

Older Canadians and the Abuse of Seniors:

A Continuum from Participation to Empowerment

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Health Canada

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Introduction

Experience illustrates that strategies which incorporate client insight and expertise yield better results. This has prompted a trend in planning and intervention strategies to involve consumers and clients directly. This paper explores the current and future role of older Canadians as active participants in the prevention and intervention of the abuse of seniors. Various opportunities for the meaningful contribution and empowerment of seniors are explored through an analytical approach to the topic.

The involvement of older Canadians in prevention and intervention as it relates to the abuse of seniors is an emerging issue. This paper represents an important step in outlining the benefits and opportunities associated with this approach. It is hoped that it will act as a catalyst to generate further discussion and action on seniors' involvement.

The impetus for this paper came from within the Family Violence Prevention Division of Health Canada. In its ongoing efforts to learn more about the topic, the Division conducted two Policy Circle groups on the abuse of seniors. These groups brought seniors, academics, front-line workers and other professionals together to identify areas for future investigation into this issue (Appendix A). The Policy Circle groups concurred that there was a need for further consideration of older people's role concerning the abuse of seniors.

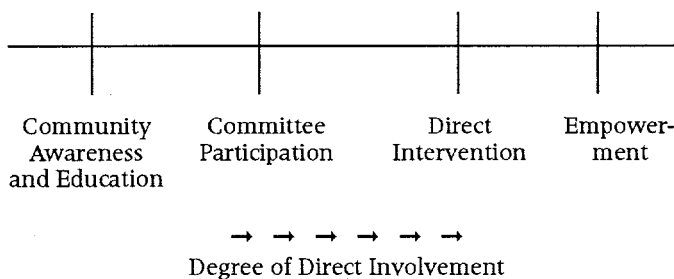
The paper comprises five sections. The initial section presents the objectives of the exercise, the methodology and the key definitions used throughout the paper. Section 2.0 focuses on the realities, obstacles and future approaches to expanding the involvement of seniors in prevention and intervention activities related to the abuse of older persons. The third section describes the projects funded through the Family Violence Prevention Division. Section 4.0 explores the opportunities for greater seniors' involvement along a continuum of activities and roles. Finally, Section 5.0 summarizes these opportunities on the continuum and suggests ways for the Family Violence Initiative to support future prevention and intervention efforts across Canada.

Objectives

The main objective of the paper is to explore the involvement and empowerment of older Canadians as it relates to the abuse of seniors. An analytical framework was devised to organize the types of participation under consideration along a continuum. This continuum illustrates activities that gradually entail more direct involvement of seniors, beginning at participation in community awareness and education, moving to membership on program or special purpose committees and to hands-on program delivery, and ending at action leading to the empowerment of mistreated seniors (Figure 1).

Another objective of the paper was to gather opinions on the involvement and empowerment of seniors in abuse prevention and intervention from the Project Leaders of projects currently funded by the Family Violence Prevention Division and other prominent persons in the field. The paper also generates ideas for further consideration under the Family Violence Initiative in the area of seniors' involvement in the issue.

Figure 1: Seniors' Involvement Continuum



Methodology

The methodology used in this exercise focused on a review of the literature on the abuse of seniors (also referred to as elder abuse) and key informant interviews.

A search of the international literature on abuse directed at seniors revealed no articles that examine the issue of seniors' involvement. This paper follows the recent publication of several comprehensive documents on the abuse of seniors released by the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (refer to Appendix B: Suggested Reading). Rather than duplicating the content of these documents, this paper incorporates the information into the analysis of each involvement opportunity along the continuum.

Interviews were conducted with 17 individuals knowledgeable about the abuse of seniors (refer to Appendix C: Key Informant List). Fourteen of these key

informants are Project Leaders responsible for the projects currently funded by the Family Violence Prevention Division. The other three include a senior and directors of organizations and agencies concerned with the issue. The interviews focused on the projects' progress, the involvement of seniors in the project, feedback on the seniors' involvement opportunities along the continuum, empowerment, program and knowledge gaps and areas for future investigation.

Context

The premise of the paper – that older persons' involvement will improve efforts to address the abuse of seniors – is not intended to suggest that seniors should assume sole responsibility for eliminating this social problem. In order to stimulate and perpetuate this involvement, however, seniors must be acknowledged, through meaningful and respected participation, as important contributors to alleviating the problem. Seniors, in partnership with professionals and front-line workers, will collaboratively design more effective and responsive approaches to address the issue.

The term seniors' involvement requires clarification because not all older persons will be willing and able to participate in strategies against the abuse of seniors, such as those identified on the continuum. Seniors who are active in the issue today are often retired professionals. These seniors tend for the most part to address abuse against their peers formally through programs and organizations committed to the prevention of abuse. Other seniors who continue to contribute to the alleviation of abuse are typically persons who have been abused or have supported an abused individual. These people perhaps play a more hidden role in addressing abuse of seniors since their involvement is primarily informal. However, tapping the diversity of insights, skills and backgrounds within the heterogeneous senior population would be advantageous in designing appropriate, effective and responsive strategies for reducing the abuse of seniors. Strategies for encouraging seniors from all walks of life to participate are discussed later in the paper.

This paper acknowledges the importance of sensitivity to the needs and perspectives of ethnocultural groups concerning seniors in abusive situations. The Family Violence Prevention Division, in partnership with the Multiculturalism sector of Canadian Heritage, is currently funding a project to explore the ethnocultural perspective on the mistreatment of seniors and will provide strategies for intervention. There is a need for further work on the influence of culture on prevention and intervention strategies.

Definitions

A growing emphasis in work on abuse of seniors involves the development of concise and standardized definitions for key terms. For the purposes of this paper, the following definitions have been adopted.

- **Senior.** A senior is a person over 60 years of age.
- **Abuse of Seniors; also called Elder Abuse.** "Any action/inaction which jeopardizes the health or well-being of an older person" (Lukawiecki, T., *Community Awareness and Response: Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults*. Health and Welfare Canada, 1993: 4). The scope of abuse includes physical abuse, psychological abuse, financial/material abuse or exploitation, sexual abuse, violation of civil/human rights and neglect.
- **Involvement.** A personal commitment to address a particular cause through whatever contribution or style of participation is comfortable and feasible for the person.
- **Empowering.** The process of helping individuals to maximize their confidence, skills and abilities in order to take control of their lives and to make informed decisions that are in their best interests. Empowerment also involves the element of choice and available, accessible options.

