

Elder Abuse Policy

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to guide commitment of all staff of Homes North in preventing and responding appropriately to the abuse of older people in line with the *Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Older People: NSW Interagency Policy 2015*. In addition, Homes North will act in the best interests of an older person who has been abused by upholding their rights and ensuring that the dignity and respect of older people accessing services is upheld at all times.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Homes North staff in preventing and responding to the abuse of older people.

3. Policy statement

Homes North is committed to ensuring that all older tenants are protected from all forms of abuse.

This policy outlines the key principles of working with older people to identify abuse and recognise key considerations in responding to abuse of older people.

4. Definition of Elder Abuse

Homes North has adopted the World Health Organisation definition of elder abuse as cited in the *Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Older People: NSW Interagency Policy 2015*. Elder abuse can be 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”.

Elder abuse can take various forms such as financial, psychological (including social isolation) or emotional, physical and sexual abuse. It can also be the result of intentional or unintentional neglect.

5. Key principles of working with older people

Homes North recognises that abuse of older people does exist in the community and supports the general principle that older people have the right to:

- be treated with dignity and respect
- make their own decisions and choices
- live in a safe environment
- access the protections available to other adults in the community

6. Commitment

Homes North is committed to dealing effectively with the abuse of older people and is committed to:

- Creating a climate of trust where staff are encouraged, comfortable and confident about identifying and responding to the abuse of older people.
- Developing a process to deal with reports thoroughly and taking appropriate action to address the reported abuse and prevent it from reoccurring.
- Providing resources and training for staff about how to identify and respond to the abuse of older people.
- Properly managing any workplace issues that the allegations identify or that result from a report or any other identified problem (e.g. staff safety).
- Working collaboratively within the agency and across agencies to achieve the best outcome for the older person and prevent abuse from reoccurring (e.g. share and review effective intervention and prevention strategies).

7. Identifying abuse

All staff play an important role in identifying suspected abuse and protecting older people by responding to suspected cases of abuse. Homes North recognises five (5) forms of abuse of older people within NSW: financial abuse, psychological abuse (including social isolation), neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse. This policy embodies the view that social isolation is a key risk factor and that older people experiencing abuse often lack social connection. Staff have a duty of care to report incidents, suspected incidents and/or changes in well-being to their manager (refer to Homes North procedures).

8. Key considerations in responding to the abuse of older people

8.1 Practices and partnerships

Homes North will respond promptly in situations of abuse of older people. Where abuse or risk of abuse of an older person has been identified Homes North will, in the first instance assess the immediate safety of the older person. If there is no immediate risk, Homes North will consider all possible referral options including the local Age Care Assessment Team, service providers working with older people and seeking advice from the NSW Elder Abuse Helpline and Resource Unit.

8.2 Emergency response

Regardless of the victim's views, agencies must ensure workers report to NSW Police any instances where:

- The abusive situation results in serious injury inflicted on the victim.
- The perpetrator has access to a gun and is threatening to cause physical injury to any person.
- The perpetrator is using or carrying a weapon (including guns, knives or any other weapon capable of injuring a person) in a manner likely to cause physical injury to any person or likely to cause a reasonable person to fear for their safety.
- An immediate serious risk to individual/s or public safety exists.

- Workers are threatened.

8.3 Mental capacity and consent

In NSW there is a legal presumption that all adults have the mental (cognitive) capacity and ability to make their own decisions until proven otherwise.

A person lacking capacity to act or make decisions may need a guardian or financial manager if they have not appointed an enduring power of attorney or enduring guardian while they are capable.

9. Staff roles and responsibilities

Managers

Managers play a lead role in identifying and responding to the abuse of older people in accordance with policies and protocols and consistent with the Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Older People: NSW Interagency Policy 2015. Consideration of safety, protection, consent, confidentiality and duty of care issues:

- Assess and respond to immediate and serious risk of harm of an older person and exercise duty of care to make reports to the Police.
- Support staff that respond to an emergency situation and protect evidence.
- Identify response options including collection of information about what the older person wants for referral options.
- Discuss options with the older person.
- Support the older person with empathy, asking what the older person wants and exploring needs.
- Refer, if appropriate, to a specialist response agency for further assessment, investigation or to negotiate a support plan such as via the MyAgedCare Portal
- Complete agency specific documentation.
- Support the identifier of abuse, including providing access to debriefing and training such as an Employee Assistance Program.
- Capacity decisions: referral to a specialist service or professional with the expertise to assess capacity such as legal practitioners, medical practitioners, specialist medical officers or Aged Care Assessment Teams.

Staff

Staff play a key role in responding to abuse situations by identifying abuse (potential, suspected or actual) reporting to the manager, documenting and following agency procedures.

- In an emergency situation, contacting the NSW Police and/or other emergency services and protect evidence.
- Initial detection of abuse.
- Support the older person with empathy, asking what the older person wants and exploring needs.
- If safe to do so, inform the alleged victim of the responsibility to tell a senior staff member about concerns for the older person's health, safety or well-being.
- Ensure any property damage is assessed and rectified.

- Ensure that any additional security measures, such as crim-safe screen doors, are recommended.
- Recommend tenant acquire a “vita call” device for future emergencies.
- Inform managers about what happened and what was noticed, said and done in the situation.
- Referral, if appropriate, to a specialist response agency for further assessment, investigation or to negotiate a support plan.
- Documentation and reporting.
- Participation in debriefing where appropriate.
- If there is an issue about the older person’s mental capacity to act or make decisions, seek advice from the manager.

10. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the:

Chief Executive Officer to ensure this policy and associated procedures are applied and committed to by the Senior Management Team.

Senior Housing Managers & Asset Manager to provide the team with timely policy-related support and guidance, to ensure familiarity with this policy and related procedures, to commit to following them accordingly and where relevant, promote the policy to their team.

Employees to ensure they comply with this policy, be responsible for their own behaviour and if required, attend relevant training as provided by the company from time to time.

11. Where to get more information

Contact Homes North on 67725133 or armidale@homesnorth.org.au.

For further information on Elder Abuse contact NSW Elder Abuse Helpline & Resource Unit at: <http://elderabusehelpline.com.au/>

Relevant legislation

- [Residential Tenancy Act 2010](#)

Related documents/resources

- Homes North Domestic and Family Violence Policy
- Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Older People: NSW Interagency Policy 2015 Appeals Policy

National Community Housing Standards

Standard 3.1 – Tenant rights

Work Health & Safety Act 2011

Age Care Act 1997

NSW Charter of Victims Rights

NSW Code of Practice for the Charter of Victims Rights

Policy information

Policy no: 3.1.1\1

Adopted: April 2017