

Social Development Canada

**BEST PRACTICES FOR STOPPING
THE ABUSE OF OLDER ADULTS IN THE NWT.**

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Executive Summary

The abuse of older adults describes the many forms of neglect, mistreatment and violence that older adults may experience. The abuse of older adults is a serious and complicated problem that is not well known or understood.

Social Development Canada contracted Lutra Associates Ltd. of Yellowknife to explore effective interventions to prevent, reduce and eliminate the abuse of older adults in the NWT. This report summarizes available programs and services in the NWT and best practices in Canada for responding to the abuse of older adults. The report also makes recommendations for the type and design of programs and services most likely to succeed in stopping the abuse of older adults in the NWT.

Programs and Services for Stopping the Abuse of Older Adults in the NWT

Most NWT communities have basic social, health and policing services to respond to a range of demanding community issues including the abuse of older adults. These service agencies, community leadership, and older adults themselves may have limited understanding of older adult abuse, lack capacity to respond to victims or those at risk of abuse, or accord little or no priority to this problem. Many older adults might not disclose abuse because they do not recognize it, are isolated from others, lack English language skills, lack access or the ability to use technology, feel shame or guilt, or lack confidence that anyone can help.

The communities of Hay River and Inuvik and the NWT Seniors' Society have helped to raise the profile of older adult abuse and ways to address it. A small number of other agencies are also endeavouring to address older adult abuse. Still, the overall understanding and priority to stopping the abuse of older adults is low, and the capacity to address it is limited. Community-based elders/seniors

groups and service providers need guidance on how and who should take the lead in responding to and raising awareness about older adult abuse. Also, seniors and elders need to organize and take greater ownership of solutions for stopping the abuse of older adults in the NWT.

Best Practices

Across Canada several voluntary groups and government agencies are endeavouring to confront and stop the abuse of older adults. This research involved consultation with groups across the country to learn about best practices or good ideas and solutions that should be adopted more broadly to deal with the abuse of older adults. They offer best practices in five areas.

- Information

Information and education should confront the assumptions that underlie the abuse of older adults. Information should feature familiar people, places, agencies, culture, language and environmental contexts. Information should empower older adults to make choices that stop the abuse.

- Education

Interactive workshops and presentations led by trained educators/facilitators/presenters, especially older adults educators, are effective and preferred approaches.

- Advocacy

Advocacy is not about forcing disclosure or imposing interventions/supports on non-consenting older adults. Across Canada networks have developed as the foundation for advocating against the abuse of older adults. Networks and coalitions are effective ways to engender ownership, inspire action and address scarce resource issues that typically plague advocacy efforts to address the abuse of older adults.

- Community Response - Direct Intervention

The immediate safety of the victim or those at risk of victimization is the primary objective of direct intervention. Secondary objectives are to provide services and supports that keep older adults safe from abuse in all its many forms. Community intervention models evolve from a multi-agency community plan. These plans designate a lead agency. Lead agencies coordinate response efforts, a multi-service consultation or case management team or abuse network team and ongoing efforts to reach out to older adults and other community members. Community plans usually try to engage all community members in responding to and preventing abuse.

- Protocols

The effectiveness of community-based responses or interventions is improved with clear policies and procedures for handling cases of suspected or confirmed abuse of older adults. Protocols link the internal policies and procedures of various agencies with those of others to share responsibility for dealing with abuse.

Recommendations

To respond to the abuse of older adults in the NWT, three recommendations are offered in no order of priority. It is recommended that:

- more financial and human resources be invested in addressing the abuse of older adults in the NWT and that these resources focus on:
 - empowering older adults to organize and take greater ownership in solutions for stopping the abuse of older adults in the NWT.
 - building community and territorial networks that enable older adults and the front-line workers and organizations that serve them, to develop and share information, tools, approaches and research to address the abuse of older adults.
 - research to support education and advocacy efforts that debunk misconceptions about the abuse of older adults and help older adults identify and name it.

- building community capacity that promotes stronger, collaborative relationships among community agencies, volunteers and leadership, and assists consultation and intervention teams to form and be sustained in their efforts to address the abuse of older adults.
 - developing familiar and culturally and linguistically appropriate public education and awareness resources for use in campaigns to promote zero tolerance of the abuse of older adults.
 - piloting and evaluating proven community development approaches for responding to the abuse of older adults such as a family support centre/ safe home network and older adult outreach program in smaller NWT communities.
 - increasing community resources to eliminate service gaps for victims of older adult abuse (e.g. victim service workers, older adult outreach personnel, and peer advocate/counsellors) and those at risk of abuse (e.g. transportation, regular socialization and recreation programming).
 - responding to community requests for information workshops, forums and presentations to raise awareness and stimulate discussion about the abuse of older adults.
 - recruiting and training local gatekeepers and volunteers committed to addressing the abuse of older adults.
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- the link between the abuse of older adults and family violence be made more obvious and more strongly in the implementation of the NWT Protection Against Family Violence Act and plans to address family violence.
 - community protocols be developed that reflect agency, leadership and community commitment and capacity to respond to older adult abuse. Protocols should provide details on the ' who, what, when, where and why' of responding to the abuse of older adults. Protocols should also respect the rights of older adults to live with dignity, independence and in safety.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Abuse of Older Adults

Abuse is a term that describes the many forms of neglect, mistreatment and violence that older adults may experience. Abuse can be physical, mental, emotional, social, sexual, financial, or spiritual. It can be expressed through any number of actions or conduct such as threatening or intimidating behaviour, isolation from friends and family, neglect of daily living needs, forced sexual activity, restrictions or manipulation. The abuse of older adults often stems from inequality and misuse of personal or professional power. Frequently the abuse of older adults is a factor in family or other dependent relationships.

The abuse of older adults is a silent problem because it may not be identified as abuse or it is tolerated or condoned. Victims and perpetrators of older adult abuse may not recognize various actions or behaviours as abusive or may be fearful, uncomfortable or embarrassed to name the abuse. The abuse of older adults is a serious and complicated problem that is not well known or understood. Abuse may affect 7% of older adult Canadians¹ and likely even more in the NWT given the very high rates of violent crime, sexual assaults and admissions to women's shelters in the north.² While the incidence of older adult abuse is not well known, Canadian statistics show that financial and emotional abuse of older adults is the most common form of reported abuse and may be an early warning of other forms of abuse.

