



Lifelong Respect:

Tasmania's Strategy to end the abuse of older people (Elder Abuse) 2023–2029

Community Partnerships and Priorities
Department of Premier and Cabinet



Tasmanian
Government



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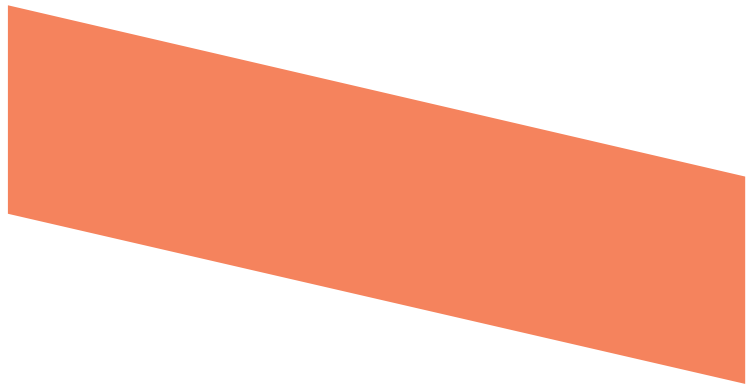


Acknowledgements

The Tasmanian Government acknowledges and pays deep respect to Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional and original owners and continuing custodians of Tasmania. We pay our respects to Elders, past, present and emerging.

The Tasmanian Government would like to acknowledge that Aboriginal people refer to 'Elders' as well-respected knowledge holders who provide guidance with authority on cultural customs, that are attached to their obligations and responsibilities to their people. We have moved away from the term 'Elder Abuse' in this strategy and where possible have used the term the 'abuse of older people/older Tasmanians'.

The Tasmanian Government also recognises that 'Elder' has a different meaning and context in many Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.



Minister's message

The Tasmanian Government's vision is to build an age-friendly state in which all Tasmanians can stay active, healthy, resilient, and connected to their community and economy.

In achieving our vision, it is important to recognise that preventing and responding to the abuse of older Tasmanians is a whole-of-community responsibility.

It requires a shared commitment between Government and the community to ensure that everyone is involved in ending the abuse of all older people.

The Tasmanian Government, with our community partners, continues to take action to prevent and respond to the abuse older Tasmanians experience, through a standalone Strategy.

Lifelong Respect: Tasmania's Strategy to end the abuse of older people (Elder Abuse) 2023-2029 builds on the achievements of the previous two elder abuse prevention Strategies.

I thank members of the Statewide Elder Abuse Prevention Committee (SEAPAC) who have provided valuable advice and feedback regarding the Strategy's development, including representing the lived experience of many older Tasmanians.

As Minister for Community Services and Development, I am pleased to release the *Lifelong Respect: Tasmania's Strategy to end the abuse of older people (Elder Abuse) 2023-2029* which provides the foundation for the Government's ongoing commitment to older Tasmanians' right to be safe, respected, and live with dignity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Street'.

Hon. Nic Street MP

Minister for Community Services and Development

Why does Tasmania need a strategy?

Recognising, responding to, and preventing the abuse of older Tasmanians is a priority for the Tasmanian Government and the Tasmanian community. Older Tasmanians have the right to be an integral and respected part of the community, living free from abuse.

Lifelong Respect: Tasmania's Strategy to end the abuse of older people (Elder Abuse) 2023–2029 (the Strategy) builds on the achievements of the past two Tasmanian Strategies, which have each brought the issue into greater prominence, to ensure there is a specific and tangible focus and response to the abuse of older Tasmanians.

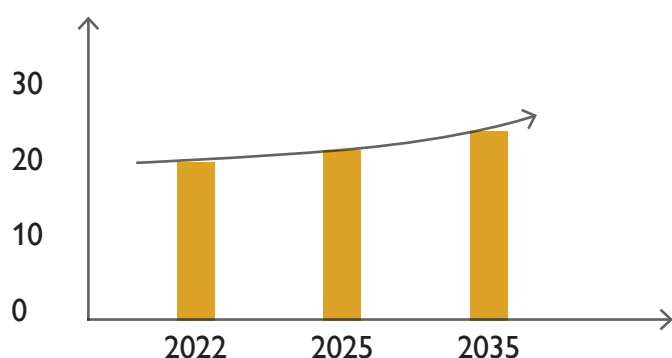
The vision of the Strategy is for all older Tasmanians to be safe, respected, and live free from abuse.

