



New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services Submission to the Joint Venture Business Unit on the Family Violence and Sexual Violence National Strategy Older People’s Policy Group Perspective

Introduction

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the National Strategy and Action Plans to eliminate family violence and sexual violence. NZCCSS has six foundation members; the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.

Our member organisations have a long history of working with older people both in residential care settings and in the community delivering a range of services including: retirement villages, rest home care, specialist dementia hospital care, day care programmes, and home support. Our members also provide a range of mainstream support services which assist older people living in hardship in the community. These services include housing support, budget assistance, access to food and other necessities, and welfare advocacy. Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website www.nzccss.org.nz

NZCCSS Feedback on the proposed Vision, Principles and Focus Areas

NZCCSS is broadly supportive of the proposed vision, principles and focus areas. The following comments relate to specific areas raised by our membership.

Vision – Our Vision is for the end of family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa New Zealand – so that people are safe, well, and thriving across the life span

NZCCSS recommends the inclusion of ‘*across the life span*’ to the proposed vision. Family violence and sexual violence occur across the life span from young to old. Elder abuse is seen to be increasing in New Zealand, and we believe this is compounded by a lack of awareness of the drivers, symptoms and responses to elder abuse. Including a reference to ‘*across the life span*’ in the vision statement makes transparent old age is not a protector from violence in all of its forms.

Our Principles – how will we work together to achieve the vision?

Equitable and inclusive approaches - To ensure that people are free from discrimination, receive culturally informed support, and their inherent dignity and mana is upheld

In addition to the above principle concerning equitable and inclusive approaches, the NZCCSS recommends the inclusion of an equity principle to reflect the rights of all New Zealanders to access a liveable household income to enable them to live a *'safe, well and thriving life'*. Our members report inadequate income (waged and income support) as a significant factor underpinning stressful relationships in families and whānau which can exacerbate family violence including elder abuse. Inadequate housing (overcrowding, unhealthy living conditions) is a related factor which often stems from an inadequate household income.

In the context of older people, there are a range of scenarios which identify income and housing as factors of elder abuse. For example, housing shortages in New Zealand are placing pressure on many families. A common response to rising rents and cost of living is seeing older people invite relatives to live with them. Unfortunately this is leading to increased costs for older people in this situation and in some cases, financial abuse.

Another form of elder abuse identified by members is neglect. The type of scenario is where the older person is invited into the relative's house with the best of intentions however the pressure of life on the relative means that the older person faces neglect. Usually in these cases there is significant denial by the family / whānau that anything is wrong because they still think they can adequately support the person.

Focus area – Build awareness and capability across the public sector and NGO workforce

"Strengthen workforces to prevent and respond to family violence and sexual violence - People and communities are supported by workforces that are diverse, skilled, resourced and have clearly defined roles in responding to and preventing family violence and sexual violence. Services are shaped to meet specific needs including the history, culture and situation of people and whanau."

Elder abuse occurs in a wide range of settings both in the community and in residential facilities. However, while people are increasingly aware of elder abuse, particularly financial abuse, the full extent of this type of violence remains hidden. The victim is often too ashamed or afraid to identify a family member or someone they depend on as a perpetrator and/or do not recognise them as a perpetrator. In some instances, older people may willingly be a victim as paying someone to spend time with them and providing an environment for potential abuse to occur is better than being lonely.

Therefore, a great deal of knowledge and skill is required to identify the signs of elder abuse and to understand what is an appropriate response. More education and training are needed among services providing support to older people (Governmental, private and NGO) to recognise all forms of elder abuse, which occur in a wide variety of settings (including rest homes). In addition, specific knowledge and training is needed to understand and respond to sexual abuse which occurs within the context of cognitive decline both in terms of the perpetrator and victim.

The broader community also needs to be aware of the signs of elder abuse, and how best to respond. Sufficient public funding is needed to support an ongoing public health campaign as part of a preventative strategy.

Banking services conditions contributing to elder abuse

NZCCSS members have raised concern about changes to the banking sector impacting disproportionately on older people and other vulnerable groups. The removal of cheques is reducing the security of many of our older generation's finances. Many older people are not able to transition to phone or internet banking services. In these cases, our members report that some older people provide pin and password access details to trusted families and friends. Not only is this a breach of conditions in relation to bank policy, it opens many elder people up to financial abuse.