

BRIEF PREPARED FOR:

THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS TO ACT AS A WITNESS FOR THEIR STUDY ON ELDER ABUSE

PREPARED BY:

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Thank you, Madam Chair and Honourable Members of the Standing Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the important work you are doing to study elder abuse in Canada.

I am proud to be able to describe to you the fine work being done in British Columbia to raise the awareness of abuse, neglect and self-neglect and to help our communities find ways to prevent it. The last two provincial governments have recognized that this issue is often hidden, little understood and extremely damaging to older and vulnerable adults throughout the province. For the last ten years they have funded the work that our organizations are doing, and it is my distinct pleasure to have been involved since the beginning.

I have written a more detailed description about how the BC Association of Community Response Networks and the Council to Reduce Elder Abuse are organized to work towards reducing elder abuse by concentrating on supporting a local community response.

You have heard from our colleagues, the Canadian Centre for Elder Law, the Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and Seniors First BC about the various kinds of abuse and how they impact the life of the abused person – especially when it is an older adult in care. And you have had some discussion about possible legal penalties and options which could be administered to the perpetrators of the abuse. I would like to take this time to discuss with you the role that the community can play in preventing the abuse before it becomes life-threatening. And I would also like to discuss why the abuse takes place and some remedies which could be supported by the federal government to help the abuser stop their destructive behaviour.

We believe that neighbours, friends and families of vulnerable adults play an important role in the prevention of elder abuse. About 8 years ago the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children at the University of Western Ontario received a three-year New Horizons grant from HRSDC to create a workshop which could be delivered across Canada to address the issue of Elder Abuse. It is called “It’s Not Right – Neighbours, Friends and Families”. It was developed with representation and input from all provinces and territories including the BC CRN. The theme is “Bystander Engagement”. The workshop describes ageism, what is abuse, what does it look like, how does it escalate, how can individuals respond safely and what resources are available in the community. We have trained all our contracted regional mentors and many community members to deliver this

material. It can now be delivered virtually. Many larger organizations are now training a staff member to be a presenter so the material can be delivered in house on an ongoing basis. The BC CRN provides all the materials, resources, training and support free of charge.

Videos which were produced to help to illustrate the various situations which arise in community are very powerful illustrations of what is happening and are a vehicle for discussion on taking action at the community level. There has been little, or no research done on helping the perpetrators of abuse and understanding why they abuse in the first place. We believe that this is an important part of any initiative to ultimately prevent abuse.,

Here are some examples of how abuse occurs:

1. Middle-aged children of aging parents finding it difficult to help their growing family's needs. They see their parents with assets and think it would be good if they could have their inheritance before their parents die. The parents want to help their children and often freely deplete their resources and then find themselves having to live with their children or, as is sometimes the case, end up homeless. Often when parents live with their children and start to require care and/or start to lose mental capacity, the children become frustrated and, what was financial abuse, can escalate into emotional and physical abuse.
2. When companies find themselves having to down-size or, as is happening during the COVID pandemic, having to lay-off workers, many wage-earners are finding themselves desperate and move back into their parents' home – often with children. This can create a tension which can result in all forms of abuse.
3. Immigrant families often bring older family members from their homeland to help look after the children. Sometimes these older adults are not provided with any freedom to create a safe life for themselves which is further hindered by the inability to speak English or French. They become lonely and extremely vulnerable to abuse – especially when the children grow up and they are no longer needed.
4. Adding to the challenges of reconciliation, decolonization and the impact of residential schools, some of the older indigenous Canadians are also faced with the pressures from their younger family members who expect them to provide financial support to help them deal with their own issues.
5. The issue of abuse in care facilities has been an eye-opener during the COVID epidemic. The abuse has been horrendous. However, institutions have historically been dealing with elder abuse between residents and their families; between residents and the staff; and between residents themselves. Again, much of it is hidden and kept invisible.

How can the Federal Government play a role in reducing elder abuse?

1. Understand that it is a systemic issue and that there is no quick fix.
2. When considering mandatory reporting understand that most elder abuse is perpetrated by family members and few parents will report or lay charges against their own child. This could have the effect of driving the abuse further underground. *As Krista James of the Canadian Centre for Elder Law said, "Abused adults don't want their family member to go to jail; they just want the abuse to stop".*
3. Support for Law Reform initiatives (CCEL)
4. Support for the key role played by the RCMP so they can respond effectively.
5. Support research projects which help seniors live safely on their own at home (Age-Well)
6. Support research into what causes elder abuse.
7. Support safe and accessible housing projects for elders. This should be a human right.
8. Support job creation and retraining for people trying to enter the workforce or are dealing with being down-sized or laid-off.
9. Support training for front-line workers in institutions as well as in community.
10. Support ESL projects for immigrant seniors along with other settlement services.
11. Support Indigenous communities in developing safe and healthy housing for their families – and elders.
12. Support mental health and addiction services – especially for families in crisis. No individual can be forced into therapy so there needs to be supports in place to help them want to change.
13. Support the development of safe and accessible transition houses for older adults and allow a longer stay (in BC a woman can only stay 30 days in a transition house)
14. Support the development of a National Elder Abuse Strategy