Tasmania has a population with significant risk factors for the abuse of older Tasmanians¹ including the highest per capita ageing population in Australia.² The number of older people has increased in all Tasmanian regions during the past 10 years and this trend is expected to continue.

In June 2022, there were 571,540 people living in Tasmania. Of these, 119,347 Tasmanians were aged 65 years (20.9 per cent) and 232,196 Tasmanians were aged more than 50 years (40.6 per cent).³

It is estimated that by 2025, 22.6 per cent of Tasmanians will be aged more than 65, jumping to 25.1 per cent by 2035 (or 1 in 4 people).⁴

Increase of Tasmanians aged <65 years



One in six older Australians experienced abuse



Only one third of these people seek help



In 2021, The National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study (Prevalence Study)⁵ found that almost one in six older Australians surveyed reported they experienced abuse in the previous 12 months, and only about one third of those people sought help.

Incidents of older people experiencing abuse will likely grow as Tasmania's population ages, and the number of older Tasmanians increases. A whole-of-community commitment to recognise, respond and prevent the abuse of older Tasmanians is therefore required.

Fostering a confident and inclusive society where all people are treated fairly, with respect and without discrimination is crucial to achieving the goals of this Strategy. This is why it is critical the Strategy takes an intersectional approach to recognising, responding and preventing the abuse of older people in Tasmania. An intersectional approach explores how different aspects of someone's identity can overlap, exposing them to greater discrimination and marginalisation and therefore a greater risk of violence, systemic barriers, and social isolation.⁶

The Strategy has four high-level Priority Areas detailing the outcomes to be achieved:

- Awareness
- Self-determination
- Responsiveness
- Safeguards.

Two-year Action Plans will be developed in consultation with stakeholders to achieve the outcomes during the life of the Strategy. This will ensure a contemporary approach, and most importantly, reflect the voice of lived experience.

At a national level the Tasmanian Government will continue to collaborate with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions to continue the delivery of the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019-2023⁷ (National Plan) and contribute to the development of future National Plans.

Consistent with the Tasmanian Government's commitment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the abuse of older Tasmanians will be addressed. This work will be approached through a lens of cultural safety, overcoming power imbalances of places, people, and policies through actions which recognise, respect, and nurture the cultural identity of Aboriginal people.⁸



What is the abuse of older people

In Tasmania the abuse of older people is defined as; “a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.”⁹

Older people are defined as Aboriginal people aged over 50 years, and all others aged over 65 years.¹⁰

The abuse of older Tasmanians is a confronting and complex issue that remains largely hidden within the community. It is caused by an interplay of multifaceted individual, interpersonal, community and social factors. Signs of abuse can be subtle and hidden, often because they are mistaken for illness or ageing.

Signs to look out for include:¹¹

- Injuries: bruises, fractures, cuts, and injuries that have not been treated which can be both external and internal
- Unexplained weight loss, including signs of malnutrition
- An unexplained deterioration of personal hygiene
- Unexplained disappearance of personal effects and belongings
- Large bank withdrawals, a sudden decision to sell property, changes to wills or documents such as power of attorney and guardianship arrangements
- Social isolation

- Depression, anxiety, and confusion, including anxiety around a particular person or people.
- Unexplained sexually transmitted disease and/or incontinence.

