

Brief to the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights' Study on Elder Abuse

Submitted by John E. Johnson and Sabby Duthie, co-founders of [BridgeGen Canada Centre](#), and co-authors of a new book out now titled "**Elder Abuse: You Have a Role to Play**".

Recommendation

It is our position that legal remedies may serve as effective deterrents, but the law lacks the flexibility, and requires too much administration, to provide meaningful, timely solutions. In many respects, by the time the issue reaches the courts, the damage done is usually irreparable.

By bringing the conversation about elder abuse out into the open we stand a greater chance of exposing the deviant human elements at work in real-time. Education, awareness, and the empathetic intervention of all members of the community involved in the lives of senior citizens, including the elderly themselves, point to an early resolution.

What can the federal government do?

The clear evidence brought forward by other observers as to the deficient standard of the care for the elderly population is attributable to the lack of available trained caregivers – whether it is delivered in the setting of the older person's home or an institution, such as a retirement home, or the hospital-like facilities providing long term care.

Funding

The federal government is well-positioned to provide funding to train more caregivers to a professional standard entitling them to seek higher wages and benefits. The provinces would continue to administer such programs as in the past.

Education

By encouraging more education to be available to families to assist them in providing a higher standard of care, the program can take advantage of new-found skills in virtual education produced in the pandemic. Senior citizens facing retirement should prepare as well, by better understanding some of the challenges they face when caring for themselves or a spouse or other relatives.

The fear of not knowing what to do is the root inaction even in the face of apparent need. In the end, an educational program should be developed and available to anyone who is looking at the prospect of giving care. A community-based, multi-generational, multi-jurisdictional, multicultural approach that emphasizes and amplifies awareness of the signs of elder abuse is recommended.

- Seniors organizations should be able to deliver such audiences for such programs in person and online.
- High-school-aged kids should be able to put their volunteer hours to use learning how they can contribute meaningfully to the care of the older people in their lives.

- Public health units having cemented their value to communities at the local level through their handling of the pandemic are well placed to deliver program information and materials effectively, in plain language, in multiple formats, and in multiple languages.
- Family physicians, nurse practitioners, and paramedics need to apply the Elder Abuse Suspicion Index (EASI) in cases that evoke suspicion of abuse. EASI has been a very successful tool which has been shown to take only two minutes to administer, and 97.2% of doctors surveyed believed it would have a moderate to a big impact in revealing cases of abuse where patients are reluctant to disclose.
- A modified version of the EASI¹ tool to identify and act on suspected cases of elder abuse in the moment in any interaction with the elderly in another professional capacity such as financial advisors.

Our senior population is now more ethnoculturally diverse due to more open Canadian immigration policies. 1 in 5 new Canadians are members of visible minority groups. Research on the intersection of culture and elder abuse is markedly absent. What is clear is that Canadian communities which are rich in diversity must be offered health programs about seniors care in multiple languages to support the connection between family members which will better mimic their cultural mores within the context of current best practices.

Respectfully submitted,

John E. Johnson and Sabby Duthie

About the Authors of “Elder Abuse: You Have a Role to Play”.

John E. Johnson

As a lawyer, I was introduced to the area of elder abuse by a great number of my clients whose senior relatives were being physically and psychologically abused by other members of their own family, mainly with the object of taking their property.

Sabby Duthie

I grew up in England in a southeast Asian family where respect for an older person was instilled within me and the responsibility for the care for the older person had to remain within the family unit.

In addition to studying law, I have been the owner and operator of two retirement homes in the Ottawa and Leeds & Grenville areas. I have just turned fifty years old myself and have learned valuable lessons

¹ Yaffe MJ, Wolfson C, Lithwick M, Weiss D. (2008). Development and Validation of a Tool to Improve Physician Identification of Elder Abuse: The Elder Abuse Suspicion Index (EASI). *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*. February 2008, 20(3), 276-300.



about aging, which my residents have shared with me during the years of working in the retirement home industry.