In jurisdictions across Canada including in the NWT, the abuse of older adults is gaining profile as a serious societal issue that must be addressed. In many jurisdictions, older adult abuse is addressed within the context of family violence and violence against women. In the NWT, the NWT Seniors' Society has been

¹ Statistics Canada and Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (2000).

² NWT Seniors' Society (2004).

working on this issue for at least ten years mainly through community-based workshops that bring older adults and other community members together to talk about this problem and look at solutions for stopping the abuse. In 2004, the NWT Seniors' Society released *A Plan for Action: Respect Our Elders- Stop the Abuse*. The action plan has three objectives:

1. empower NWT older adults to deal with abuse
2. identify and deal with the abuse of older adults, and
3. deal with the addictions that contribute to abuse.

The NWT Seniors' Society has promoted the action plan broadly including to governments at all levels.

1.2 The Intent and Methodology for this Report

Social Development Canada (SDC) is the federal government department mandated to strengthen Canada's social foundations. SDC does this through supports to individuals, families and communities that encourage well being and active participation. Seniors are a target group of SDC programs and services.

Both in response to the NWT Seniors' Society's plan of action for stopping the abuse of older adults and its mandate to encourage the well-being and active participation of seniors, SDC contracted Lutra Associates Ltd. of Yellowknife to explore effective interventions for the prevention, reduction and elimination of the abuse of older adults in the NWT. This is the purpose of this report. This report provides:

1. a summary of programs and services available to NWT residents intended to reduce or prevent the abuse of older adults;
2. a summary of best practices in Canada for the delivery of programs and services that prevent and/or reduce the abuse of older adults; and
3. recommendations for the type and design of programs and services most likely to succeed in preventing and reducing the incidents of older adult abuse in the NWT.

This report was prepared from a review of literature including statistical research on the abuse of older adults in the NWT and Canada (Appendix A) and through in-person and telephone interviews with 32 service providers and senior serving organizations in the NWT and Canada (Appendix B). Interviewees were mainly identified by SDC and the NWT Seniors' Society or by peers working in the field of older adult abuse. Agencies and individuals were also identified through a review of pertinent literature as well as an electronic search of abuse prevention programs in Canada. In advance of the interviews, interviewees were provided with the attached interview guide and letter of introduction (Appendix B).

The research team found that all individuals and agencies invited to participate in this research, were anxious to do so. They were also eager to identify others who could contribute to this research. To this end, many of the well-known and long-term practitioners of programming to stop the abuse of older adults in Canada, have inputted into this research. The excellent and high quality participation is noteworthy given the short (six-week) timeframe of this research project.

2. Responses to the Abuse of Older Adults in the NWT

This chapter summarizes the supports and services available in NWT communities to respond to the abuse of older adults. The inventory attached in Appendix C provides the basis for this summary. This chapter also reports key informant views on service gaps and recommendations for responding to and preventing older adult abuse in the NWT.

Information brought forth by key informants in the NWT corroborates the Coalition Against Family Violence's *NWT Action Plan on Family Violence 2003 – 2008* which also considers the abuse of older adults, and the NWT Seniors' Society's 2004 *A Plan for Action: Respect Our Elders- Stop the Abuse*. The NWT Action Plan contains 25 recommendations in eight categories (i.e. policy and legislation; working together; capacity building; training; prevention; education and awareness; services; and monitoring, evaluation and accountability). The NWT Seniors' Society's Plan of Action recommends 11 actions to stop the abuse of older adults. In 2004, the GNWT responded to the Coalition Against Family Violence's *NWT Action Plan on Family Violence 2003 – 2008* Action Plan by providing a framework for action.³

2.1 Services and Supports

Three main categories of services and supports exist in the NWT to respond to the abuse of older adults:

- legal protection and assistance,
- public education, awareness and advocacy, and
- community response services.

³ GNWT. 2004. *GNWT Response to the NWT Action Plan on Family Violence (2003-2008) - A Framework for Action*

Legal Protection and Assistance

On April 1, 2005 the NWT Protection Against Family Violence Act will come into force. The Act will provide legal protection for older adults when there is an act or a threat of family violence, abuse or neglect.⁴ Through the Act, older adults threatened with or in an abusive family situation can seek:

- an Emergency Protection Order which will provide immediate protection by granting them sole use of the family home or other property; restricting communication with the abusive family member; and police seizure of the abuser's weapons or firearms. With the help of police or shelter staff, older adult victims or other immediate and extended family members can apply to a justice of the court at any time for an Emergency Protection Order.
- a Protection Order that provides the same protection as in an Emergency Protection Order but also includes financial compensation or requires the abuser to participate in counselling.

A coordinator with the support of an advisory committee will oversee the implementation of the Act. The advisory committee will have members from the NWT Coalition Against Family Violence such as the RCMP, YWCA, the NWT Department of Health and Social Services, the Native Women's Association of the NWT and the Yellowknife Health and Social Services Authority.

Several initiatives will support the implementation of the Act, including:

- plain language and interactive public education materials (e.g. "Ask Me" activities that target older adults);
- a multi-media public education campaign in all official languages in the NWT (e.g. radio and TV public service announcements, information workshops and public education sessions);
- frontline service provider response training (e.g. for the RCMP, justices of the peace, courts staff, and community social workers);

⁴Family violence is defined as an act or threat that causes bodily harm or damage to property; sexual, psychological, emotional and financial abuse; and neglect.

- a commitment for two demonstration projects; and
- monitoring and evaluation activities.

The RCMP provide crime prevention and protection services through the community-policing program in NWT communities. With the exception of a small number of communities,⁵ policing services are provided from local detachments. RCMP respond to and assess complaints, take appropriate action with perpetrators of violent and abusive action and refer victims to such community agencies as the community social or health workers, an emergency shelter, victims services,⁶ or other community-based support or intervention programs/services. Where there is sufficient capacity, officers will follow-up with victims.