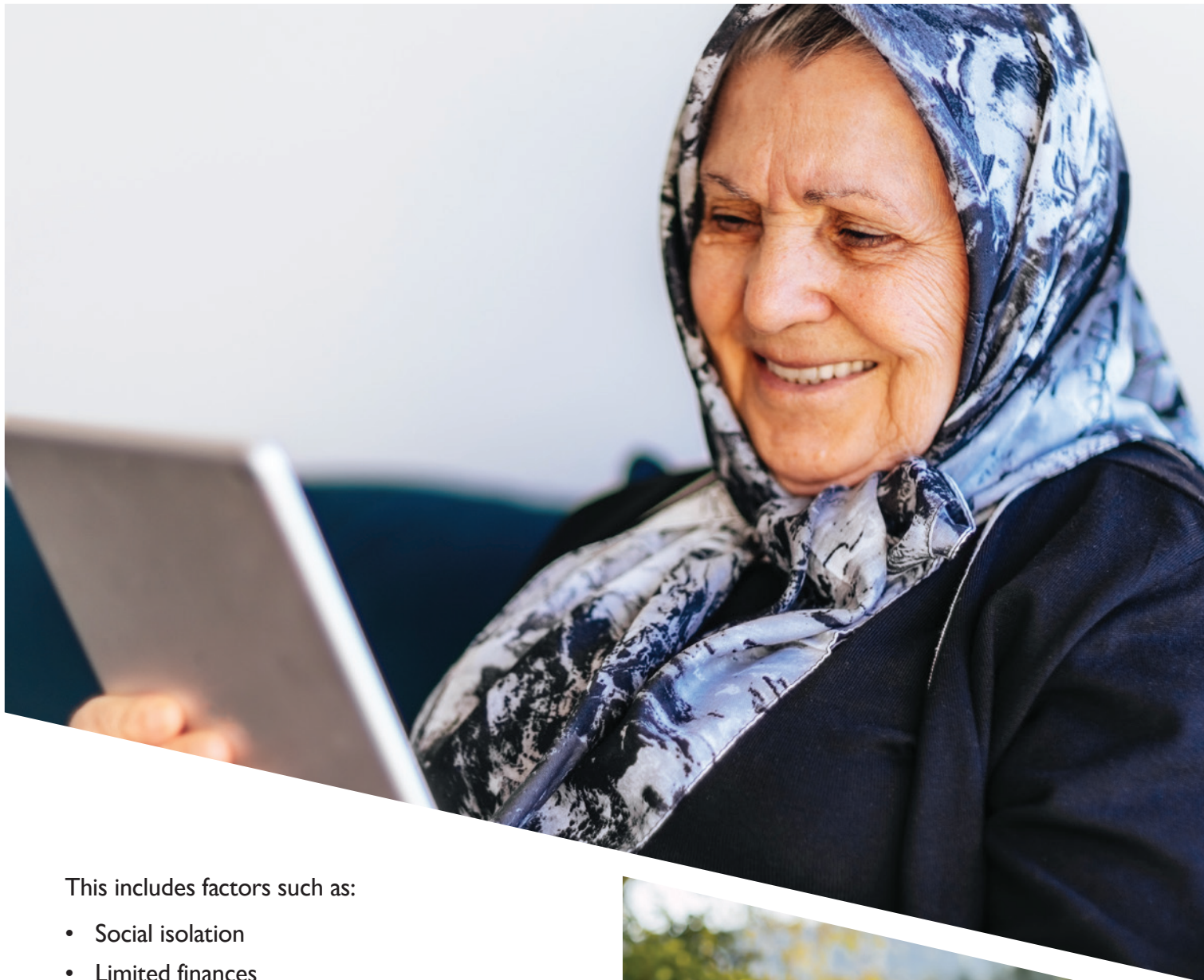
Older people experiencing abuse will generally know the person causing them harm. While this could be a family member, friend or acquaintance, adult children have been found to be the category of individuals most likely to abuse older people.¹²

Abuse may be unintentional or unconscious. This can be when a person believes they are acting in an older person’s best interest. However, in enacting this belief, they have often taken away an older person’s choice and control by not respecting their right for self-determination in all aspects of their life.

The abuse of an older person can be a criminal or non-criminal act. In Tasmania in instances where the abuse is committed by an intimate partner, it is considered family violence under the *Family Violence Act 2004*.¹³

Older people may not report the abuse or seek help because of feelings of embarrassment and shame, or fear of the repercussions for themselves or the person causing them harm, particularly when this person is a child or family member. Sometimes actions may not be perceived as abuse, leading to a lack of understanding of what abuse is and how to seek assistance. This may be compounded where English is a second language and for people with disability.