Seniors' Involvement in the Issue Concerning the Abuse of Older Canadians: An Update

Credit for raising the consciousness of society with respect to the abuse of seniors is due mostly to the efforts of professionals who respond routinely to the needs of abused seniors in either a paid or volunteer capacity. The transition toward active involvement of older Canadians in addressing the problem of abuse against seniors has just begun.

An initial question in this paper is the extent to which seniors are already involved in this issue. Discussions with key informants suggest seniors, as a collective and as individuals, are contributing to the prevention of abuse in increasing numbers and greater visibility through work as members of committees, boards, advisory councils and seniors' service agency volunteer forces and as participants in public consultations and surveys. Much of this work is not well known because of its local, informal and ad hoc nature. For the most part, the information, experiences and knowledge about seniors' involvement have not been disseminated.

The federal government is committed to help find ways of preventing the abuse of seniors. There is much that the federal government can do to provide national leadership and to focus public attention on the issue. Partnerships with provincial and territorial governments and with the non-governmental sector are crucial for Canada to be able to address the issue effectively.

The provinces are responsible for the administration of justice and for the delivery of health, education and social services, which are the four major systems most directly involved in addressing elder abuse. Through delegation of legislative authority, the federal government has transferred various powers, similar to those of the provinces, to the territories. The federal government supports provincial mandates, primarily through a wide range of financial arrangements.

Projects for and by seniors related to the abuse of seniors have been funded by Health Canada, through the Seniors' Independence Program and New Horizons. These programs promote increased awareness about, and support community action against, the abuse and mistreatment of seniors. With financial support of these programs, seniors organizations and community groups

continue to develop programs and explore opportunities to address abuse directed at seniors. Examples of the work undertaken include awareness campaigns, professional training materials and legal resources.

The Seniors Secretariat and the National Advisory Council on Aging promote awareness of issues concerning older Canadians, including the abuse of seniors. The empowerment of seniors and the significant involvement of seniors in issues of concern to them are crucial principles regarding the work of both bodies.

The current Family Violence Initiative, announced in February 1991, involves the direct participation of seven federal departments in addressing the different aspects of family violence, including the abuse of seniors (Table 1). Many activities are under way with a view to alleviating the abuse of older Canadians through work undertaken by these departments, including projects discussed in this paper.

Table 1
List of Departments and Agencies Involved Directly in the Family Violence Initiative

Current Names of Departments and Agencies	Former Names of Departments and Agencies
Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation	Same
Canadian Heritage	Multiculturalism and Citizenship Secretary of State
Health Canada	Health and Welfare Canada
Human Resources Development	Health and Welfare Canada Secretary of State
Indian Affairs and Northern Development	Same
Justice Canada	Same
Solicitor General Canada	Same

Seniors and professionals across Canada have begun to lay the groundwork for further development by illustrating the benefits of their involvement. The time is right to build on the successes of the existing approaches in which seniors have played an integral role. Further progress in this area is required to ensure that the issue of abuse related to seniors is addressed effectively and expeditiously. Consideration should be given to the following actions as steps toward realizing the universal and meaningful involvement and empowerment of older Canadians in efforts to reduce abuse against seniors.

- **Professional Recognition of Seniors' Contributions.** Service providers, researchers and professionals need to recognize that seniors' involvement is not a panacea but an opportunity to improve the effectiveness and extent of actions against the abuse of seniors. Professionals would not consider exploring violence against women without soliciting the involvement of women, yet this same approach has not been readily adopted for investigating abuse directed at seniors. Older Canadians can influence the success of prevention and intervention strategies because they can associate with the concerns and values of their peers. They may be able to offer direction on effective communication strategies, coping mechanisms and problem-solving techniques which are appropriate and sensitive to seniors in abusive situations. Seniors who have been actively involved in supporting someone who has been abused or who have experienced abuse personally would bring an invaluable perspective to efforts aimed at finding solutions and approaches for reducing abuse against seniors.
- **Collaboration Between Seniors and Professionals.** The clear message from older Canadians on the topic is that they are interested in participating in the prevention of abuse but not in assuming full responsibility for the amelioration of abuse against seniors. Seniors want to be team players, working together with professionals and front-line workers on strategies to alleviate the abuse of their peers.
- **Ensuring a Meaningful Experience.** Many people, including seniors, find involvement in efforts to address social problems a meaningful experience. This applies to participation in the prevention of abuse of older Canadians. A meaningful experience requires that contributions are encouraged, respected and incorporated into the actions of the group. In order to realize the value of seniors' involvement, there must be a sufficient number of older participants to ensure that a variety of insights and perspectives are gleaned. Furthermore, non-seniors need to invite seniors to participate, not as a token gesture but because they acknowledge the real need for seniors' involvement.
- **Generating Seniors' Interest and Commitment.** The level and type of interest in the issue is highly dependent on the characteristics of the seniors community and its leaders. Prominent seniors in the community occupy an advantageous position for arousing interest among their peers by publicly discussing issues and illustrating their personal commitment to alleviate the problem of abuse against seniors.

Although seniors have insight and experience that may contribute to dealing with issues of abuse, current patterns of participation imply that the majority of older Canadians are not likely to express a strong interest or serious commitment to action. It

is more likely that seniors who have experienced abuse or have closely supported an abused peer will be motivated by their empathy to become involved. This is not to suggest that seniors who do not share these experiences cannot play a significant role in prevention and intervention strategies.

Seniors may hesitate to become involved in the issue for a variety of social and personal reasons.

Personally, seniors may not be convinced that they could make a valuable contribution. However, social values related to abuse in the family are more likely to inhibit seniors' involvement in part because of:

- the social taboo associated with the mistreatment of a family member;
- a respect for family privacy (i.e., the "behind closed doors" notion); and
- the fear of association with abuse (i.e., "if one becomes involved in the cause one must be a part of the problem").

Some key informants indicated that the older population generally is not receptive to the fact that the abuse of seniors is a problem in our society. The fear associated with growing old and more dependent may manifest itself in a form of denial of abuse against seniors. This "not in my backyard syndrome" may be based on the commonly held perception among seniors that they can protect themselves from abuse, despite the potential for increased vulnerability due to age and infirmity. Apparently, some seniors still consider that victims must deserve such mistreatment if it is experienced or must be too weak to stand up for themselves. These insights reveal the need for ongoing education to arrest the potential danger of victim blaming by seniors who do not understand the issue fully.