The philosophy of the RCMP's community policing programs involves responding to local priorities and direction. The RCMP endeavours to build trust and relationships with community leadership and service agencies. RCMP officers are visible in communities. They volunteer in community recreation and social activities (e.g. seniors luncheons, coaching sports), attend committee meetings, and time and circumstances permitting, connect with older adults in a friendly social manner.

Victim's services are available in nine of the 33 NWT communities. Victim services assist victims of abuse and witnesses to prepare for legal action through the preparation of victim impact statements and obtaining protection orders in civil and criminal court; and referrals for counselling services to help deal with trauma. In communities without victim services, older adult victims of abuse may be referred to the community social worker for similar supports.

⁵ Sachs Harbour, Wekweti, Kakisa, Colville Lake, Nahanni Butte, Gameti, Tsiigehtchic, Wrigley, Jean Marie River, Trout Lake.

⁶ On April 1, 2005, the RCMP will refer victims of complaints to victim services where available or the community social worker for supports (e.g. assistance to prepare a victim statement) in preparation for legal action.

Yellowknife Victim's Services trains volunteer victim service workers. Supports are available 24 hours per day seven days per week to victims and those at risk whether a crime is reported or suspected. In addition to assistance preparing for court, victim service workers may provide or arrange for emotional support for those leaving an abusive situation. Yellowknife Victim's Services identifies interagency cooperation as fundamental to providing appropriate supports to victims of violence and abuse.

The NWT Guardianship and Trusteeship Act provides protection for vulnerable older adults incapable of attending to their own safety, well being and financial affairs. The Court may make a guardianship order to appoint a guardian if an adult is:

- incapable of understanding information or the consequences for making a decision concerning his or her own health care, nutrition, shelter, clothing, hygiene or safety.
- incapable and at risk of physical or mental abuse or neglect.

The Court may make an order to appoint a trustee to look after the financial affairs of an adult who is considered incapable of doing so him/herself. Where the Court is not satisfied that the guardian or trustee meets the provisions of the NWT Guardianship and Trusteeship Act, it may appoint the Public Guardian or Public Trustee to assume trustee and guardianship duties on behalf of an incapable adult.

Policies and guidelines may be in place in long-term care facilities to protect older adults in care from abuse and neglect. Staff may be instructed to observe visitors and intervene if abuse is suspected. Personnel policies may also be in place that requires staff to respect the rights of older adults, understand the characteristics and types of abuse older adults may experience and the consequences for caregivers who abuse.

Public Education, Awareness and Advocacy

Over the past ten years the NWT Seniors' Society has partnered with the Government of the NWT to actively raise awareness and educate older adults about abuse and neglect. The Society operates a seniors telephone information service, sponsors community workshops and disseminates multi-media information (e.g. public service announcements (PSAs), posters, brochures, media interviews and a video/audio tape in English and Aboriginal languages). Word of mouth promotion via informal community networks, media interviews and sporadic older adult abuse workshops over the past decade have been among the most successful of the NWT Seniors' Society's efforts to raise awareness and educate the public about the abuse of older adults.

The NWT Seniors' Society invites NWT communities to host education and awareness workshops to empower older adults to organize and work together to deal with abuse in their own communities. The Society will partner with communities to arrange for workshop funding and facilitators. Community hosts are responsible for engaging older adult participation, and arranging for space, interpretation, snacks and community-based presenters (e.g. leaders, frontline community health and social service workers and RCMP). A unique feature of the workshop format includes visits to community schools to raise awareness about respecting older adults and 'erasing' abuse.

The NWT Seniors' Society advocates against older adult abuse through representation on the Coalition Against Family Violence and the NWT Seniors' Advisory Council. In recent years, the NWT Seniors' Society has participated in two program and service reviews, consulted with all levels of government and agencies on the abuse of older adults and successfully advocated for the elimination of abuse as a central focus of the 2004 NWT Family Violence Declaration and NWT Family Violence Awareness Week. NWT political leaders

are regularly invited to NWT Seniors' Society forums and open houses, at which time the Society makes its concern about the abuse of older adults known.

The Government of the NWT plays a role in supporting older adults who may be victims or at risk of abuse or family violence. In addition to regional and community personnel, two headquarters positions, the NWT Seniors/Disability Consultant and Family Violence Prevention Specialist, have responsibility for:

- consulting with seniors, senior serving organizations and family violence agencies regarding policies and guidelines for programming to address and prevent older adult abuse and family violence;
- administering contribution agreements for seniors services such as with the NWT Seniors' Society's information line, awareness and public education campaigns and abuse of older adult workshops; and
- administering contribution agreements with service providers for shelters from violence.

Community seniors' societies, Aboriginal friendship centres, public nursing homes/long-term care facilities and day programs exist in some communities and provide opportunities for older adults to network and receive support to address abuse. Community-based programs tend to focus on engaging older adults in a relaxed social setting and raising their awareness about abuse.⁷ In some communities, regular older adult luncheons are held and guest speakers are invited to make presentations on topics of interest to older adults. For example, the Yellowknife Seniors Society holds weekly 'lunch with a bunch' gatherings and regularly offers information sessions on such issues as financial abuse, scams, fraud and neglect.

⁷ Seniors societies are located in Fort Smith, Hay River, Fort Simpson, Fort Resolution, Yellowknife, and Inuvik Elders Day Program. Friendship Centres are located in Rae Edzo, Fort Providence, Fort Simpson, Fort Smith, Hay River and Yellowknife.

Community Response Services

Older adults anywhere in the NWT seeking help in an abusive situation or crisis can receive help by calling the RCMP's 24-hour emergency line. This line is monitored from a central RCMP dispatch. Older adults can also call the Help Line and AIDS/HIV Information Line, which are monitored by mental health professionals. They can also call the Seniors Information Line, Tele-Care NWT Line or Law Line for information on legal, benefit, family, health or abuse issues.

The RCMP are the first responder in emergencies situation and for a complaint of abuse. In communities with victim service workers (e.g. Yellowknife), these workers are playing an increasingly important role in responding to non-emergency abuse situations where older adult victims may be involved.

Community home care staff collaborate with other community agencies to provide nursing, personal and other supports that allow older adults to remain in their own homes. Because home care staff work with older adults in their homes, they are able to observe older adults and family dynamics for signs of abuse. If abuse is suspected, it is reported to the community social worker. As awareness increases about the abuse of older adults, more community service providers in NWT communities will be looking out for the well being of older adults.

