



## **Safeguarding Carers at Risk**

**A summary report on the  
Safeguarding Carers at Risk Project**

**Commissioned by  
Office for the Ageing**



**Government  
of South Australia**

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SA Health

**Report Title:** Safeguarding Carers at Risk  
**Commissioned by:** Government of South Australia – Office for the Ageing  
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## **Background**

Commissioned by the Office for the Ageing (OFTA), Carers SA was tasked with exploring, within existing services, early ways to identify risk factors and prevention and early intervention safeguards for older people in carer relationships. The information gathered was used to develop a Guidelines document to assist other agencies, and also an information brochure for family carers.

Between August 2014 and January 2015, Carers SA undertook primary research with three different groups: Key Stakeholders (agencies with expertise in dealing with cases of abuse); Carers SA Advisory and Counselling staff (with expertise in supporting family carers); and family carers (who have lived experience of the issues).

## **Project objectives**

The objectives were to:

1. Explore processes within existing services for early ways to identify carers at risk
2. Develop a screening tool to identify risk factors and resilience factors
3. Identify prevention and early intervention strategies for agencies and staff
4. Develop guidelines supporting carers at risk
5. Raise aged care agencies' awareness and understanding of strategies to support carers at risk

Information provided by the Key Stakeholders, Counselling and Advisory staff, and family carers has identified risk and resilience factors, and prevention and early intervention strategies. This information has underpinned the resources Carers SA has developed. The 'Guidelines' document is a poster which incorporates information about risk and resilience factors within a structured approach to prevention and early intervention.

The Carers SA's Forum 'Safeguarding Carers at Risk' afforded an opportunity to raise care agencies' awareness and understanding of strategies to support carers at risk.

## **Key Findings**

- Counselling should be promoted early in the caring phase.
- The most helpful strategies to reduce the stress of older people in their caring role were to: reassure the carer and listen to the issues; encourage regular respite; encourage carers to ask for support; and explore support options.
- The advice respondents wanted Carers SA to give carers at risk of perpetrating abuse included: encouraging carers to seek help early; identifying whether the carer has self-awareness of warning signs; identifying causes of stress and assisting to alleviate it; offering respite and counselling; and connecting them with other carers to reassure them they are not alone.
- Stress factors fell into three categories: the carer relationship; lack of community support; and structural and administrative aspects of support provision.

- There were examples of physical abuse perpetrated by the person cared for against the carer.
- The issue of whether providers could inadvertently be perpetrators of abuse towards carers was raised in the context of decisions providers need to make which challenge an ageing carer's competency and capacity.

## **The resources**

The stress factors most frequently heard were specified in the prototype 'Guidelines' document and the prevention and early intervention strategies were translated into the prototype as "Listen', 'Encourage', 'Help' and 'Advocate'

It was decided that a poster, which would condense and give structure to the information captured by the research, would be the most suitable format for the 'Guidelines' document for other agencies. The poster can be easily displayed above a desk or in some other prominent position and it incorporates both the steps for prevention and early intervention, and the major points to remember about each step. Its high visibility assists in raising awareness about the subject.

The research findings underpinned the decision to create a resource for family carers as a means of empowering them by providing generalised advice about abuse and its early prevention. It also suggested that support agencies could be better trained to understand their partnership role with family carers, and that advocating for family carers is another aspect of prevention and early intervention.

The brochure developed for family carers is a deliberately non-confrontational approach to raising awareness amongst carers of the risk of abuse, and encouraging them to seek help. It is suitable for distribution via information packs, display stands (in, for example, doctors' surgeries, local council offices, support agency offices etc.) and also through less formal contacts such as family and friends.

In January 2015, Carers SA trialed the prototype resources with a group comprising family carers and advisory and counselling staff. Following this consultation, the two products were further refined.

## **Forum**

In March 2015, Carers SA convened a forum entitled 'Safeguarding Carers at Risk' at which further feedback about the two resources was received. Expressions of interest from 37 of the attendees at the forum indicate a high level of interest for the resources.

Additional feedback from the forum highlighted an unmet need for staff training to respond to abuse in the family carer situation.

The low level of response about prevention and early intervention suggests an unrecognised need for staff training in safeguarding carers at risk.