Such opinions about older people's negative attitudes toward abuse of seniors were not shared by all key informants. In fact, Project Leaders from the seniors' organizations actually refuted these comments, stating that in their experience, seniors did not hesitate to become involved and committed to actions against the problem.

Clearly, there is a need for further investigation into the attitudes held by older adults and service providers regarding abuse directed at seniors.

- **Brainstorming.** Sessions with seniors, professionals and front-line workers provide an opportunity to explore innovative ways to prevent the abuse of seniors and to help those who are abused. Several key informants supported the Policy Circle concept as an effective forum.
- **Senior Advisors.** The experience and perspective of seniors provide valuable direction in the development of guiding principles for ongoing work in the area of abuse against older Canadians. These principles might anchor future activities related to prevention and intervention.

- **Central Coordination.** An inventory of projects and respective evaluation results, at the national, regional, provincial and local levels in which seniors played a part, would facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences and lead to a more consistent approach to seniors' involvement. This inventory could be made available through university libraries, resource centres, government offices, etc.

This section highlighted the realities, obstacles and future considerations related to the involvement and empowerment of seniors. A closer look at the projects funded by the Family Violence Prevention Division in the next section shows how seniors' involvement can help to alleviate the abuse of seniors.

Projects Related to the Abuse of Seniors: The Family Violence Prevention Division

Since 1991, the Family Violence Prevention Division has funded 21 projects related to the abuse of seniors. This report examines 15 projects which, for the most part, are currently receiving financial support from the Division (refer to Appendix D: Project Descriptions). The projects explore separate aspects of the issue and concentrate mostly on different target groups. The criteria for selection and funding included:

- partnerships between agencies concerned about the abuse of seniors;
- a multidisciplinary focus, where possible;
- innovation and unique approaches that would further the understanding of the abuse of seniors and program delivery;
- a project evaluation component;
- a national scope;
- potential for replication on a national scale; and
- a final product and a scheme for the dissemination of the product on a national scale.

Table 2 categorizes the 21 projects by their major focus on the abuse of seniors, such as research, prevention, education and training, protocol development and training, and service delivery models. These categorizations are not mutually exclusive in that many projects are involved in more than one aspect of the issue and could be identified under other categories in the table. The majority of these projects concentrate on the prevention aspect of the issue, mainly through community education, professional training and general information.

Interestingly, of the community education projects, most are targeted to seniors. Three projects are administered by seniors' organizations (i.e., Seniors' Education Centre, Kerby Centre and One Voice). These three organizations operate on the "seniors helping seniors" philosophy.

The main question of this paper – the extent of seniors' involvement in existing prevention and intervention activities related to abuse against seniors – was applied to the projects. Project Leaders were asked to describe how seniors were involved in the various components of their projects. While Leaders agreed on the value and

appropriateness of involving older Canadians in the issue of abuse of seniors, the responses to the above question varied considerably.

Table 2
Projects Funded by the Family Violence Prevention Division

Elder Abuse Project Category	Agencies and Project Titles
Research	Seniors Resource Centre, Provincial Committee on Elder Abuse, Newfoundland – <i>Elder Abuse: Definition, Measurement*</i>
	Canadian Association on Gerontology, National – <i>Abuse and Neglect of Older Canadians: Consolidation and Strategies for Change</i>
	Interministry Committee on Elder Abuse of British Columbia, British Columbia – <i>Multi-Phase Community Service Research Project on Elder Abuse</i>
Prevention	Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres, National – <i>Creating Community Frameworks for Family Violence Prevention Among Citizens Who Have a Disability</i>
	Canadian Association of Social Workers, National – <i>Elder Abuse Among Minority Groups</i>
	One Voice, The Canadian Seniors' Network, National – <i>A Plan to Develop the Seniors' Response to Elder Abuse in Canada</i>
	L'Association québécoise plaidoyer-victimes, Québec – <i>Chapitre sur la victimisation des aînés du guide d'intervention pour les victimes d'actes criminels*</i>
	Sûreté du Québec, Québec – <i>"Calling a Halt" (Video and Guide)*</i>
	Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Ontario – <i>Elder Abuse Program Proposal*</i>

Elder Abuse Project Category	Agencies and Project Titles
Education and Training	St. John Ambulance, Nova Scotia – <i>Eldercare Employee Assistance</i>
	Manitoba Seniors Directorate, Manitoba – <i>Multi-Media Campaign on the Subject of the Financial Abuse of the Elderly*</i>
	Seniors' Education Centre, Saskatchewan – <i>Elder Abuse Prevention Model*</i>
	Interhospital Domestic Violence Committee, Saskatchewan – <i>Education Program for Elder Abuse within the Institutional Setting*</i>
"	Age and Opportunity, Elder Abuse Resource Centre, Manitoba – <i>A Multidisciplinary Approach to Elder Abuse (Video)*</i>
Protocol Development and Training	Queensway-Carleton Hospital, Ontario – <i>An Education Program and Interagency Model for Police on Physical Abuse and Neglect of Seniors*</i>
	Nova House, Manitoba – <i>A Training Program for Shelter Workers on Elder Abuse</i>
	Home Support Canada, National – <i>Elder Abuse Protocol for the Canadian Home Care Sector*</i>
Service Delivery Models	Concordia University, Québec -- <i>Abuse of Elders by Caregivers: An Intervention and Evaluation of Outcomes Study</i>
	Kerby Centre, Alberta – <i>Addressing the Issues of Family Violence in Older Families: Synergy II</i>
	Maison Jeanne Simard, Québec – <i>Projet pilote parrainé par la Maison Jeanne Simard</i>
	North Shore Community Services, British Columbia – <i>Evaluation of Community Response Model*</i>

* These projects are now completed and are no longer receiving funds from the Family Violence Prevention Division.

Although the projects funded under the Family Violence Prevention Division are not required to have a specific number of seniors actively involved, there was consensus among Project Leaders that seniors' involvement was an important consideration. The extent to which seniors are involved varies from project to project, ranging from no direct participation to complete administrative and service delivery responsibility. Interestingly, the projects associated with seniors' groups consistently described the most extensive and diverse involvement. The types of seniors' involvement in the projects include:

- **Members of Advisory Committees.** The majority of the projects had seniors on their project advisory committees. However, there was no consistency in the number of older participants. That is, while a small number reported having only one senior on the advisory committee, seniors' organizations such as Kerby Centre and One Voice had committees almost exclusively made up of seniors.
- **Survey Participants.** A few projects surveyed seniors on topics related to the abuse of older persons.
- **Senior Volunteers.** Several projects involved senior volunteers in two main capacities, namely as trained public speakers or presenters and as volunteer peer counsellors.
- **Public Forum/Focus Group Participants.** Only a few projects held forums or focus groups with seniors.