Community-based housing organizations are responsible for tenant relations and the administration and maintenance of seniors housing in the NWT. Housing staff connect periodically with older adult residents of seniors housing. If they suspect abuse, they are required to report it to the community social worker or the RCMP.

There are some very good models of community response to abuse in a small number of NWT communities. Two examples are provided here - one in Hay River and one in Inuvik. The Hay River Family Support Centre is succeeding in connecting with older women who are victims of abuse. The Centre:

- monitors a crisis line and responds to calls from across the NWT 24 hours per day, seven days per week. It also accepts collect calls.
- has established procedures for responding to abuse. In an emergency, the RCMP are contacted first followed by medical assistance, Social Services and Victims Assistance, depending on the situation. Contact with Social Services followed by other community agencies is the procedure for suspected abuse. Procedures are flexible in consideration of the unique circumstances of each case.
- provides shelter in safe homes throughout the community and at the Centre's 12 bed residential facility for women 18 to 70 years.
- makes home visits to older women in the community through its Elder Outreach program and arranges transportation with a local taxi company to bring older women to the Centre.
- participates in client safety plans and arranges older adult 'buddies' for older women victims or those at risk of abuse.
- raises community awareness about family violence.
- collaborates with other community agencies in an informal interagency team.

The annual intake of older women to the Hay River Family Support Centre increased by two and one half times between 2003 and 2004. The uptake of the Centre's services is attributed to the introduction of Elder Outreach program.

The Inuvik Elder Day Program is in its second year of operation. It was established to break the isolation and loneliness that exists for many older adults living in the community. The Day Program was planned in cooperation with older adults and professionals/service providers who regularly work with older adults. The Day Program is designed to improve wellness and engage isolated older adults in a range of socialization and recreational activities. Some features of the Day Program are:

- a varied calendar of activities with information sessions on a range of topics including the definition and types of older adult abuse and services and supports for dealing with it;
- staff observation and discussions with older adults suspected of being abused and referrals to a medical social worker or Social Services;
- collaboration and good working relationships with community groups, government and private agencies;
- transportation for older adults to and from the Day Program;
- a safe and caring atmosphere with snacks/lunches provided including country foods; and
- respite for caregivers.

2.2 Service Gaps and Challenges

"People are living in violent situations, their daily lives a steady progression of one crisis after another. It (family violence) is a complicated issue. It is difficult to educate these folks immediately as their focus is on surviving abuse right now." (NWT Service Provider)

"Many older adults live in isolation within their communities and are dependent on adult children for basic needs. They live in fear, but do not call us [RCMP] for help in an emergency. Elders need to know there are all kinds of people who are prepared to help them." (NWT Service Provider)

The circumstances of older adults vary widely within and among NWT communities. These circumstances pose challenges to service providers and others seeking to address the abuse of older adults. Many older adults are lonely and live in relative isolation from family and community. Verbal and written English language skills, formal education, health issues, and access to and ability

to use technology may be significant barriers that prevent older adults from recognizing and addressing abuse. Lack of services and/or confidence in local services may further prevent older adult victims and those at risk of abuse from calling a crisis line, the RCMP or the community health centre. Lack of willingness to reach out to service providers may be based on a fear that they will be removed from their home or institutionalized or that they will cause harm to a family member. Older adults even if they do feel confident in reaching out, may be unsure that there will be someone who understands them and is able to respond to their call for help.

Existing research and key informants suggest that one of the main barriers to addressing the abuse of older adults is the unwillingness of both victims and society in general to name or identify this crime whether as a result of fear, shame, guilt or acceptance. Few NWT communities have identified the abuse of older adults as a priority although many are seeking to address it within the context of family violence.

“Abuse is not a topic of conversation and must be in order to change attitudes towards the abuse of older adults. The community needs to attend information workshops on abuse and talk about it openly. People need to open their eyes and watch for signs of elder abuse and take some action. Caregivers need to understand their limitations and seek help before the situation accelerates into an abusive relationship.” (NWT Service Provider)

“Many elders are from a time where a great deal of shame is attached to abuse, especially when a child harms a parent. Guilt and shame keep some elders from reporting incidents of abuse. Networking is key to success in this business. I encourage my staff to network within our community continuously, and it sure helps when we are working on a difficult case. We try to teach our clients to network too.” (NWT Service Provider)

The circumstances and general attitudes of older adults and communities in the NWT about the abuse of older adults are especially difficult to address given the overall limited capacity to respond to and support victims of abuse or those at risk of it. In all NWT communities and particularly in small communities, too few service providers are available to meet complex local wellness needs. For example, the RCMP would like to follow-up on suspected cases of abuse but frequently lack the resources to do so. Further, most communities outside of the capital city of Yellowknife do not have access to the continuum of supports needed to respond to more difficult cases of abuse.

Key informants identify an extensive list of limitations and gaps in the basic services that do exist in the NWT to respond to the abuse of older adults. These are:

- limited access to Aboriginal language services and interpretation.
- limited outreach for older adults at risk of or living in an abusive situation.
- irregular recreation and socialization activities for older adults.
- inconsistent or non-existent services to transport older adults to social and recreational activities and information sessions during the cold winter months and in the event of inclement weather conditions.
- limited victim services.
- few local emergency shelters and even fewer that are geared to the specific needs of older women or men.
- the presence of homeless shelters in only one or two communities (e.g. Yellowknife and Inuvik).
- limited respite for caregivers.
- little training for community service providers and professionals that focuses on the definition, types, risk factors, and signs of older adult abuse and the supports needed to deal with it.
- insufficient information or community awareness of where to find information about older adult abuse or how to use it to educate the public and raise awareness about it.

- few older adults organizations that have the capacity to advocate for an end to older adult abuse in NWT communities.

Communities throughout the NWT appear to be at different stages in their preparedness to respond to the abuse of older adults. In a few communities, some agencies have internal procedures and guidelines for responding to the abuse of older adults. They may also have established informal networks to build relationships to share expertise to deal with difficult cases and raise awareness about older adult abuse. More generally, service providers in the NWT seem to need guidance on how and who should take the lead in responding to and raising awareness about the abuse of older adults. Overall, service providers seem to be unaware of protocols to guide agency, interagency and community response to the abuse of older adults.

