identified two types of advanced planning documents that older adults and the public need to learn more about:

1. **Representation Agreements:** A representation agreement allows an adult to appoint a person of his or her choosing to make personal and health care decisions on their behalf. An adult can also appoint a person to manage some aspects of their financial affairs under a representation agreement.

If possible, the representative must consult with the person who appointed them before making decisions on their behalf. The representative must act honestly and keep records.

2. **Powers of Attorney:** A person can give another person, or a business like a trust company, the authority to manage their financial, business or legal affairs with a power of attorney. The attorney acts as an agent of the person who appointed them and must act in their best interests. The attorney does not gain any right to use or access the assets of the person they acting on behalf of for their own benefit.



Stopping Elder Abuse

As has been mentioned throughout this report, everyone in BC, including family members, older adults, caregivers and service providers, requires information about how to respond and who to contact if they encounter elder abuse. Below are some of the key ideas participants identified to stop elder abuse.

End Isolation

Participants indicated that reaching older adults who are isolated and being abused is a priority for service providers. Participants indicated often the key to stopping abuse is to end the isolation of an older adult. Participants who work in the health care profession indicated that once an older adult is reconnected to the community their well being usually improves and further abuse is often prevented. Participants identified the need for more social support and outreach services for older adults. A participant suggested that trained foster families for older adults who wish to participate may help reduce isolation and increase the support an older adult has.

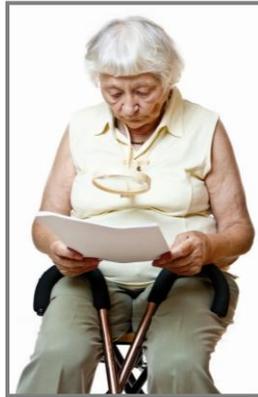
Provide Education, Services & Support to Older Adults

Participants indicated that older adults experiencing abuse, neglect or self-neglect require information about their options and available supports and programs. This will allow them to make an informed decision and choice about how to address their circumstances. The older adult should also be provided adequate support and recovery time before any major decisions are made. Participants suggested that some older adults may need a navigator or advisor to help them navigate through the various programs and services that are available. One participant suggested a legal advocate could visit older adults who are in hospital and have experienced abuse or mistreatment or are deemed at risk of experiencing abuse or neglect.



Reaching Older Adults

Preventing and stopping elder abuse requires older adults to reach out to one another and for the community to reach out to older adults to ensure they have the knowledge and tools to prevent and stop elder abuse. Participants indicated that a variety of methods of outreach are required in order to reach older adults.



Participants indicated that the older adults who need support and assistance the most are often the most reluctant to seek it. A relationship needs to be built with the older adult so they trust the person they are working enough to confide their concerns. Participants suggested that some older adults may be more receptive to information if it comes from a professional, rather than a family member or a friend.

Accessible Information

Participants identified that information should be provided in many formats and languages when educating the community and older adults about elder abuse. The information available should be in plain language and be simple and straight forward. Formats suggested include pamphlets, posters, booklets, illustrations and videos.

Participants indicated that information and education need to be provided to organizations of all cultural backgrounds and that the information may need to be presented differently to different cultural groups.

How to Reach Older Adults

Participants suggested many forms of communication to effectively reach older adults, including:

- **Informal:** Participants suggested that outreach may be most effective if it is informal. They suggested brochures and pamphlets should be available at places older adults frequent. This includes malls, senior centres, religious institutions, libraries, recreation programs, doctor's offices, lawyer's offices, pharmacies and hospitals.
- **Newspaper, Radio, TV:** Participants suggested that stories in local and national newspapers, on the radio and on the local and national news would be an important way of reaching older adults, especially those who are isolated.
- **Online:** Participants suggested that information should be available on the internet for older adults, caregivers, families, professionals, services providers. This could include videos in a number of languages that portray elder abuse and provide information on how to respond to elder abuse.
- **Government Benefit Mail Outs:** Participants suggested sending information on elder abuse prevention and awareness to everyone who applies for the Canada Pension Plan benefit would be a way to reach all older adults.
- **Public Education Workshops:** Participants suggested public education workshops designed for older adults on topics relating to elder abuse.