Many projects involved seniors in more than one activity, usually combining membership on the advisory committee with senior volunteers. These projects were affiliated mostly with seniors' organizations. Some examples include:

- **Kerby Centre,** a seniors centre in Alberta, has trained over 30 senior volunteers as peer counsellors who assist abused seniors in the community. These peer counsellors are supported by the professional staff of the centre.

- **Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Local Community Service Centre** (working in collaboration with Concordia University) in Montreal has a group of senior volunteer buddies who are trained peer counsellors. This project has also developed a train-the-trainer program to expand the number of volunteers. Seniors are involved in public speaking and sensitizing and education programs. They are also involved in research.
- **One Voice,** The Canadian Seniors' Network, has organized six forums across Canada using seniors to speak to other seniors on abuse directed at older people.
- **Seniors' Education Centre** in Saskatchewan is operated by the Seniors University Group Inc. at the University of Regina. The centre, in a multi-phase project, has developed a training package for senior trainers and trained 40 seniors. These seniors will also be involved in the evaluation of the training package.

These projects represent examples of substantive and meaningful involvement of seniors. The following section explores opportunities for more seniors' involvement along the continuum and describes ways to integrate them in both new and expanded roles in strategies responding to the abuse of seniors.

Options for the Involvement of Older Canadians in the Abuse of Seniors Issue

The involvement of older Canadians is not only a beneficial element in addressing the abuse problem, it is fair practice – those who are affected by decisions or subsequent actions should have the opportunity to participate in the planning and decision-making processes.

The current challenge is to identify meaningful and productive opportunities through which older persons can participate in efforts to alleviate the abuse of seniors. The continuum of seniors' involvement (Figure 1) introduced in this paper responds to this challenge. This continuum illustrates activities that gradually entail more direct involvement of seniors, beginning with participation in community awareness and education, moving to membership on program or special purpose committees and to hands-on program delivery, and ending finally at action leading to the empowerment of mistreated seniors. Seniors may be involved in several of these activities simultaneously. More specifically, the framework identifies:

- **Community Education and Awareness Strategies** where seniors in partnership can raise the collective consciousness of seniors, front-line workers and professionals.
- **Committee Work** where seniors can influence program planning and implementation, policy, research, etc., to ensure sensitivity to seniors' needs and expectations.
- **Direct Intervention** where seniors in various capacities can identify abusive situations involving older adults.
- **Senior Empowerment** where potential or actual victims can be offered information, choices and support. In return, these persons can help seniors as a group and professionals, as well as support other older victims of abuse.

Each component of the continuum is discussed below in greater detail. Areas for further investigation relating to each element are also outlined for consideration and support by the federal government as part of its commitment to alleviate the abuse of older Canadians.

Community Awareness and Education

Older persons have a role to play in educating the public and professionals about the problem of abuse directed at seniors. Leaders in the seniors' community can help to build an understanding of the abuse issue and empathy for older victims. In partnership with other players, they must reinforce to society that abuse of seniors is not acceptable.

Older Canadians can make a significant contribution to education by also addressing an underlying cause of the abuse – ageism in society. Seniors can address ageism by highlighting their individual and collective contributions to society.

Education is the key prevention strategy in that it provides seniors and service providers alike with clear and common ideas on what constitutes abuse. It informs potential and actual victims of their rights and offers information necessary to react to the situation. Education also helps community members to identify abuse and respond appropriately. Education increases awareness about abuse and may encourage abused seniors to seek assistance. The long-term impact of educational activities may be that future generations of seniors may respond to the issue of abuse and abusive situations in a different, less tolerant manner.

Success in education and prevention related to abuse of older people relies on seniors' input through design and implementation. Seniors understand that other older persons in search of information and help do not want to be told what to do, but want to be presented with options for consideration.

Potential Implications of Education

Education can have a positive impact on the abuse of seniors, but certain factors could undermine its benefits if not given full consideration. These factors include:

- That awareness of information and support will require existing services to become more accessible to seniors.
- That awareness may increase demand for service. Therefore, options and alternatives must be available to offer victims of abuse if they choose to act on their acquired knowledge. There is a risk that if no alternatives to the situation are readily available at the time of inquiry, solutions may result in less than ideal actions. At present, little support is available in most communities for older victims, especially emergency housing for abused seniors.
- That educational activities and materials which are not sensitive to individual needs may complicate the seniors' situation. Specifically, many Project Leaders have observed that some seniors do not define an abusive situation along the same criteria as younger

professionals. This orientation to abuse may result from comparisons between the abuse and other worse life experiences, a socialization to accept one's lot in life or a process of coming to peace with one's life and the surrounding world. These suggestions should be considered carefully since they have the potential to minimize the seriousness of the abuse and compromise the actions taken to assist the older person.

- That cultural norms and values may not be consistent with "mainstream" society as they relate to the role of women and status of seniors. These culturally specific factors will influence not only the seniors' interpretation of abuse but will determine in part the appropriate actions. Before designing any educational program, the cultural characteristics must be clearly understood to ensure that the content and presentation style is suitable for the group.

Vehicles for Education

Seniors are effective in reaching their peers on a variety of topics and trained senior presenters are being recognized as an important resource in education. Older persons can deliver their messages on abuse through:

- **Seniors' centres** which, as focal points in seniors' communities, represent an informal, non-threatening environment. Here, seniors experiencing abuse can maintain anonymity and receive support. Project Leaders indicated that these centres were the most effective milieu for disseminating information on the topic. The challenge facing seniors' centres is reaching isolated individuals. This group represents seniors who are least likely to visit a centre, yet may be most in need of support.
- **Seniors' organizations** that have active committees and community outreach functions. By expanding their mandates to incorporate the issue of abuse of seniors, members of these organizations can become partners in sensitizing the public, professionals and front-line workers to be responsive to abused seniors.
- **Intergenerational programs** which concentrate on instilling positive images of aging and intolerance for family violence. The programs bring seniors and children of all ages into direct contact where the younger generation may be introduced to seniors as people. Through the interaction and exchange of wisdom and skills, children may begin to appreciate the value of becoming old. Seniors can illustrate that they as individuals and as a collective group are important members of society and the family. They can reinforce that it is not acceptable to abuse seniors simply because they may be perceived as frail and vulnerable. Seniors involved in educating younger persons play an integral part in long-term prevention by altering attitudes and values that result in abuse.