2.3 Improving Responses to Older Adult Abuse in the NWT

"Elder abuse for me is like any other social problem. One little program won't change things however a concerted effort in all areas related to elder abuse will make a significant difference." (NWT Service Provider)

Key informants from the NWT participating in this research suggest that several actions are needed to close gaps in services and empower communities and older adults to address older adult abuse. They agree that older adult abuse is very complicated and requires a multi-faceted approach. They see older adult abuse as a community issue that needs community driven and community specific strategies. They also see a need for older adults to organize in ways that enables them to talk about abuse and support each other. *"Together their voices will be heard."* They also suggest that NWT leaders at all levels need to talk about the abuse of older adults and recognize it as a priority that must be addressed in most if not all communities.

Key informants from the NWT describe efforts to address the abuse of older adults as isolated, just like the people they are trying to serve. “*We are trying to do it in isolation and it doesn’t work.*” They see establishing community-based committees and more effective networking among front-line workers, agencies and communities as good ways to share information and ideas for preventing older adult abuse. Some agencies regard protocols as necessary for establishing principles and guidance for consistent community responses to older adult abuse.

Raising awareness and educating the community about the abuse of older adults is extremely important if not fundamental, to addressing it. Older adults need to better understand abuse and be empowered to use available services and supports to stop it. Older adults can play an important role in championing the cause and providing peer support. They can team up with service providers to make presentations on abuse, for example to young people in local schools. They can engage other older adults in one on one dialogue. Their efforts can be supported by pictorial and plain language information in the official languages of the NWT. Discussions about other social issues (e.g. residential schools) and approaches (e.g. traditional parenting) may provide a comfortable context for raising and addressing the issue of older adult abuse.

Finally, key informants believe that it is important to expand access to important supports such as victim services to more NWT communities. Others advocate for broader application of best practices such as shelter outreach work with older women and support groups for older adults to help prevent isolation and loneliness, conditions that increase the risk of older adult abuse.

3. Best Practices For Stopping Older Adult Abuse

3.1 What is Best Practice?

Best practices are good ideas and solutions that should be adopted more broadly to deal with a particular issue. The proof of a best practice is in the evaluation of outcomes and in the perceptions of service providers, clients and the community at large as a practice worth repeating. Best practices reflect current thinking and approaches for effectively dealing with a particular issue. Best practices are found in types of services as well as in program and service processes and models.

Best practices are useful in a variety of ways. They can:

- be a goal to work towards.
- form the framework for effective practice.
- guide program planning and development.
- inform, improve and even transform program and service practices.
- encourage reflection on critical issues by those developing, implementing and evaluating community programs.

Best practices for stopping the abuse of older adults describe the main ingredients of services and programs for effectively responding to and preventing the abuse. The best practices discussed in this chapter are taken from 13 programs across Canada that address the abuse of older adults. These programs are described in detail in Appendix D.

3.2 Responses to Older Adult Abuse in Southern Canada

The abuse of older adults is slowly being acknowledged as a societal problem across Canada. It is a problem that is multi-dimensional and complex and like family violence, tends to involve the misuse of power. The abuse of older adults is not quickly or easily stopped. It is also an issue that older adults may not recognize or willingly name or confront abuse for several reasons including their own shame, guilt or capacity. Older adult abuse may be the continuation of a life long cycle of abuse. It may be accepted or tolerated if not condoned. The abuse of older adults is also a problem that may not be acknowledged by front-line workers or organizations with responsibilities for human safety and well being.

Many of the programs and services documented in Appendix D recognize the complexity of older adult abuse. Best practices to address this complex problem involve:

- information.
- education.
- advocacy.
- community response - direct intervention.
- protocols.

Best practices under each of these heading are discussed below.

Information

Many of the programs and services documented in Appendix D point to the need for meaningful and relevant information materials and educational processes that confront the assumptions that underlie older adult abuse. The main assumptions are:

- the abuse of older adults is a private, family or individual matter.
- the abuse of older adults is not a community or societal issue.

- older adults exposed to abuse over a lifetime or a prolonged period are unwilling or unable to recognize it or don't have the power to do anything about it.
- frontline service providers aren't equipped to respond to the abuse of older adults.

The most effective public information materials about older adult abuse involve older adults in the design and the production of them. In southern Canada several voluntary groups have produced information materials as part of a pilot project with a broader purpose such as establishing a community response network. Public information materials produced by older adult abuse response networks have the objective of naming and describing the abuse of older adults and equipping people to deal with it and stop it. Some materials target older adults while others are aimed at caregivers and service providers. Some provide information for the general public and others target the many volunteers that tend to form the foundation of organized and individual efforts to stop the abuse of older adults.

Public information materials that can be adapted to a variety of media are most effective given the busy world of the individuals, families, and community service providers who need to receive information about the abuse of older adults. Multi-media materials are also appropriate for older adults as many rely on print, TV, radio and electronic media for information. With this in mind, the British Columbia -Yukon Society of Transition Houses printed brochures and information booklets and produced a video on older adult abuse. These materials target service providers and older women and provide information on the type and signs of abuse, ways to respond if abuse is suspected or disclosed, and where to find safety and support. Other videos such as *Money Matters for Seniors*, *ABCs of Fraud*, and the *Best Friends Gatekeeper Program* are available from the British Columbia Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors (BC CEAS) and community resource networks in British Columbia.

A wealth of resources including pamphlets, newsletters, flyers, public service announcements, newspaper articles/letters to the editor, research reports, manuals, videos and websites are available to inform the public and others about the abuse of older adults. For example, the BC CEAS distributes a quarterly newsletter, *A Shared Concern*, to members and electronically to the public. It also recently produced a *Seniors and the Law Manual* as part of a Seniors and the Law Project and makes information from the manual available to community networks. Community response networks throughout British Columbia also use a variety of brochures, newsletters, pamphlets, fridge magnets and interactive theatre events to inform older adults and others about older adult abuse and how to get help. Similar approaches are taken in other Canadian jurisdictions. For example the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Network recently completed a 30 second public service announcement for television.