## **Recommendations**

1. Support staff and agencies should routinely refer family carers to Carers SA early in the caring phase for support and counselling.
2. Carers SA Counselling and Advisory staff should provide information about abuse in relationships involving older people as early as possible after a carer makes contact.
3. The 'Safeguarding carers at risk' poster should be widely distributed amongst service providers, support agencies and other organizations and individuals working with family carers.
4. The 'Safeguarding against abuse' brochure for family carers should be widely distributed by Carers SA and other support agencies to make it highly accessible to carers.
5. The 'Safeguarding against abuse' brochure for family carers should be made available in other languages.
6. Carers SA should explore ways of obtaining funding, including partnering with other agencies, government departments or corporate sponsors, to print the two resources.
7. Carers SA's Education and Training Team should take a central role in developing and promoting training about safeguarding family carers against abuse, for its own staff, for service providers and education professionals, and for community information sessions and carer workshops.
8. More detailed information about support agencies for specific situations and medical conditions should be provided on the Carers SA website.
9. Carers SA should advocate for a single point of information about services and supports for all carers.
10. Carers SA should identify and report known limitations or deficiencies in support services that could put carers at risk of abuse or abusing in a carer relationship involving older people, and should advocate for improvement in those services.

## **Appendix A**

### **Poster**

# Abuse: Safeguarding carers at risk

1800 242 636 [www.carers.sa.asn.au](http://www.carers.sa.asn.au)



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Abuse can be physical, psychological, financial, sexual, or neglect. Older people are especially at risk

## **Appendix B**

### **Brochure**

## Abuse is a Human Rights issue

*All people have the right to live their lives free from neglect, abuse and exploitation.*

Carers and those the people they care for have the right to:

**Independence** including access to basic needs, health care, work, education and the right to live in supportive, safe environments

**Participation** in social activities and opportunities to share their knowledge and skills with their community

**Care** that maintains their optimal level of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and includes access to social and legal services

**Self-fulfilment** to realise their potential and access educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources

**Dignity** to be treated fairly, to be valued in their own right, to live in dignity and security, to be free of exploitation, physical and mental abuse, to be able to exercise personal autonomy.

(Aged Rights Advocacy Service: 2013 APP Fact Sheet 1)

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## Safeguarding carers at risk

Carers SA provides support to all carers, regardless of age, ethnicity, gender or condition of the people cared for. We can guide you through the service maze.

Carers SA provides:

- FREE information and advice on available services
- Counselling and emotional support
- Access to local carer programs
- Up to date training on managing the carer role
- Respite to give you a break

Tel: 8291 5000 Fax: 8271 0388  
Toll Free: 1800 242 036  
Email: [info@carers-sa.asn.au](mailto:info@carers-sa.asn.au)  
Website: [www.carers-sa.asn.au](http://www.carers-sa.asn.au)  
[www.facebook.com/CarersSA](https://www.facebook.com/CarersSA)  
[www.facebook.com/youngcarersSA](https://www.facebook.com/youngcarersSA)  
[@Carers\\_SA](https://www.instagram.com/Carers_SA)  
Carers SA is a business name of the Carers Association of SA Inc.



## Safeguarding against abuse

We can help you





### Understanding abuse

Abuse can be any intentional harm caused by another person in a position of trust. The abuser can be a family member or friend, carer or paid worker.

Abuse can be:

**Physical**

Hitting, pushing, slapping

**Psychological**

Verbal harassment, humiliation, threats

**Financial**

Misuse of money, property or resources

**Social**

Restricting or stopping activities or contact

**Sexual**

Non-consensual sexual contact

**Neglect**

Failure to meet basic needs or provide necessities

**There's no excuse for abuse**

(Older People Have Rights: ARAS pocket guide)

### Be aware of how you feel

Seek help if you feel something is not right

Either you, or the person you care for, may be experiencing unwelcome feelings as a result of abuse



### Who can help?

**For carer support, information and advice**

Carers SA: 1800 242 636 [www.carers-sa.asn.au](http://www.carers-sa.asn.au)

**For 24 hour crisis support**

Lifeline: 13 11 14 [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**For further information about abuse and your rights**

Aged Rights Advocacy Service (ARAS): 8232 5377 [www.agedrights.asn.au](http://www.agedrights.asn.au)

**If in danger**

Police: 000 or 131 444

### What can you do?

Reach out for support - you are not alone

If you are concerned about abuse, help is available.

- Confidential counselling
- Help in the home
- Information
- Respite
- Peer support
- Referrals to specialist agencies
- Workshops about caring