- **Participation in other areas of family violence prevention** in order to stimulate cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches and to dispel further the myths of aging.
- **Pre-retirement classes** in which the rights of individuals in society are discussed, regardless of their age. These educational forums can also provide information on the aging process, practical steps for preparation for possible vulnerability, the implications of financial and dependency decisions and the diversity of factors that may precipitate abuse.
- **Arts and media presentations** which focus on seniors' rights and the abuse of older Canadians in ways that do not sensationalize the issues. For example, plays performed by seniors present the issue of abuse in a non-threatening way and increase awareness among audiences of all ages.

Government's Role

Through the Family Violence Initiative, support could be provided for the following educational activities:

- an investigation into seniors' specific strategies for public awareness and education campaigns that focus on using existing seniors' or other networks;
- the development of a practical guide written by seniors to sensitize professionals to the needs of abused seniors and abused seniors from different ethnocultural backgrounds; and
- the investigation of approaches that lessen the denial of abuse among seniors and promote active involvement in the movement.

Committee Participation

Advisory committees, service agency boards, planning and research bodies affiliated with family violence would benefit from active seniors' involvement. Seniors representing both genders, different age cohorts and ethnocultural backgrounds would result in better insight into the issues associated with the abuse of seniors. However, more important than the number of seniors is the quality of the involvement; seniors' input must be requested, respected and implemented. Seniors must have some power in the decision-making processes. To maximize the benefits of their participation, seniors need to be involved at all levels and phases of prevention and intervention strategies.

Benefits of Senior Involvement

Seniors speaking on behalf of other seniors help to ensure that the needs and concerns of their peers are understood and that the decisions and directions taken are appropriate. Senior committee participation also:

- keeps the committee close to the real issues;
- offers practical and responsive solutions; and

- identifies appropriate research strategies and questions that may result in more reliable and useful data, including the anecdotal information.

To facilitate meaningful committee involvement for seniors, the committee must:

- invite seniors from all walks of life who have the requisite skills and commitment to the issue to participate as active members;
- offer a comfortable environment for participation that is non-threatening and provides necessary supports for participation and enhanced interaction (e.g., briefing sessions, audio-visual aids);
- eliminate the barriers to participation (e.g., meetings during daylight hours, accessible buildings and facilities, transportation to meeting places);
- provide clear guidelines on the expectations for participation (e.g., the purpose of their involvement, required input); and
- reinforce the significance of seniors' contributions.

Government's Role

Through the Family Violence Initiative, more seniors' committee participation could be facilitated by supporting:

- the development of a practical guide to committee management, geared to professionals and board chairpeople, which identifies ways of facilitating meaningful seniors' participation on committees;
- the development of a manual for existing committees interested in expanding their mandate to incorporate issues associated with the abuse of seniors; and
- fair and meaningful representation of seniors on all types of committees.

Direct Intervention

Prevention and intervention activities related to the abuse of seniors need not be undertaken by new and specific agencies. Project Leaders suggested that the needs of abused seniors could be addressed most effectively by programs in the existing infrastructure of home support and health care community-based services.

Traditionally, seniors have been the major source of volunteers for these seniors' service agencies. These same volunteers can be encouraged to participate in the development and implementation of new prevention and intervention strategies within these existing organizations.

Benefits of Seniors' Involvement

- **Experience.** Seniors bring hindsight, life-long experience and wisdom to their volunteering activities. These attributes may represent an advantage in reaching out to peers, particularly those living in an abusive situation. While peer connections are important, senior volunteers must be supported by trained professionals.
- **Familiarity.** Senior volunteers involved in intervention and direct service delivery have a vantage point for identifying potentially abusive situations involving seniors. Through their routine and non-threatening contact with isolated and homebound seniors, they may be able to establish a certain familiarity and rapport. This familiarity with the volunteer may be the key to breaking down some of the barriers to disclosure and acceptance of initial professional contact.
- **Informal Associations.** Not all seniors volunteer their time to formal agencies. Many provide assistance and support through other organizations such as churches, and service clubs. These volunteers may also have the opportunity to assist a senior in need and should be included in community education campaigns that link with professional services.

Seniors, especially from ethnocultural groups, may not participate as a volunteer in a formal seniors' service agency but may be involved in activities affiliated with cultural organizations. Therefore, it is important to provide education on elder abuse to ethnospecific organizations. In some cultures, there may not be the pool of volunteers to respond in the seniors' language or customs. Informal support from friends and neighbours may take the place of volunteer activity. Reaching these people to educate them concerning the abuse of older persons presents a real challenge.

Volunteer Opportunities

The time and emotional commitment associated with strategies to respond to the abuse of seniors varies, depending on the type of program. Three opportunities for seniors' involvement through intervention include:

- **Seniors' Service Volunteers**, in the capacity of friendly visitor, volunteer driver, meals-on-wheels deliverer, etc., offer an obvious resource for detection of potentially abusive situations. Trained in the indicators of abuse, these volunteers can alert professionals of their concern. A comprehensive protocol for volunteers and professionals must be in place to ensure appropriate responses.
- **Peer Mentors** may be volunteers with specific training in providing information and identifying choices for abused seniors.
- **Peer Counsellors** represent individuals who are interested and have made a personal commitment to

become involved on a more intimate level with the senior in a suspected abusive situation. Counsellors need to be highly trained and receive constant support from professional staff. A preferred counsellor model involves a supporting triad where the volunteer counsellor and victim may be supported by another volunteer or a professional. The role of this third party supporter is critical to ensure that volunteer burnout is not a factor and that the dependency of the abused senior is not transferred directly to the counsellor. To minimize the risk of burnout, a time-limited and specific commitment should be arranged.

Volunteers in any capacity need to respect the senior clients' right to choice, self-determination, confidentiality and service access, and to understand the importance of ongoing support and sensitive attitudes toward clients. Comprehensive training is the most effective strategy in equipping volunteers for their involvement with abused seniors.