Part III: Resources

Below you will find a list of some of the resources which may be able to assist you if you are experiencing abuse or neglect or if you know an older adult who is experiencing abuse or neglect.

Toll Free Help Lines Providing Assistance to Older Adults

Seniors Advocacy and Information Line - BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support: BC CEAS offers support and assistance to older adults who have been abused, mistreated or whose rights have been violated. SAIL operates from Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. and is answered by a victim service worker. Callers requiring legal assistance or with a legal question will be referred to the Legal Advocacy Program. Call SAIL at 1-866-437-1940 or visit www.bceas.ca.

VictimLink BC: VictimLink is a toll-free, confidential service that provides information and referral services to all victims of crime and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence. VictimLink provides service in over 110 languages, including 17 North American aboriginal languages. VictimLink operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 1-800-563-0808, for TTY service call 604-875-0885 or visit <http://www.victimlinkbc.ca/>.

Agencies that assist Older Adults who may be unable to seek assistance on their own

Designated Agencies: Under the *Adult Guardianship Act*, the five health authorities in BC have the responsibility to look into situations of abuse, neglect or self neglect where there is reason to believe an adult is unable to seek help and

assistance on his or her own. If you wish to report abuse or neglect you may find the contact number for the designated agency in your community online: <http://www.trustee.bc.ca/pdfs/STA/abuseneglect.htm>.

Public Guardian and Trustee: The Public Guardian and Trustee (PGT) provides a range of financial and personal care services to adults who may need help managing their affairs. The PGT can also intervene in situations where an adult is being financially abused and may not be able to seek help and assistance on his or her own.

For more information on the PGT's services visit <http://www.trustee.bc.ca/> or call 604-660-4444.

Other Information and Support Services for Older Adults

bc211: Call 2-1-1 for information about community, social and government services in your community. 211 is a free, confidential, multi-lingual service. It operates 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Call 211 or visit www.bc211.com.

Health and Seniors Information Line: The Health and Seniors Information Line provides information on both health and non-health related federal and provincial government programs and services for older adults in BC. Translation services are available in over 130 languages. Call 1-800-465-4911 or visit http://www.seniorsbc.ca/shls/seniors_info_line.html



Transition Houses: The BC Society of Transition Houses provides a directory of transition houses in BC online at: http://www.bcsth.ca/sites/default/files/Compendium2011_o.pdf

Community Based Services: There are many organizations and seniors and community centres that provide support, services and outreach to older adults in BC. To find services in your local community you may wish to contact or visit your local community or seniors centre or contact bc211 at 211, VictimLink at 1-800-563-0808 or BC CEAS at 1-866-437-1940.

Legal Services

Elder Law Clinic - BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support: The Elder Law Clinic provides legal advice and representation to eligible older adults who are over 55, cannot afford a lawyer and have a legal problem in certain situations. Issues the clinic may be able to help with include:

- Appeals of denial of benefits and pensions (CPP, OAS, GIS);
- Human rights violations with discrimination on the basis of age;
- Financial abuse (frauds, scams, abuse of power of attorney);
- Violation of legal rights in long term care or assisted living facilities; or
- Elder abuse where the older adult's safety is at risk and a legal remedy is needed.

If you are interested in learning more about the Elder Law Clinic call 1-866-437-1940 or visit www.bceas.ca.

Law Students Legal Advice Program (LSLAP): LSLAP is a program run by law students at the University of British Columbia. They provide free advice and representation to clients who would otherwise be unable to afford legal assistance. Clinics are located throughout the Greater Vancouver Regional District. Call 1-604-822-5791 or visit <http://www.lslap.bc.ca>.