In preventing and responding to the abuse of older people it is important to address its underpinning drivers. Ageism, including community stereotypes, attitudes and unconscious bias towards older people is linked with the complex social, environmental, and economic risk factors associated with the abuse of older people in our communities.



This includes factors such as:

- Social isolation
- Limited finances
- Poorer physical and mental health
- Access to transport and supports.

While the community prevalence of ageism is a major driver of abuse, it is important to recognise older Aboriginal Tasmanians and other groups of older Tasmanians, including CALD communities; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer+ (LGBTIQ+); and persons with disability, face a wide range of discrimination which compound the social, environmental, and economic risk factors and may place these people at greater risk of abuse. Specific responses and actions will therefore be required with an intersectional approach allowing for consideration of these diverse factors in developing responses.



Forms of abuse of older people

Any form of abuse of older Tasmanians is unacceptable. Older people can experience one form of abuse, or a combination. Some forms of abuse are often wrongly seen as not being as serious as others, however, this minimises the impact and extent of abuse in its many forms and supports its underlying drivers. Some of the forms abuse can take are defined below.

The abuse of older people cannot be viewed in isolation without addressing the attitudes, behaviours and culture that underpin the root causes of abuse including ageism and disrespectful behaviour towards older people.

It is also recognised the past experiences of older people experiencing abuse also needs to be acknowledged, with abuse in childhood as well as intimate partner violence as an adult, risk factors for the abuse of older people.¹⁴

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is an act that causes physical pain or injury to an older person. It can include, but is not limited to, actions such as hitting, pushing, or kicking. The inappropriate use of drugs or physical restraints are also examples of physical abuse.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is any sexual behaviour without an older person's consent. It includes sexual interactions and non-contact acts of a sexual nature.

Psychological or emotional abuse

Psychological or emotional abuse is an act that causes emotional pain or injury to an older person. It can include:

- Insulting or threatening a person
- Acts of humiliation or disrespect
- Controlling behaviours such as confining or isolating a person.

Financial abuse

Financial abuse is the misuse or theft of an older person's money or assets. It can include, but is not limited to:

- Behaviours such as making financial decisions without permission
- Using a legal document such as an enduring power of attorney for purposes other than those it was originally intended for
- Withholding care for financial gain
- Selling or transferring property against the older person's wishes.

Neglect

Neglect is the failure to meet a person's basic needs such as food, housing, and essential medical care.¹⁵

Social abuse

Social abuse prevents an older person from having social contact with friends or family or access to social activities. It includes:

- Moving the older person far away from, or cutting support from, friends or family members
- Restricting telephone use or screening calls
- Preventing the older person from socialising or meeting with neighbours
- Gaslighting such as leading the older person to incorrectly believe that their family and friends are "interfering".

Spiritual abuse

Spiritual abuse is the denial or use of spiritual or religious beliefs and practices to control and dominate a person, damage their spiritual experience, and isolate them.¹⁶

Cultural abuse

Cultural abuse is the assault, challenge, or denial of a person's cultural identity, of who they are and what they need.¹⁷ Cultural abuse is a distinct issue for Aboriginal older people and members of the CALD and LGBTIQ+ communities.

Coercive control

Coercive control is a pattern of behaviour that over time establishes and maintains power and dominance over another person.¹⁸ It can be used in isolation or in conjunction with other forms of abuse and is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviour.¹⁹

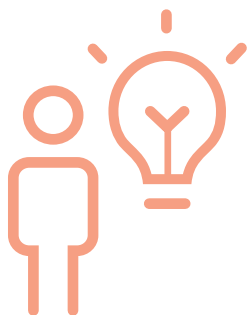


Priority areas

PRIORITY AREA ONE:

AWARENESS – The Tasmanian community and Government together recognises and responds to the abuse of older Tasmanians with a shared commitment to advancing older people’s rights and ensuring everyone is involved in ending the abuse.

Raising community awareness will make sure the abuse of older Tasmanians and its drivers such as ageism are recognised as serious community issues that require a whole-of-community and whole-of Government response. Awareness aims to ensure older Tasmanians from all backgrounds are empowered to seek information and support, and the community is actively recognising, responding to, and preventing the abuse of older Tasmanians.