Government's Role

Through the Family Violence Initiative, senior volunteer participation in the abuse of seniors issue could be facilitated by:

- collaborating with other federal, provincial and municipal governments to continue to provide funding support for pilot and demonstration projects focusing on community-based service delivery models;
- supporting the development and evaluation of senior volunteer training packages; and
- supporting the development and evaluation of protocols for senior volunteers involved in seniors' intervention and strategies related to abuse directed at seniors.

Empowerment Strategies

The most effective way to involve seniors in resolving personal abusive situations is by assisting them to regain control. According to key informants, the process of becoming an empowered senior requires:

- receiving and understanding information on one's rights and what constitutes abuse;
- understanding all possible choices and their consequences;
- having one's privacy, dignity and right to risk respected;
- being offered continual support through the process; and
- receiving support and respect for the ultimate decision and subsequent action.

The challenge for seniors and professionals involved in the issue lies in creating an environment where an older person feels confident to speak out about abuse and ask for help in both practical and emotional terms. An initial step may be to address the reasons why seniors generally do not report abuse. These include:

Emotional

- fear of abandonment or institutionalization;
- fear of reprisal;
- fear of disclosure;
- shame or embarrassment;
- feelings of helplessness;
- depression;
- lack of energy to act;
- fear of the unknown; and
- lack of recognition of abuse.

Situational

- isolation and inability to contact help;
- lack of financial resources; and
- physical or mental disability making location of assistance and communication difficult.

Service Availability/Accessibility

- lack of emergency shelters and alternative housing; and
- lack of support services and access to information.

Improving service availability and accessibility should be part of the efforts to develop comprehensive community-based service systems for seniors across Canada. While some of the emotional obstacles may eventually be obliterated through increased awareness about abuse and the available options, the majority of abused seniors will continue to require the time, patience and skill of trained volunteers and professionals to address their situation.

Seniors' Self-Help Opportunities

Being empowered may also mean having the capacity to share experiences and help others. Although self-help and therapeutic mutual aid strategies (e.g., victim presentations and support groups) have been successful for victims of other forms of family violence, their effectiveness for abused seniors is unknown.

Government's Role

The Family Violence Prevention Division could contribute to the empowerment of abused seniors by:

- collaborating with other levels of government to provide funding and guidelines for the establishment of accommodation and support services to meet the needs of abused seniors;
- supporting the development, implementation and evaluation of self-help groups which specifically address the needs of older abused women and men; and
- supporting further research to develop more detailed and accurate descriptions of the abused senior and abuser dyad.

Summary: Involvement of Older Canadians and Government Contributions to the Abuse of Seniors Issue

The premise of this paper is that senior involvement is advantageous for effective prevention and intervention. The purpose of this paper was to examine ways to involve and empower seniors. Examples of this participation are limited; even among the 15 projects funded by the Family Violence Prevention Division and reviewed in this paper, only a few reported that a significant number of seniors were involved in a meaningful way.

While the involvement of seniors in the abuse issue may be an emerging trend, more effort is required to determine the best approaches. This paper has identified several options for consideration which were organized into a continuum of seniors' involvement. The continuum illustrated opportunities that ranged from community awareness and education, to membership on program or special purpose committees, to hands-on program delivery and finally to action which leads to the empowerment of mistreated seniors. Each opportunity was explored:

- **Community Education and Awareness**
Strategies discussed the role of seniors in raising the awareness of their peers, front-line workers and professionals through education about the abuse of seniors. Discussion focused on the factors to consider in developing educational programs and the vehicles through which seniors can educate the public and professionals. These specific approaches included seniors' centres and organizations, intergenerational programs, pre-retirement classes and the media.
- **Committee Work** discussed the benefits of seniors' involvement on advisory committees, agency boards and planning committees. This participation also enables seniors to influence program planning and implementation, policy, research, etc., and to ensure sensitivity to seniors' needs and expectations. Discussion concentrated on the need for actual seniors' representation and ways to facilitate their meaningful and productive involvement in committee work.
- **Direct Intervention** described the role of seniors as senior service agency volunteers, peer mentors and peer counsellors. Through training and professional support, seniors in these capacities can identify and assist in finding solutions to abusive situations.

- **Senior Empowerment** discussed the process of empowering an older person in an abusive setting by providing information, choice and support from seniors and professionals. The section also identified why seniors typically do not report abuse and suggested that addressing these specific obstacles is an immediate priority.

Much of the discussion on the seniors' involvement continuum incorporated feedback from key informants. The Project Leaders and experts also suggested that more work in the area is necessary to realize the opportunities on the continuum. Some of this work could be supported through the federal Family Violence Initiative as part of its commitment to alleviating the abuse of seniors, as well as through provincial/territorial and local initiatives. Guidelines for future activities funded may include:

- fair and meaningful representation of seniors on all aspects of the activities;
- the global aim of any activity is to work to eliminate the ageist perceptions in society through positive portrayal of aging and seniors;
- the abuse of seniors should be considered in the context of family violence;
- sensitivity to seniors' individual needs and expectations based on gender, religion, culture, race, socioeconomic status; and
- a separate component, within the activity, for rigorous evaluation to ensure the activity outcomes are appropriate for wide distribution or replication across Canada.

Specific suggestions for federal government involvement in the issue of abuse against seniors centred on support for the following:

Further Investigations

- seniors' specific strategies for public awareness and education campaigns that focus on using existing seniors' networks;
- approaches that lessen older Canadians' denial of abuse toward seniors and promote their active involvement in the movement;
- the potential for involvement of trained retired professionals as agency representatives on behalf of their younger counterparts at meetings related to the issue; and
- further research to develop more detailed and accurate descriptions of the abused senior and abuser dyad.

Product Development, Implementation and Evaluation

- a practical guide to committee management geared to professionals and board chairpeople that identifies approaches to facilitate meaningful seniors' participation on committees;
- a practical guide written by seniors to sensitize professionals to the needs of abused seniors and abused seniors of ethnocultural backgrounds;
- a manual for existing committees interested in expanding their mandate to incorporate issues related to the abuse of seniors;
- senior volunteer training packages, including training for peer counsellors;
- protocols for senior volunteers involved in seniors' service delivery and strategies that respond to abused older Canadians; and
- self-help groups which specifically address the needs of older abused women and men.

