

Submission to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights



CANADIAN NETWORK for
the PREVENTION of ELDER ABUSE
RÉSEAU CANADIEN pour la PRÉVENTION
du MAUVAIS TRAITEMENT des AÎNÉS

Re: Bill C-16 (*Protecting Victims Act*)

From: Benedicte Schoepflin, Executive Director, Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (CNPEA); Dr. Amy Peirone, Coordinator, Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee Windsor-Essex, Board member CNPEA.

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Introduction

Bill C-16, titled *Protecting Victims Act*, which proposes to create a standalone coercive control offence, represents a commendable advancement in addressing coercive control within intimate relationships. However, its current scope overlooks the multifaceted nature of coercive control experienced by one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population - older adults. This narrow focus neglects the realities faced by older adults who may be subjected to coercive control by adult children, other relatives, caregivers, or individuals in positions of trust.

CNPEA is a member of the [Elder Justice Coalition](#), an ad hoc group of 16 organizations across Canada calling on parliamentarians to adopt a coercive control offence that extends beyond intimate partners and protects victims of elder abuse, consistent with approaches taken in several other jurisdictions.

Coercive control is a form of elder abuse that extends beyond intimate relationships

Coercive control, characterized by a pattern of behaviours aimed at dominating and manipulating another person, is not confined to intimate relationships. It can manifest as “gradual but escalating abuse, which can engender in the older adult a state of fear, anxiety and dependency, along with the loss of autonomous decision-making and personhood” ([Quinlan et al., 2024, p. 287](#)). **Research by Quinlan and colleagues highlights the experience of coercive control of older adults in filial relationships**, demonstrating how adult children often exert control over their parents through financial manipulation, isolation, and threats.

A report by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department titled *Understanding How Coercive Control Can Affect Older People*, further emphasizes that coercive control of older adults can be perpetrated by an intimate partner, family members, and others. The report

underscores that coercive control erodes an older person's freedom and independence, reinforcing the urgent need to recognize it as a form of elder abuse that extends beyond intimate relationships ([Australian Attorney General](#)).

The recognition and call to attention that coercive control affects older adults outside of intimate partner relationships is not new. In the House of [Commons Report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights](#) (2021), witnesses testified that “coercion and control...also play out in elder abuse situations...with one organization recommend[ing] that the offence proposed in Bill C-247 on coercion and control in intimate relationships be expanded to include elder abuse between family members beyond intimate partners and those living together” (p. 23).

Limiting coercive control legislation to intimate partner relationships “fails to account for the widespread abuse suffered by older adults at the hands of their own family members, particularly adult children and caregivers.” Legal expert Heather Campbell Pope further stresses that legal reforms should explicitly recognize coercive control as a key mechanism of elder abuse, rather than solely focusing on domestic violence frameworks ([Pope, 2024](#)).

Recent data highlight some concerning realities:

- Since 2018, family violence against older persons in Canada has increased by 49 percent, according to Statistics Canada.
- When a woman is killed by a family member, more than half the time, the accused is her own son (55%), according to 2024 statistics released by the [Canadian Femicide Observatory for Justice and Accountability](#). This figure is a stark reminder that **older women are at dual risk, from partners and children, when it comes to coercion and abuse, too often leading to their death.**
- A Seniors First BC report (2024-25) shows that in nearly two-thirds of calls made to the Seniors Abuse and Information Line, the alleged abuser was an adult child (32% sons and 32% daughters).
- Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council service data (2024–25) shows that when older adults seek elder abuse support, 55% involve immediate family members (parent, child, sibling), compared with 24% involving intimate partners.

Ageism and the Housing Crisis

Coercive control can trap older people in relationships where they cannot access financial resources or leave due to a lack of housing options. Ageism limits their ability to find work or secure financial independence. The current affordable housing crisis exacerbates these risks by reducing the availability of safe, low-cost housing, forcing some to stay in abusive relationships or live in poverty.

International Response to Coercive Control

Internationally, England and Wales have already taken steps to address this gap. The [Serious Crime Act \(2015\)](#) criminalizes controlling or coercive behavior in an intimate or family relationship, explicitly recognizing that coercive control is not limited to intimate partners, but also occurs within familial relationships, representing a broader element of abusive dynamics. This example highlights how other jurisdictions have expanded legal protections to account for coercive control within familial relationships.

In May 2025, Queensland, Australia, [criminalized coercive control](#) in domestic relationships, broadly defined as intimate personal relationships, family relationships, and informal care relationships. Adopting a similar approach in Canada would ensure older adults facing coercion from non-intimate partners are equally safeguarded.

Coercive Control in the Caregiving Context

The role of coercive control in elder abuse remains under examined in the caregiving dynamic, despite growing evidence that psychological and emotional abuse play a crucial role in how older adults experience control and mistreatment ([Deadrich, 2025](#)). **Caregivers, particularly those supporting individuals with cognitive impairments, may unintentionally or deliberately restrict an older adult's autonomy, often justifying these actions as necessary for care and protection.** As dementia and other cognitive conditions progress, some caregivers begin treating the older adult as a child, believing their role has shifted into that of a parental figure ([Oliveira et al., 2023](#)). This shift can lead to controlling behaviours, such as enforcing strict routines, monitoring and limiting their interactions, intruding on personal privacy, and withholding information in ways that diminish the individual's independence ([Oliveira et al., 2023](#)). In addition, caregivers who struggle with stress, frustration, or feelings of inadequacy may become more prone to controlling behaviours as a way to regain a sense of order or authority, which can escalate into psychological mistreatment, including criticism, verbal aggression, and blaming, leading to a dynamic whereby the older adult feels powerless ([Ali & Bokharey, 2016](#)). Understanding coercive control within caregiving relationships is essential for shaping policy responses to elder abuse. If these behaviours remain unaddressed, many older adults, especially those with cognitive challenges, will continue to face subtle yet deeply damaging forms of manipulation that undermine their dignity and self-determination.

Along with other members of the Elder Justice Coalition, we propose amending Bill C-16 so the coercive control offence applies beyond intimate partners and includes relatives. After two years, the law should be reviewed to consider extending it to informal caregivers and other relationships of trust and dependence.

Conclusion:

While Bill C-16 is a positive step toward addressing coercive control, **but its limitation to intimate partner relationships neglects the complex and pervasive nature of such abuse**

against older adults. Research and real-world cases demonstrate that coercive control is often perpetrated by adult children and others in positions of trust. **Expanding legislative definitions to include these relationships is essential to provide comprehensive protection for this vulnerable and growing segment of our population.** Without such legal recognition, older adults who are particularly vulnerable to coercion, financial exploitation, and manipulation, will remain invisible and inadequately protected under the law.

Respectfully submitted by:

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About CNPEA:

The Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (CNPEA) is a pan-Canadian network supported by leaders in aging, research, law, health care, elder abuse prevention and response, among others. CNPEA builds awareness, support, and capacity for a coordinated pan-Canadian approach to the prevention of elder abuse and neglect. We promote the rights of older adults through knowledge mobilization, collaboration, policy reform, and education. www.cnpea.ca.