Legal Services Society: Legal Services Society offers legal services to people who cannot afford a lawyer. Call 604-408-2172 (Greater Vancouver) or 1-866-577-2525 (elsewhere in BC) or visit <http://www.lss.bc.ca>.

Community Legal Assistance Society: CLAS provides legal assistance to disadvantaged people throughout BC. Their programs include a community a disability law program, a mental health law program and a BC Human Rights clinic. Call 1-888-685-6222 or visit <http://www.clasbc.net>.

Access Pro Bono Society of British Columbia: Access Pro Bono provides legal advice programs across BC and in some cases provides legal representation to individuals of limited means. Call 1-877-762-6664 or visit <http://www.accessprobono.ca/>.

Lawyer Referral Service: The Lawyer Referral Service provides the opportunity to have a consultation with a lawyer for up to 30 minutes for a fee of \$25 plus tax. This consultation is to determine if the potential client has a legal problem. Call 1-800-663-1919 or visit http://www.cba.org/bc/Public_Media/main/lawyer_referral.aspx.



Recommendations

Using the insights gathered at the *Building Bridges* community forums, BC CEAS drafted the following recommendations to prevent and stop elder abuse in BC:

Recommendation #1: Increase funding and support for programs and services that assist older adults who have been abused or who are vulnerable to abuse

As Canada's population continues to age, the need for supports and services for older adults will continue to grow. Participants identified there exists a continuing need for additional social and health services and resources for older adults who have been abused or who are vulnerable to abuse. Participants also identified the need for navigators or advisors to assist older adults with understanding and accessing the programs and support that may be available to them.

Recommendation #2: Increase legal education for older adults and service providers in BC

Participants repeatedly indicated that many older adults lack knowledge about their legal right to manage their affairs and make decisions as they grow older. Additionally, many older adults have an incomplete understanding of advance planning documents, such as power of attorneys and representation agreements. It is very important that older adults in BC are able to access legal education to better understand their rights.

Recommendation #3: Increase legal aid and low-cost legal services to older adults in BC

The minimal availability of legal aid and affordable legal services in BC means many older adults are unable to access the legal assistance they require when they have a legal problem. Older adults require access to legal services in order to protect and enforce their rights, manage their affairs and plan for the future.

Recommendation #4: Develop older adult networks of support

Participants indicated that older adults should be encouraged to work together and with community agencies to form networks of support. These networks of support would allow older adults to rely on each other for advocacy and support. The development of older adult networks of support may prevent isolation and increase knowledge of elder abuse and neglect issues amongst older adults.

Recommendation #5: Increase public knowledge of existing resources

Participants emphasized the importance of having one place to call in order to get information and a "road map" to deal with situations of abuse or neglect. The Seniors Advocacy and Information Line (SAIL), operated by BC CEAS, can offer support, assistance and referrals to older adults in situations of abuse or neglect. In other situations, such as if the older adult is incapable, the local health authority or the Public Guardian and Trustee may be able to provide assistance. Some participants were unclear about the roles of the different agencies and services, and who they should contact in certain situations. It is important to provide education to older adults and the



public generally about the supports and services that are available to respond to situations of abuse or neglect.

Recommendation #6: Increase information and support services for families and caregivers of older adults

Concerned family members, friends and caregivers often wish to assist an older adult who is experiencing abuse or neglect. To do so, they may require legal information or advice about the rights of the older adults and practical information and support about how to help the older adult get the support and assistance they require.

Recommendation #7: Develop a multicultural and multi-lingual approach to combating elder abuse

Participants indicated that more outreach programs need to be developed that are aimed at reaching older adults of all backgrounds and circumstances. Participants indicated that different approaches may be required in different communities and cultures in order to prevent and stop elder abuse. Resources are needed that reflect the many ways older adults learn and the many languages they speak.

Recommendation #8: Rethink the use of the term “Elder Abuse”

Older adults who participated in the forums strongly indicated they did not like the term elder abuse and would be hesitant to identify themselves as a “victim of elder abuse”. Other words and phrases may need to be developed so that older adults who are being mistreated and abused can more comfortably seek assistance. The development of new terminology may also increase public understanding and awareness of elder abuse.