Collaboration with Other Departments and Levels of Government

- establish policies and guidelines which make senior involvement in committees and projects a requisite for funding;
- support innovative community-based program models to address the abuse of seniors, which may be replicated to benefit other communities across Canada; and
- provide funding guidelines for the establishment of accommodation and support services to meet the needs of abused seniors.

In conclusion, the objective of the paper was to determine the potential for the involvement of older Canadians in the abuse of seniors issue. The benefits of involving seniors are clear and the groundwork for this involvement in specific actions has been laid out in this paper. The challenge now is to advance to the next stage where seniors' involvement in Canada is universal, effective and meaningful.

Appendix A – Policy Circle Participant List

Family Violence Prevention Division Abuse of Seniors

Policy Circle I

Mr. Robert Burrage
Federated Superannuates

Ms. Reta Deunisch-Turner
Older Women's Network

Madame Marguerite Hogue-Charlebois
National Advisory Council on Aging

Ms. Pat MacLellan
Canadian Pensioners Concerned Inc.

Mrs. Jean E. McCreight
Kerby Centre

Mrs. Jean Woodsworth
One Voice, The Canadian Seniors' Network

Policy Circle II

Mr. John Bond
University of Manitoba

Mrs. Mary Chiaverina

Ms. Reta Deunisch-Turner
Older Women's Network

Ms. Waltraud Grieger
Nova House

Ms. Pearl McKenzie
North Shore Community Services

Ms. Daphne Nahmiash
Concordia University

Ms. Judith Wahl
Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE)

Appendix B – Suggested Reading

Gnaedinger, N. *Discussion Paper on Elder Abuse Prepared for "Working Together": 1989 National Forum on Family Violence*. Health and Welfare Canada. May 1989. Ottawa.

Government of Canada Seniors Secretariat. *A Shared Concern: An Overview of Canadian Programs Addressing the Abuse of Seniors*. 1992. Ottawa.

Lukawiecki, T. *Community Awareness and Response: Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults*. Prepared for Health and Welfare Canada. 1993. Ottawa.

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McDonald, P.L.; Hornick, J.; Robertson, G.; Wallace, J. *Elder Abuse and Neglect in Canada*. Butterworths. 1991. Toronto.

Mulligan, S. *A Handbook for the Prevention of Family Violence*. 1990. Ottawa.

National Advisory Council on Aging. *Elder Abuse: Major Issues from a National Perspective*. 1991. Ottawa.

National Advisory Council on Aging. *Seniors' Independence: Whose Responsibility?* 1992. Ottawa.

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence. *Abuse and Neglect of the Elderly*. 1986. Ottawa.

Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Office for Senior Citizens' Affairs. *A Review of Community/Program Responses to Elder Abuse in Ontario*. March 1991. Toronto.

Podnieks, E.; Pillemer, K.; Nicholson, J.P.; Shillington, T.; Frizzel, A. *National Survey on Abuse of the Elderly in Canada, The Ryerson Study*. 1990. Toronto.

Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women. *Breaking the Silence on Abuse of Older Canadians: Everyone's Concern*. June 1993. Ottawa.

Wasykewycz, M. *Empowerment Through Group Process for Older Female Victims of Spousal Abuse*. Presented at the Canadian Association of Gerontology Annual Conference. October 1992.

Appendix C – Key Informant List

Pat Allen

Kerby Centre

Betty Bergin

Canadian Association of Social Workers

Mary Carson

Queensway-Carleton Hospital

Mary Chiaverina

Waltraud Grieger

Nova House

Claudette Légaré

One Voice, The Canadian Seniors' Network

Michael MacLean

Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG)

Pearl McKenzie

Vancouver, North Shore Community Services

Daphne Nahmiash

Concordia University

John Oussoren

Seniors' Education Centre

Margaret Reid

Ontario Elder Abuse Network

Diane Senechal

St. John Ambulance

Michael Stones

Seniors Resource Centre
Provincial Committee on Elder Abuse
Memorial University

Linda Wacker

Interhospital Domestic Violence Committee

Judith Wahl

Advocacy Centre

Rosemary Williams

Canadian Association on Gerontology (CAG)

Kathy Yurkowski

Manitoba Seniors Directorate

Appendix D – Project Descriptions

1. *Seniors Resource Centre, Provincial Committee on Elder Abuse, Newfoundland*

The Seniors Resource Centre Association has promoted a Canada-wide exchange on a unified and consistent approach to the definition and measurement of elder abuse to facilitate research and policy development. Interdisciplinary consensus involving professional and voluntary associations, including seniors organizations, had been sought in Newfoundland and across Canada. The final product, which will be disseminated on a national scale, reviews the approaches taken toward the meaning and definition of elder abuse; it also describes the rationale and methodology underlying the development of two valid measurement tools.

Contact: Michael Stones (709) 737-7678

2. *St. John Ambulance, Nova Scotia*

The goal of the project is to raise awareness of the role of working caregivers to employers, and to educate employees concerning caregiver roles. The project will identify and address the particular needs of employee caregivers, who are trying to maintain a balance between their dual roles as full-time workers and caregivers to aging family members. It will also introduce an educational component as a means of providing employee caregivers with coping strategies, including the issue of elder abuse prevention.

The proposed training manual will be developed and piloted in the Atlantic Provinces. The results of this eldercare project will be disseminated on a national scale.

Contact: Diane Senechal (902) 422-6577

3. *Concordia University (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Local Community Service Centre), Québec*

The purpose of the project is to develop further a preliminary intervention model concerning elder abuse and document it so it may be replicated by other intervention teams across Canada. This project will be undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team. Finally, a group of seniors will be trained to

act as supportive "buddies" to advise and empower elder abuse victims.

Contact: Daphne Nahmiash (514) 485-1677

4. *Maison Jeanne Simard, Québec*

The first shelter for seniors in Canada is undertaking a pilot project that will further develop a model to evaluate the needs of senior victims of abuse who are using this shelter. A final report will be prepared and disseminated on a national scale to enable others to replicate this innovative service delivery model.

Contact: Johanne Cottenoir (514) 259-7712

5. *Queensway-Carleton Hospital, Ontario*

This project developed an operational model which describes a step-by-step approach to assessment, planning and intervention in the area of elder abuse. This model will enable police officers to act in a supportive and protective role to seniors and will provide the vital link to the community. A video describes to police administrators, as well as to community agencies, the need for and the method of developing such a program. The Nepean Police and the Queensway-Carleton Hospital collaborated on the development and implementation of the educational program, the piloting of an interagency response model, and a senior abuse protocol appropriate for police services across Canada.