The National Clearinghouse on Family Violence has an array of information on older adult abuse from throughout Canada. Materials from the Clearinghouse are accessible in electronic and other formats and provide information on the incidence of older adult abuse, the different types of abuse (e.g. financial, psychological, and neglect), risk factors, and ways to identify and support abused older adults. Many of the materials available on older adult abuse focus on the rights of older adults (e.g. the right to life with safety and dignity) mainly due to the sensitivity of this issue. Older adult abuse materials are also available in several languages and within the context of different cultures. While a wealth of information materials exists, older adults appreciate those that feature familiar people, places, agencies, culture, language and environmental contexts.

Local media play an important role in disseminating information about older adult abuse. It is critical that local media regularly receive clear and accurate information on this issue. It is also important for advocates and other service providers to spend time developing relationships with and educating the media about older adult abuse. Spending time with journalists and other media

representatives ensures that information and news about older adult abuse are presented in ways that are sensitive and accurate.

Public information and education are fundamental to empowering individuals involved in formal and informal older adult abuse prevention initiatives such as neighbourhood watch and peer support programs. Information and education are also essential for service providers, bankers, police, postal workers, pharmacists, bus and taxi drivers, hairdressers, and others seeking to identify and address the problem of older adult abuse. The important role of information in addressing older adult abuse is evident in the Gatekeeper program that has been adapted in various Canadian communities and regions. The Gatekeeper program enlists and educates volunteers in the community to look out for older adults at risk of or victims of abuse. Gatekeeper volunteers also provide older adults with information about services and supports available to them.

Education

Educators and facilitators, who are trained to present information and lead discussions about older adults, are key to the success of educational efforts to address this complex issue. Trained facilitators and presenters are able to explain and help others understand the complexities of older adult abuse and its impacts on the individual, family and community. Trained presenters and facilitators are also able to adapt information about older adult abuse to a variety of formats whether they be panel discussions, workshops, public meetings, presentations, or training sessions.

Many seniors' groups and organizations working to stop older adult abuse regularly recruit and train volunteer presenters/educators and peer counsellors. For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador the Seniors Resource Centre's Elders Abuse Speaker's Bureau is a pool of volunteers willing and trained to do presentations and workshops on older adult abuse. Elsewhere in Canada service providers and older adult volunteers work in teams to convey information about abuse. For example in Ontario, the Guelph Seniors Offering Supports

program and the Niagara Gatekeepers program both use a team approach (e.g. older adult and professional service provider) to present information on the abuse of older adults. In Alberta, the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Network partnered with the RCMP to produce a video on older adult abuse to heighten awareness, sensitivity and the effectiveness of responses to older adult abuse among community policing program staff. The RCMP and the Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Network have continued their partnership through joint presentations to others in Alberta communities.

Elsewhere in Canada, community networks, seniors' organizations, family violence groups or professional service providers offer special sessions to educate the public about the abuse of older adults. Educational sessions may be targeted at local business, community groups or government agencies that serve older adults. Participants might include everyone from bankers to hairdressers to health care professionals to day-away program staff to taxi and bus drivers.

Individuals experienced with older adult abuse education stress the importance of involving older adults in all educational efforts to give reality to or 'put a face on' this abuse. They also stress that the educational method used (e.g. panel discussions, workshops, public meetings, presentations, and training sessions) should be tailored to the needs and interests of the audience. Among older adults interactive workshops and presentations are preferred (e.g. workshops and presentations that engage them in naming, identifying and dealing with abuse). The BC CEAS has developed several older adult awareness workshop modules and shared these with community response networks in the province. These interactive workshop modules focus on abuse issues and older adult centred support strategies.

Theatre has proven to be an effective medium for informing and educating communities in British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario about older adult abuse. Theatre troupes occasionally rely on older adult volunteers to write scripts or to

take parts in plays about older adult abuse. Occasionally directors employ interactive delivery techniques to engage actors and the audience in an exchange about older adult abuse. Interactive theatre is very attractive to older adults and is an excellent medium for creating awareness of older adult abuse.

As described in Appendix D, a lack of financial and human resources regularly challenge the sustainability of information and education efforts. Funding tends to be available to older adult abuse activities on a short-term, project-specific basis. Resources are often insufficient to support the significant effort required to develop and disseminate information, and recruit and train educators and coordinators.

Coalitions are one way to build critical mass to share responsibilities and cope with scarce resources. Networking is another approach. The BC CEAS is a good example of an effective network among community organizations, older adult service providers, older adult groups, and governments throughout the province. The group uses every opportunity including its annual conference to network, build and maintain profile, and actively recruit members. Guidance on building networks is available through the BC CEAS as well as the Alberta Elder Abuse Network, which plans to release a guide to assist communities to form older adult abuse response networks.

Advocacy

Efforts to respond to and prevent older adult abuse in Canada are frequently led by volunteers and voluntary groups who are supported to varying degrees, by government service providers and community residents. These individuals and groups play several roles including that of advocates with respect to addressing the broader issue of older adult abuse as well as the particular needs of older adult victims or those at risk of abuse.

Older adult abuse advocacy work is not about forcing disclosure or imposing intervention/supports on non-consenting older adults. In general terms, older adult abuse advocacy work is about human rights. It assumes the right of older adults to live safely, independently and with dignity, and that adults are capable of such unless proven incapable or incompetent. Across Canada, networks have developed as the foundation for older adult abuse advocacy. Community, regional, provincial and national networks are key sources of information, support and assistance for mobilizing others and employing strategies to advance older adult abuse issues.

The effectiveness of older adult abuse networks is evidenced across the country and is inspiring for individuals and groups concerned with this serious issue. In several provinces, dedicated networks of concerned citizens, voluntary groups and professional advocates work together to raise political awareness of and secure commitments for addressing the abuse of older adults. For example, advocacy efforts of the Ontario Network of Prevention of Elder Abuse resulted in a commitment from the Government of Ontario to a five-year, \$4.33-million strategy "*to send a clear message that Ontario will not tolerate elder abuse.*" The Ontario strategy not only involves public education but also coordination and training supports to community service providers to improve response to the abuse of older adults. In Newfoundland and Labrador advocacy efforts by the Seniors Resource Centre have led to a collaboration with the provincial government for a provincial strategy for the prevention of the abuse of older adults.

