

**Study of Elder Abuse by the Standing Committee
on Justice and Human Rights**

Prepared by:

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Elder Abuse Prevention (ON)

Stop Abuse - Restore Respect

Prévention de la maltraitance envers les aînés (ON)

Arrêtez les mauvais traitements - Restaurez le respect

May 18th, 2021



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Date: May 18, 2021

To: The House of Commons' Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

From: Marta C. Hajek, Executive Director, Elder Abuse Prevention Ontario (EAPO)
Raeann Rideout, Director of Partnerships and Outreach

Subject: Study of Elder Abuse – Supplemental Brief to EAPO's Testimony to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights,

Following our testimony before you on May 11, 2021, we are pleased to submit some additional comments for consideration, building on the questions and issues you raised as part of your study on Elder Abuse.

While some of these issues were discussed at length, others were not. Yet, all are important. The solutions to elder abuse are as complex as the problems themselves. We remain steadfast in our belief that combating elder abuse and neglect starts with Prevention.

Once again, we sincerely thank you for addressing this matter and we remain at your disposal should you require any further assistance to advance this important work.

After a more than a year of witnessing the devastating impacts Covid-19 has had on the global community, particularly on older persons, many have stood up and taken notice. The difficult road lies ahead as we collectively get up and take appropriate action!

Together, we can and must address the elder abuse crisis in Canada.

Respectfully,

Marta C. Hajek
Executive Director

Raeann Rideout
Director, Partnerships and Outreach

Prevention

Stopping elder abuse, restoring respect and the reasonable expectation that seniors remain safe starts with Prevention. When it comes to the prevention of Elder Abuse, *knowledge is power*.

It is crucial that all Canadians understand that elder abuse is not only a violation of basic rights and freedoms, but that abuse and neglect takes many forms. Seniors, family members, (spouses, adult children), siblings, neighbours, friends, staff, volunteers, and other community members need to know how to recognize the signs of elder abuse, whether it be neglect, physical, psychological, sexual or financial in nature.

Canadians must know that there exists a myriad of preventative actions that can be taken to prevent abuse and neglect to avoid further victimization. This includes encouraging Canadians to communicate their wishes in advance, to plan for their future care, by updating their powers of attorney or wills, as their relationships change.

In addition to knowing the forms of elder abuse and the action to take to prevent it, it is equally important that Canadians know how to respond, when elder abuse does occur. In fact knowing when, where and how to report it, is crucial to preventing further harm, abuse or neglect from recurring.

Finally it is said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. This is certainly true when it comes to elder abuse. In short, it is more cost effective to prevent elder abuse than to respond to the tragic financial and social implications that abuse can have on individuals, families, communities. These instances of abuse have a direct cost to systems providing health, social, legal, police and other services.^{1 2}

As such it is necessary that the federal government support extensive education and training related to elder abuse prevention, in order to empower seniors, their loved-ones, and those who care for them to safe-guard their wellbeing.

National Strategy

We all have a role to play in preventing elder abuse and the federal government is in a unique position to ensure that all Canadian seniors are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

¹ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine/fullarticle/1675876>

² <https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMra1404688>

Setting new National Standards for long-term care is a step in the right direction in addressing the crisis in LTC in Canada and restoring Canadians' trust in these essential institutions. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), *"rates of elder abuse are high in institutions such as nursing homes and long-term care facilities, with 2 in 3 staff reporting that they have committed abuse in the past year."*

We know however, that only a fraction (7.1%) of seniors live in long-term care.³ In fact, 92.1% live at home or in other community settings. Elder abuse is not limited to long-term care homes. We are calling on the federal government to continue to support the development and implementation of a pan-Canadian elder abuse strategy that extends to all seniors, regardless of where they live.

This strategy spearheaded by the Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, with the support of the federal government, would contribute towards levelling the playing field and ensuring greater consistency across Canada in terms of response and intervention support for seniors and the resources available to help prevent elder abuse. Featured within the strategy – an awareness building campaign, that is multilingual and intersectional, is deeply needed so as to include all diverse populations in Canada.

Tethered Funding

The wellbeing of seniors and the prevention of elder abuse is everyone's responsibility and Canadian elected officials at all levels of government, have a moral and legal obligation to protect our most vulnerable.

By leverage its ability to engage in bilateral agreements with provinces and territories the federal government can better coordinate efforts aimed at stopping and preventing elder abuse in Canada. More specifically, we are asking that the federal government provide tethered funding to provinces and territories to support the execution of the National Elder Abuse Strategy, in all its facets.

Moreover, the Government of Canada's increased investments in long-term care and to keep Canadians safe in the wake of COVID-19 must be coupled with similar investments in community-based, non-profit organizations at the local, provincial, and federal levels. While these organizations are best positioned to raise awareness, to offer training (including to personal support workers, paramedics and first responders), and to provide services in a localized and with a culturally appropriate lens, their capacity and that of front-line workers is

³ https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-312-x/98-312-x2011003_4-eng.cfm

dwindling at an alarming rate. In Ontario, for instance, there were once 57 active Elder Abuse Networks -today, that number is down to 30. Meanwhile, call volumes to the 24-hour Seniors Safety Line have risen by 250% in Ontario, over this past year.

By providing tethered funding, the federal government would closely collaborate with its provincial and territorial counterparts, ensuring that organizations dedicated to preventing and stopping elder abuse, can do their work effectively, relying on stable, predictable, multi-year funding models.

Data Collection

We applaud the federal government's commitment to making informed, evidence-based decisions. Moreover, we are pleased, that the Minister of Seniors' Mandate Letter recognizes the need to "*invest in better data collection*" as a top priority "*to strengthen Canada's approach to elder abuse*". We, and our growing family of community partners, could not agree more.

To deliver on this priority, the federal government should consider implementing the following changes:

- First, it should require federal, federally funded and regulated agencies to collect disaggregated data on elder abuse and neglect, and to report on it.
- Second, it should integrate data collection requirements on incidents of elder abuse and neglect, into National Standards for long-term care.
- Third, it should invest in research to better understand the complexities of elder abuse and neglect to inform appropriate interventions and responses.
- Fourth, it should examine public policies through an intersectional lens, one that takes '*age*' into account. Ageism, as defined by the WHO, '*arises when age is used to categorize and divide people, in ways that lead to harm, disadvantage and injustice*'. Ageism drastically affects the quality of care and services for older persons and is at the core of elder abuse and neglect.

By implementing these changes, the federal government will be better positioned to meet the public's demand for increased accountability and to strengthen Canada's approach to Elder Abuse by standardizing data collection practices and making better informed decisions that ensure that every dollar invested, yields the maximum public benefit.

Criminal Code

We are pleased to see that the Committee is examining the sufficiency of current laws in combating elder abuse, as well as options to explicitly penalize those who neglect seniors under

their care. Making amendments to the Criminal Code and ensuring better law enforcement is most definitely an avenue worth exploring.

However, while we recognize that stricter laws and more severe penal sanctions can serve as deterrents, one must also acknowledge that these changes would penalize wrongdoers *after* the elder abuse takes place. It goes without saying that our goal should and must always be, to prevent the abuse from happening in the first place.

This brings us back full circle to, knowledge being the first step in prevention and providing information about alternate means of dealing with situations of abuse. Therefore we believe that making legislative amendments and increasing law enforcement capabilities should be treated as a potential complement – not a replacement – by devoting adequate training for front-line officers and providing resources to support the response in elder abuse/senior safety related issues.