Contact: Mary Carson (613) 721-2000

6. *Nova House, Manitoba*

The purpose of this project is to develop procedures, protocol and training material for shelter workers on responding to the needs of abused older women. The group will also establish an inventory of alternative community housing options for abused older persons, both male and female, to better respond to the needs of shelter and non-shelter clients. An advisory committee, comprising representatives from the police, hospital, continuing care, personal care homes, senior organizations, shelters, as well as government agencies, will oversee the project. The training material will be piloted in two shelters in Manitoba, both in rural and urban settings. Once tested and evaluated, the training tools will be disseminated nationally through other shelters in Canada.

Contact: Waltraud Grieger (204) 482-7882

7. *Interhospital Domestic Violence Committee, Saskatchewan*

The Interhospital Domestic Violence Committee will develop an educational module that will include a handbook, sample policies and procedures for the implementation of a prevention program, and a video. This module will be designed in order to raise awareness among health care workers regarding practices that may lead to elder abuse in the institutional setting, and will provide skill training. The group will organize 10 workshops, reaching 150 policymakers and the same number of front-line workers in Saskatchewan. Once the module has been tested, it will be disseminated across Canada.

Contact: Linda Wacker (306) 359-5266

8. *Seniors' Education Centre, Saskatchewan*

This was a four-phased project and the Family Violence Prevention Division provided financial assistance for phases II and IV. Phase I enabled the centre to develop an inventory of resources on elder abuse through funding from New Horizons. Phase II included the development of a multi-disciplinary and generic training module on elder abuse issues and resources. The document is available in both official languages and continues to be promoted and disseminated across Canada.

Phase III, funded by the Seniors Independent Program (SIP), involved the training of 40 seniors and professionals at a central forum from six communities in Saskatchewan to become leaders and future trainers on elder abuse issues and resources at other community workshops.

Finally, Phase IV, co-funded by SIP and the Family Violence Prevention Division, included a provincial workshop involving those who participated in the previous phases to evaluate the impact and the processes and prepare recommendations.

Contact: John Oussoren (306) 779-4816

9. *Kerby Centre, Alberta*

Kerby Centre is a major seniors centre established 20 years ago, with a formal membership of over 5 000. The primary goal of the project is the development of a comprehensive, practical and inexpensive service delivery model which focuses on intervention and treatment protocols, yet generates a wealth of reliable and useful research data on the subject of elder abuse. The demonstration service delivery model, which involves senior volunteers, will be such that it can be replicated throughout the country. National dissemination is incorporated into the project.

Contact: Jean E. McCreight (403) 265-0661

10. *Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (National)*

The primary goal of the project is to provide Independent Living Centres (ILC) staff and other front-line workers with training, resources and innovative outreach methods to mobilize community prevention concerning the issue of family violence and abuse. This in turn will facilitate consumer control, self-determination, peer support, individual advocacy, information and referral, and research development.

The project is divided into three major components, each being piloted in a different province. The first component will institute a national, peer-directed train-the-trainer prevention program, in Alberta; the second will develop an Independent Living self-help prevention model for adolescents who have a disability, in Ontario; and the third component will test and promote a rural outreach prevention model for adults and seniors, of which a large number will be women living in rural and isolated regions, in Quebec.

The anticipated outcome of these particular components will be portable community development prevention frameworks, which will be disseminated nationally to other ILCs, as well as to community-based and professional organizations.

Contact: Traci Walters (613) 563-2581

11. *Canadian Association of Social Workers (National)*

The needs of ethnic and visible minority communities with respect to the issue of elder abuse have not been explored. Furthermore, there is a lack of substantive information about how elder abuse can be prevented, and about how to intervene effectively when it does occur.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers is gathering information on the subject through self-administered questionnaires and focus groups involving seniors, leaders of minority seniors' groups, members of the boards of directors of the Canadian Ethnocultural Council and its constituent organizations, its own members and other professionals.

One of the outcomes of this national project will be detailed information about the ways of preventing elder abuse among minority communities. The final product will be disseminated on a national scale.

Contact: Eugenia R. Moreno (613) 729-6668

12. *Canadian Association on Gerontology (National)*

The Canadian Association on Gerontology is conducting a national study to consolidate information on the issues of abuse and neglect of older adults. The study will review and analyze the following areas: education, research, policy, and community

programs. It will also include comparisons abroad, both in the United States and Europe, to place the abuse and neglect of older Canadians within a global context. The primary product of the project will be a scholarly book which will be disseminated on a national scale to a diverse audience.

Contact: Michael MacLean (613) 728-9347

13. *One Voice, The Canadian Seniors' Network (National)*

The purpose of the project is to enlist the involvement of the seniors community at the national, provincial/territorial level to design a national plan which will address the issue of elder abuse prevention. To accomplish this goal, One Voice has held six regional forums across Canada. These forums have not only raised awareness among seniors and those working with them, concerning the subject of elder abuse, but have also been the vehicle to solicit their concerns and recommendations in addressing the issue. A final report will be prepared and disseminated on a national scale.

Contact: Ivan Hale (613) 238-7624

14. *L'Association québécoise plaidoyer-victimes, Québec*

This project supported the addition of a chapter on the victimization of seniors to the revised *Handbook on Assistance to Crime Victims*. In addition, a stand-alone version of the chapter will be distributed to approximately 700 senior residential facilities (private and public), 500 libraries, 50 provincial organizations and 250 seniors' organizations across Canada.

Contact: Josée Coiteux (514) 526-9037

15. *Manitoba Seniors Directorate*

Health Canada's Family Violence Prevention Division, in partnership with the Manitoba Seniors Directorate and working with the Canadian Bankers' Association, produced a video and accompanying guide on the financial abuse of seniors.

The close-captioned video is entitled "Standing Up For Yourself" ("La force de s'affirmer") and has been disseminated to some 500 major organizations across Canada. It was also advertised in the journal, the *Canadian Banker*, through a jointly authored article entitled "The Sad Abuse of Seniors" by Madame Monique Vézina, former Minister of State for Seniors and Mr. Gerry Ducharme, Manitoba Minister Responsible for Seniors.

The video and guide are currently available in both official languages through the National Film Board's Family Violence Film and Video Collection.

Contact: Kathy Yurkowski (204) 945-7729