In British Columbia, the BC CEAS regularly engages government officials and legislators in dialogue for the purposes of advocating for the restoration of publicly funded senior citizen counsellor positions, volunteer peer counsellor training, liability insurance coverage for volunteers and other supports for persons working to prevent and address the abuse of older adults. Networks are also effective ways to support advocacy at an individual level. An example of this

is provided by the BC CEAS. Through its Seniors and the Law Program, the B.C. network promotes legal options available to seniors through the community justice system. To support seniors to pursue these options, BC CEAS has trained legal advocates and lawyers in 16 communities and promotes their availability to older adults.

Advocacy on older adult abuse issues is greatly assisted by information technologies. Information technologies help networks to grow and flourish by connecting individuals and groups concerned with the abuse of older adults and facilitating greater access to information at little or no cost. The Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse⁸ provides an extensive listing of groups and individuals involved in older adult abuse advocacy.

Community Response- Direct Intervention

Appendix D describes several community-based approaches for directly intervening or responding to older adult victims and those at risk of abuse. Community-based approaches are not only accessible to the community but are owned by community members.

The immediate safety of the victim or those at risk of victimization is the primary objective of direct intervention. Secondary objectives are to provide services and supports that keep older adults safe from abuse in all its many forms. Several elements contribute to the effectiveness of community responses to older adult abuse:

- a well-known and dedicated telephone line, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Trained older adult peers and/or professional/ community service providers answer and respond to telephone calls. The Edmonton and Medicine Hat community response models favour the latter

⁸ www.cnpea.ca

approach while the Seniors Offering Support (SOS) approach of the Wellington Dufferin response model, favours the former.

- strong collaboration among community service providers built through clearly articulated roles and relationships, teamwork, networking and ongoing training. Virtually all of the programs and services described in Appendix D recognize the importance of building relationships, delineating roles and responsibilities and ensuring that these are formalized and communicated in a way that the community as a whole knows who and how older adult abuse intervention occurs. Protocols, memorandums of agreement, partnership agreements and terms of reference are tools used to formalize and communicate roles and responsibilities.
- multi-faceted strategies that provide public and individual education, peer/and or professional counselling, case management, referral and assessment services, legal or police services and crisis services in consideration of the broad range of circumstances of older adults. Multi-faceted strategies should be realistic and build on the strengths of community agencies and volunteers. For example, within the emergency shelter and transitional housing services provided to older women, the British Columbia and Yukon Shelter Program seeks to build a support system that responds to their personal needs.
- legislation that mandates reporting. For example, in Manitoba The Protection for Persons in Care Act mandates reporting of abuse in hospital and personal care homes and The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act also mandates reporting of abuse of those persons living with a mental disability.

Community intervention models are typically built on a multi-agency community plan. Community plans usually identify:

- lead agencies that coordinate response efforts. Lead agencies are community or social service agencies with adequate resources to take on this role. They have well-established service networks and relationships with older adults and other service agencies. A lead agency may deliver or designate a range of services for both the victim and the perpetrator including community surveillance, case finding, assessment, counselling, referral, dispute resolution and relocation assistance. The lead agency can also play an advocacy role ensuring that needed resources are available in the community. They may also establish quality assurance programs with partner agencies serving older adults.
- a multi-service consultation, case management or network team or partnership that collaborates to address older adult abuse. The Edmonton and Wellington Dufferin teams described in Appendix D are good examples of multi-service teams. Multi-service, case management and network teams often develop tools to support and guide their work. For example, the Edmonton Elder Abuse Intervention Team developed a screening tool “Indicators for Level of Intervention”. Another example of teamwork is the partnership between Aboriginal members of the RCMP and a community response network worker to do outreach in Aboriginal communities in the Queen Charlotte Islands. The Trinity Place Foundation offers another example of teamwork. In this case the Foundation, a non-profit residence, works with community agencies in Calgary to improve the access of older adult residents to the health and social services that help to prevent older adult abuse.
- ongoing efforts to reach out and engage older adults and other community members in identifying, preventing and responding to the abuse of older adults. Community plans that have achieved the greatest success engaging older adults, train older adult peers to actively and capably respond to abuse. For example, the Niagara Gatekeepers program trains

older adult peers and others who regularly come in contact with older adults to understand and recognize signs of abuse or risk and link them to community-based service providers.

- the 'how, what, when and who' of monitoring and evaluating results.

While community planning and collaboration are essential ingredients of effective responses to the abuse of older adults, many communities lack financial and human capacity to plan or build collaborative relationships. In these cases, institutional and volunteer supports are needed.

Protocols

The effectiveness of community-based responses or interventions to older adult abuse is improved with agency policies and procedures for handling cases of suspected or confirmed abuse. Protocols:

- are mechanisms for guiding the response of community agencies to addressing older adult abuse.
- link the internal policies and procedures of various agencies with those of others to share responsibility for addressing older adult abuse.
- provide a basis for building collaborative relationships among community service providers and community members.
- provide a framework for communicating commitment to addressing older adult abuse.

Protocols can involve a wide variety of agencies and individuals from nursing homes, home care agencies, seniors centres, meals-on-wheels, community social workers, family violence shelters, victim-services units, and the myriad of other service workers in the community. Community response networks throughout Canada offer several examples of older adult abuse protocols.

Typically these protocols describe responsibility and procedures for:

- responding to calls on an emergency telephone line or by any other agency.
- intake and assessment.
- referrals.
- emergency shelter, personal support and relocation assistance.
- safety planning.
- client-centred intervention plans.
- community surveillance and case finding.
- dispute resolution.
- quality assurance and monitoring programs.

Protocols also provide specific information with respect to confidentiality; obtaining, recording and disclosing information; and other provisions such as requirements of relevant provincial or national legislation.

4. Conclusions

The abuse of older adults is a complex problem that affects the whole community. Ending older adult abuse is a lengthy process with no one simple or quick solution. It requires a long-term commitment, awareness, multi-faceted strategies and collaboration within a whole community⁹ to break the silence and remove the cloak of privacy that shrouds these acts or behaviours.