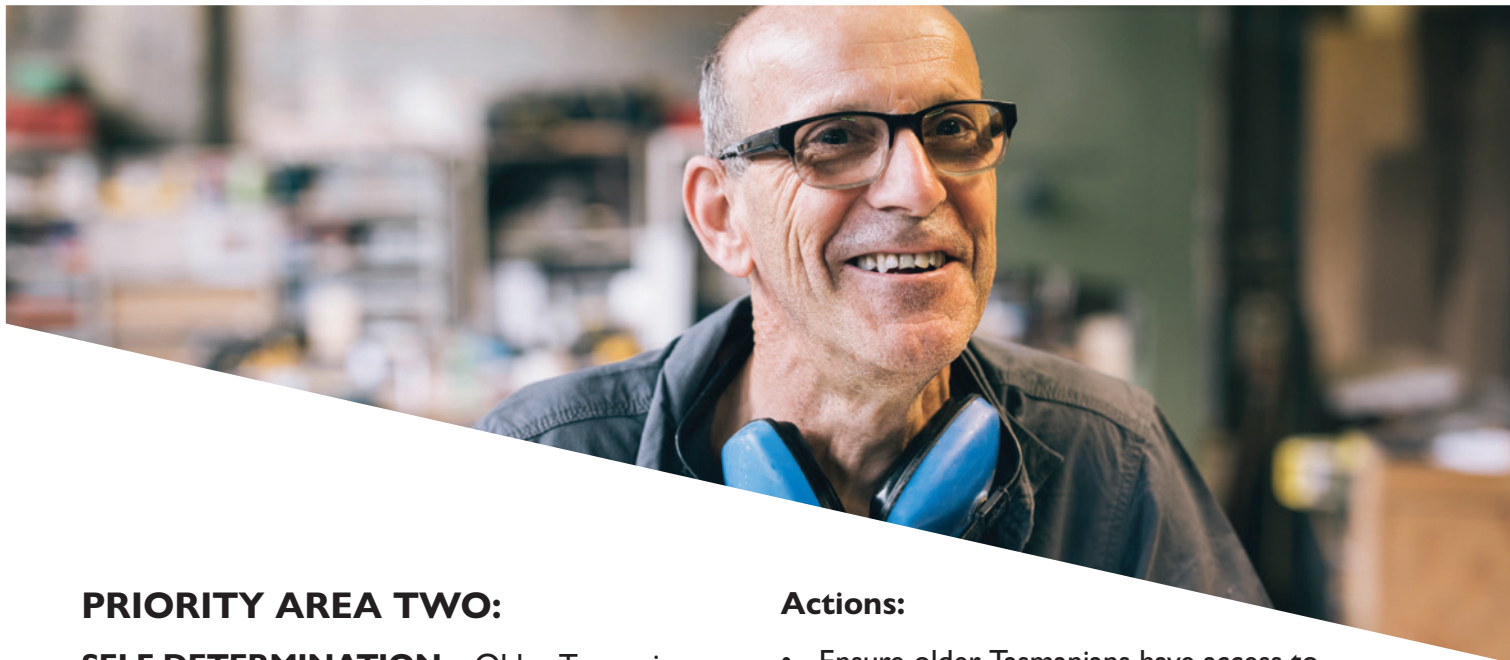


Actions:

- Raise awareness of the abuse of older Tasmanians and promote a whole-of-community response in recognising, responding to and preventing it, including addressing the underlying drivers of the abuse of older Tasmanians.
- Empower older Tasmanians from all backgrounds on self-determination, so they understand and recognise their rights and on how to recognise types of abuse and seek assistance and support.
- Listen to the voices of and be informed by older Tasmanians with a lived experience of abuse in furthering the development of initiatives that respond to the abuse of older Tasmanians in our community.
- Increase awareness and develop responses that recognise older people from diverse communities may experience abuse in different ways including cultural and language differences, and experiencing additional forms of discrimination which make them more vulnerable.

Outcomes:

- Prevention of the abuse of older Tasmanians is recognised as being everyone’s business.
- Tasmanian communities are aware and alert to the abuse of older Tasmanians, have a greater understanding of the drivers of abuse, the signs of abuse, of ways to prevent it, and can respond appropriately when encountering it.
- Older Tasmanians are aware of where to get information and support if they are experiencing or aware of instances of abuse.