Recommendation #9: Educate the public about ageism

Participants strongly identified ageism as a significant contributor to elder abuse. Combating elder abuse requires challenging ageist viewpoints, policies and laws. This requires increasing public knowledge about ageism and its negative effects on the health and well-being of older members of our communities.



Conclusion

Elder abuse is an important and serious issue in British Columbia. As our population continues to age, strategies and programs need to be continuously developed to combat elder abuse. Community gatherings to discuss elder abuse issues are an important part of this process. The *Building Bridges Community Forums on the Prevention of Elder Abuse* brought together important stakeholders to network and build capacity to prevent elder abuse.

The recommendations made in this report reflect the need to:

- **Challenge Systemic Ageism:** In some cases, elder abuse and neglect may be prevented or stopped by challenging ageist stereotypes, policies and laws in BC;
- **Empower Service Providers and Supportive Caregivers and Family:** Service providers and supportive friends, family and caregivers of older adults require the appropriate education and tools so they may assist older adults to prevent or stop abuse or neglect; and
- **Empower Older Adults:** Older adults require the appropriate health, social and legal programs and supports so they may proactively prevent and stop mistreatment, abuse and neglect.

The recommendations in this report reflect the continuing need for programs and supports to prevent elder abuse. BC CEAS is committed to continuing to work with older adults and the community to ensure that older adults in BC may live with dignity, free of abuse or neglect.

BC CEAS would like to thank all volunteers, panelists and participants for attending and contributing to the community forums. Special thanks to the United Way for providing the funding and support that made these events possible.



¹ Except where otherwise noted, the information and definitions provided in this section (What is Elder Abuse?) were adapted from the *Facts Sheets on Abuse of Older Adults* published by BC CEAS and from the *Community & Justice System Working Together as Partners to prevent or stop abuse of seniors* education tool kit developed by BC CEAS. The *Fact Sheets* available on our website at www.bcceas.ca and the tool kits may be ordered by visiting our website at www.bcceas.ca.

² Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *A Practical Guide to Elder Abuse and Neglect Law in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC, 2011) at 6. Available online at: <http://www.bcli.org/ccel/projects/practical-guide-elder-abuse-and-neglect-law-canada>.

³ R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 6 [AGA].

⁴ The amendments to the *Adult Guardianship Act* and other provincial statutes relating to advanced planning that will come into force on September 1, 2011 have **not** been incorporated into the information provided in this section.

⁵ AGA, *supra* note 3 at s.44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ss. 44, 46.

⁷ *Ibid.*, s. 47(1).

⁸ *Ibid.*, s. 48.

⁹ *Ibid.*, ss. 47, 51.

¹⁰ The precise action taken will depend on the circumstances, whether the situation is an emergency and whether the adult is capable. See AGA, *supra* note 3 at ss. 51-59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, s. 52.

¹² R.S.C. 1985, c. C-46 [“Criminal Code”].

¹³ The information provided under the heading “Criminal Remedies” was adapted from the handouts found in Chapter 5 of the *Community & Justice System Working Together as Partners to prevent or stop abuse of seniors* education tool kit developed by the BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support in 2006.

¹⁴ *Criminal Code*, *supra* note 12, s. 810.

¹⁵ For more information about this video, please visit BC CEAS’ website at www.bcceas.ca.

¹⁶ Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, “Ageism” online: Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse <<http://www.cnpea.ca/ageism.htm>>.

¹⁷ Robert N. Butler, *Why Survive? Being Old in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

¹⁸ *Canada’s Aging Population: Seizing the Opportunity* (Ottawa: Special Senate Committee on Aging, 2009) at 6 [Canada’s Aging Population].

¹⁹ *Canada’s Aging Population*, *supra* note 18 at 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.* at 12.

²¹ *Ibid.* at 13.