“People don’t want to make decisions [about responding to the abuse of older adults] on their own. The best decisions are ones where there has been consultation.” (Service Provider in Southern Canada)

Throughout Canada the silent and complex nature of older adult abuse poses several challenges for older adults themselves as well as their communities. A significant challenge is empowering older adults to overcome the shame and guilt associated with abuse and take ownership and action on this problem. In all communities public education is seen as a necessary first step to dealing with older adult abuse. Awareness of the issue is supported in some Canadian jurisdictions by legislation that respects adult protection or recognizes the authority of public guardians and trustees to help older adults confront abuse. In other jurisdictions dedicated community service providers, professionals and concerned citizens are key supports for helping older adults and others in the community to identify and take action on abuse.

Successful community responses or older adult abuse intervention models examined in this research follow a community development approach. In these models older adults, service providers and voluntary groups work together to

⁹ For example, concerned citizens, front-line workers such as community health and social personnel, justice staff and police, volunteers and community groups such as transitional housing, emergency shelters, wellness and senior counsellors, churches, service clubs, financial institutions, and others who are in contact with older adults on a regular or semi-regular basis.

develop and implement community solutions. Older adults and senior groups tend to play a central role in peer education and public awareness activities. Interactive theatre and workshops and presentations led by trained educators/facilitators have proven to be effective ways of successfully helping older adults to identify and name abuse, and take action to stop it. Both in the NWT and in southern Canada work on this issue has shown that older adults tend to find it easier to talk about abuse with someone close to their own age who is trained, empathetic, non-judgmental, and a good listener. To this end, peer counsellors and advocates who know what and how to access community resources and supports, play an important role in preventing and addressing abuse.

Effective community response models for stopping the abuse of older adults combine prevention, advocacy and direct intervention. These responses tend to be as varied as the capacity and resources available in the community.

Nevertheless certain themes run through the most effective models. These are:

- commitment to collaboration and consultation.
- strong participation and leadership from seniors groups.
- public education awareness and advocacy activities that are supported by plain language information that appeal to and are familiar to seniors.
- public education and awareness activities that clearly target older adults, victims, and service providers and confront misconceptions about the abuse of older adults.
- an effective, swift yet sensitive response to the needs and safety of older adults.
- respect for the rights of older adults and recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity.
- recognition of the prominent role that volunteers play in efforts to address older adult abuse.
- networking to support and celebrate efforts and share information and research.

Volunteers and voluntary groups tend to begin and sustain community responses to older adult abuse mainly due to the scarce financial and human resources available to address this issue. These volunteer efforts are admirable but fragile given trends toward declining volunteerism in Canada and the potential for burnout among older adult volunteers. Networking, collaboration and supporting volunteers are ways that groups in southern Canada and the NWT have sought to reinforce this fragile foundation.

Over the past decade some progress has been made in the NWT to raise awareness of and respond to older adult abuse. This progress can be seen in the work of the NWT Seniors' Society and in the communities of Hay River and Inuvik. In these and some other communities older adults are beginning to talk about abuse and to understand that they have the right to live with dignity, respect and independence. Despite these small successes and the rhetorical talk of respect and reverence for older adults, anecdotal information suggests that many older adults in the NWT likely experience or are at risk of abuse.

Little appropriate information is available in the NWT to raise awareness or educate older adults, service providers and others about older adult abuse. Lack of understanding of this issue limits the extent to which basic health, social or wellness, policing and housing services in NWT communities can or will be utilized to respond to suspected or confirmed cases of older adult abuse. Responding to and stopping the abuse of older adults is also hampered by a lack of community-based shelters, older adult recreation and socialization activities and older adult outreach programs. Further, older adults in most NWT communities are not organized in any way to raise issues of concern to them. They also have few if any 'champions' to bring their issues to the attention of community leaders and service providers. If these circumstances are left unchecked, older adult abuse will likely continue as a significant and hidden problem in the NWT.

5. Recommendations

Best practices for responding to the abuse of older adults and the current circumstances in the NWT are the basis for the following recommendations.

In the immediate term, it is recommended that the link between older adult abuse and family violence be made more obvious and more strongly in the implementation of the NWT Protection Against Family Violence Act and in current plans to address family violence. This might be achieved through raising the profile of older adult abuse in the work of the Coalition Against Family Violence and in front-line training initiatives and public education and awareness activities related to the Act.

It is recommended that more financial and human resources be invested in addressing older adult abuse in the NWT. These resources should be focused on:

- empowering older adults to organize and take greater ownership in solutions for stopping abuse and neglect of older adults in the NWT.
- building community and territorial networks that enable older adults and the front-line workers and organizations that serve them, to develop and share information, tools, approaches and research to address the abuse of older adults.
- research to support education and advocacy efforts that debunk misconceptions about the abuse of older adults and help older adults identify and name it.
- building community capacity that promotes stronger, collaborative relationships among community agencies, volunteers and leadership, and assists consultation and intervention teams to form and be sustained in their efforts to address the abuse of older adults.

- developing familiar and culturally and linguistically appropriate public education and awareness resources for use in campaigns to promote zero tolerance of older adult abuse.
- piloting and evaluating proven community development approaches for responding to the abuse of older adults such as the family support centre/ safe home network and older adult outreach program, in smaller NWT communities.
- increasing the pool of community resources to eliminate service gaps for victims of older adult abuse (e.g. victim service workers, older adult outreach personnel, and peer advocate/counsellors) and those at risk of abuse (e.g. transportation, regular socialization and recreation programming).
- responding to community requests for information workshops, forums and presentations to raise awareness and stimulate discussion about the abuse of older adults.
- recruiting and training local gatekeepers and volunteers committed to addressing the abuse of older adults.

Finally, it is recommended that community protocols be developed that reflect agency, leadership and community commitment and capacity to respond to the abuse of older adults. Protocol development should involve all key stakeholders and engender their ownership in addressing the issue of older adult abuse. Protocols should provide details on the 'who, what, when, where and why' of responding to the abuse of older adults. Protocols should also respect the rights of older adults to live with dignity, independence and in safety.