PRIORITY AREA TWO:

SELF DETERMINATION – Older Tasmanians have personal agency and control over decisions regarding all aspects of their lives.

Supporting informed decision-making will ensure older Tasmanians' right for choice and control on all aspects of their lives is respected, and the Tasmanian community recognises and values their right to self-determination.



Actions:

- Ensure older Tasmanians have access to materials, resources and information about individual advocacy and legal representation that support informed decision-making on all aspects of their life, including culturally appropriate materials and resources for Aboriginal, CALD, LGBTIQ+ and persons with disability. This includes pre-planning as an important tool in maintaining control, preventing abuse, and ensuring personal wishes are understood and respected as they age.
- Raise community awareness about supporting, respecting, and valuing older Tasmanians' decisions, and their legal and ethical rights to self-determination.
- Review existing service systems and community settings focusing on older Tasmanians' ability for self-determination. Identify initiatives and responses required to support older Tasmanians' choice and control on aspects of their life.

Outcomes:

- Older Tasmanians can make informed decisions about all aspects of their lives.
- The choices and decisions of older Tasmanians from all backgrounds are supported, respected, and valued by their families, support systems, and the whole community.
- The views, wishes and preferences of older Tasmanians are considered and respected in authorised decisions made about or for them, even when their decision-making ability is impaired.

PRIORITY AREA THREE:

RESPONSIVENESS – Older Tasmanians experiencing abuse can access a connected, coordinated, and responsive service system.

Empower older Tasmanians and Tasmania's diverse communities, including Aboriginal, CALD, LGBTIQ+ and persons with disability, to respond to the abuse of older Tasmanians through a coordinated and responsive service system. Regardless of people's community and identity this includes knowing where to seek assistance and how to access support services.



Actions:

- Promote awareness of referral pathways and how to access support services so older Tasmanians and Tasmania's diverse communities can act against abuse.
- Foster a connected, flexible service system that is respectful and culturally appropriate, safe, and welcoming.
- Engage and educate services and businesses working or interfacing with older Tasmanians so they can recognise, respond, and prevent the abuse of older Tasmanians including challenging the underlying drivers of the abuse.

Outcomes:

- Older Tasmanians are aware of how to access a service system that is connected, respectful and provides support when people experience or encounter abuse.
- Service providers are active and supported in redesigning policies, procedures, and service delivery models to recognise, respond, and prevent abuse and its social drivers, and to prevent unconscious bias and instances of discrimination.
- Professionals and community members are aware of and supported to access comprehensive information about how to respond to elder abuse and promote the rights of older Tasmanians.



PRIORITY AREA FOUR:

SAFEGUARDING – The whole community takes responsibility for safeguarding older Tasmanians and they live safely and free from any form of abuse.

Work across government and community to determine the best ways to protect older Tasmanians from abuse and harm. This will include ensuring that a range of safeguarding initiatives are in place to reinforce the safety of older Tasmanians across a service continuum of prevention, early intervention, and response.



Actions:

- Build on and continue the work already underway to review and improve future safeguarding policies and frameworks for older Tasmanians.
- Strengthen existing and develop new initiatives to safeguard all older Tasmanians against abuse.
- Promote the improved safeguards to Tasmania's diverse communities with a focus on empowering community members to recognise, respond to and prevent abuse, and to counteract its underlying drivers.

Outcome:

- The community contributes to and participates in identifying and developing ways to safeguard older Tasmanians from abuse.
- Culturally appropriate, accepted and widely recognised safeguarding measures are in place and functioning to ensure older Tasmanians can live free of abuse.





Guiding principles

The following Guiding Principles provide the foundation for the Strategy, its Priority Areas and related actions. Underpinning the Principles is recognition of the importance of incorporating the voice of lived experience in developing informed responses to the abuse of older Tasmanians.

Independence, freedom and agency

Older Tasmanians live free from harm, have the right to family life, self-fulfilment, are respected and can freely and fully participate in their communities socially, culturally, economically, spiritually, and recreationally.