About the BC Association of Community Response Networks and the Council to Reduce Elder Abuse

In 2012 the BC Ombudsperson released a report which challenged the government to address elder abuse as a topic which should be addressed in the communities. The **BC Association of Community Response Networks (BC CRN)** had been working without stable funding for over ten years to bring the local community service providers, agencies, professionals, etc. together to form networks to create a coordinated response to abuse, neglect and self-neglect. The work is based on the core belief that communities know best how, where and by whom the abuse is taking place and how they can respond to prevent it. Of course, you can't prevent something you can't see so the first task is to raise the awareness. In February of 2012, the BC CRN was awarded three years of funding to support the building of the networks and to provide education, mentoring and resources including workshops to agencies, service providers and the public. Within those three years the BC CRN was able to build a robust infrastructure, contract 15 regional mentors who work in the local communities to do this work. By the end of Year 3 there were close to 100 communities being served. In 2021 there are now 81 CRNs serving 233 communities with at least three more CRNs almost ready to sign up.

The BC CRN has contracted with a professional evaluator to do an ongoing developmental evaluation to measure whether they have been able to increase the awareness of abuse, neglect and self-neglect throughout the province. He has just completed the tenth year of the evaluation which shows a high level of confidence in the CRNs and a steady increase in the awareness levels of abuse. (see the infographics attached). And his work is continuing.

At the same time, the government started a process to create a “Together to Reduce Elder Abuse” Strategy. They set up an office within the Ministry of Health to support this work. Stakeholders from all the involved sectors were brought together of regular meetings and work sessions to provide input into the strategy. This included the BC CRN, Seniors First BC, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, Ministry of Health, Regional Health Authorities, RCMP, Municipal Police, BC Public Guardian and Trustee, Community Living BC, BC Family Caregivers, BC Care Providers, BC Association of Friendship Centres, Council of Senior Citizens Organizations, Canadian Bar Association - BC Branch, Canadian Bankers Association, Credit Unions, Immigrant Servicing Associations, etc. The group was inclusive and fluid as the work proceeded.

Finally, the Strategy was released in 2013. It recommended the formation of the **Council to Reduce Elder Abuse (CREA)** to monitor the implementation of the Strategy and to provide a forum for sharing with one another and helping to build capacity in the building the awareness and prevention of elder abuse. The ministerial office support was terminated in 2016 but the value of the work being done by the Council was recognized and funding from the Ministry of Health continues to this day to provide minimal administrative and program support for the Council.

To learn more about our organizations please go to:

www.bccrns.ca

www.reduceelderabusebc.ca

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Baker, Executive Director
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2020 SURVEY FOCUS AREAS

-  Pandemic
-  CRN Working Styles
-  Participation Levels
-  Networks & Relationships
-  Impact

As of April 27, 2021



Report adult abuse is a problem in their community requiring a community response.



Reported seeing or hearing about a positive impact on the community as a result of the work of the CRN.



Of respondents who reported receiving the E-Connector newsletter "always" or "sometimes" read it.



More than a third reported seeing signs of increases of abuse or potential abuse during the pandemic.



56%, just over half, reported increased community awareness of adult abuse, neglect, and self-neglect.



Respondents continue reporting high levels of confidence in their CRN partners and in the CRN approach.

 81 CRNs serving 233 BC communities

HOW RESPONDENTS DESCRIBE THE CRN WORKING STYLE

-  Cooperative
-  Informal
-  Transparent
-  Fair

 AN ASSOCIATION OF Community Response Networks Supporting Adult Abuse and Neglect - Response

2020 MENTOR ASSESSMENT OF CRNs

-  Mentors interviewed coordinators about pandemic experiences
-  Assessment conducted through Zoom interviews
- 10**
Mentors participated
- 31**
CRNs interviewed

As of April 27, 2021

Participating CRNs serve



THEMES

Capacity Building: Connections grow like a web

-  Trust enables better collaboration
-  Relationships create useful responses
-  Bring service providers together

Action Learning: Stories + Reflection = Learning

-  Mentor to coordinator communication experience
-  Mentor to mentor communication experience
-  Aim-act-reflect cycle

STORY TOPICS

-  Adaptability
-  Technology
-  Telling stories, learning
-  Collaboration

Technology: Pro's and con's to virtual work

-  Face-to-face and virtual needed
-  Existing relationships easy to maintain
-  New relationships hard to build

Adaptability: Helping, resourcefulness, creativity, innovation

-  Rural differs from urban responses
-  Mainstream differs from Indigenous responses
-  Nuances of communities count