Empowerment

Older Tasmanians are empowered and have the confidence, means and ability to have choice and self-determination about their future. They are safe and free from exploitation and physical, emotional, financial, sexual, social, or spiritual abuse.

Older Tasmanians have access to the appropriate supports to participate in decisions that affect their own lives. The inherent dignity of older Tasmanians is respected, including individual autonomy and freedom and right to independence and choices.

Dignity and respect

Older Tasmanians experience independence, dignity, and the ability to make decisions about their own lives. They are respected by their family, the community and not discriminated against due to their age.

Older Tasmanians have the appropriate supports, services and the means to promote their physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing, enabling them to retain independence, dignity, and the ability to make decisions about their own lives.

Diversity and inclusion

Respect for older Tasmanians' right to express and present themselves relative to their culture, community, and identity.

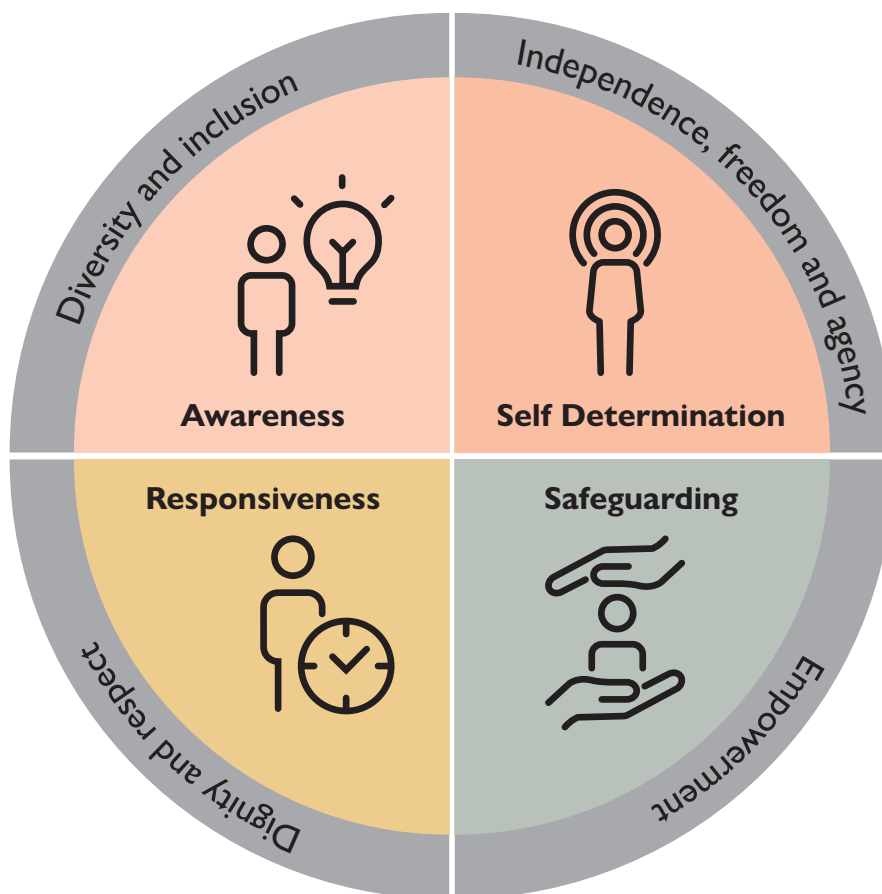
Implementation and governance

The Strategy represents the Tasmanian Government's commitment to achieving a Tasmania where all older Tasmanians live free of abuse. It will guide government agencies and the community in taking action to recognise, respond and prevent the abuse of older Tasmanians.

Consultation will continue over the lifetime of the Strategy. The Tasmanian Government will continue to listen to the voices of, and work with, older Tasmanians and the community in developing Action Plans arising from this Strategy. Together, we will review data and research to identify contemporary initiatives and actions that respond to the outcomes of the Priority Areas.

Key to the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plans is the support and advice of the Statewide Elder Abuse Prevention Advisory Committee (SEAPAC) as major contributors to the prevention and response to abuse of older Tasmanians.

Progress on the Strategy and subsequent Action Plans will be collated and reported annually to the SEAPAC and the Minister for Community Services and Development.



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