Overview

# Addressing Elder Abuse

A Toolkit for Developing a Coordinated Community Response

Alberta

# Table of Contents

**STEP 1 – Starting the Process**
a. Begin the Conversation
b. Acknowledge the Issue of Elder Abuse
c. Engage and Raise Awareness with Community Partners

**STEP 2 – Building the Team**
a. Identify Key Stakeholders
b. Gather Stakeholders
c. Compile a Community Services Inventory
d. Establish a Common Vision/Mission Statement
e. Guiding Principles
f. Decision Tree/Flow Chart

**STEP 3 – Planning the CCR**
a. Identify Strengths and Gaps
b. Determine Priorities
c. Establish Formal Structure
d. Formal Structure Tools
e. Protocols – Understanding Who Does What

**STEP 4 – Implementing the CCR**
a. Implementing the Plan
b. Team Communication
c. Keeping Team Motivation Up!
d. Dynamics of Working Collaboration
e. Team Building

**STEP 5 – Evaluating the Process**
a. Formulate an Evaluation Framework
b. Maintaining the Momentum
c. Re-evaluate and Enhance

# Acknowledge Current and Emerging Issues Impacting Older Adults

Alberta seniors represent a growing and culturally diverse population. They lead varying lifestyles, have different income levels, experience varied health circumstances and manage personal and social needs that can vary dramatically. There are many different factors and situations that can negatively impact older adults such as bullying, social isolation, ageism or scams and frauds that could happen to anyone of any age.

The *Criminal Code of Canada* is in place to protect all Canadians from the types of conduct that constitute criminal offences. The code establishes the type and degree of punishment that may be imposed when an individual is convicted of an offence, and it describes the procedures to be followed throughout the criminal process. It is important police are contacted when someone believes an individual is being abused criminally.

Other specific legislation in Alberta protects older adults, including:

- *Protection for Persons in Care Act* for those who live in publically-funded care facilities.

- *Residential Tenancies Act* for those who live in rental properties.

- *Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act* for those who are experiencing cognitive decline.

- *Protection Against Family Violence Act* for those who are experiencing family violence.

The purpose of this toolkit is to develop a community-specific, multi-disciplinary approach to addressing elder abuse. It is not intended to replace legal protections for seniors who are experiencing neglect or abuse that is criminal in nature. Working through this toolkit to develop a model to address elder abuse is the first step in developing partnerships, building teams and streamlining services to support aging Albertans.

# Purpose

Addressing elder abuse is everyone's responsibility. We can all play a role in prevention. The purpose of this toolkit is to support communities, organizations and individuals to provide a multi-disciplinary approach to prevent and address elder abuse. The toolkit outlines a five-step process for developing a Coordinated Community Response (CCR) framework and includes definitions, templates, worksheets and handouts.

**CCRs are designed to:**

Undertake education, advocacy and other strategies to prevent and reduce elder abuse, making the community a safer place for older adults.

Improve the community's ability to provide assistance to people impacted by elder abuse through the delivery of prevention, intervention and wrap-around services.

# Definition

Elder abuse is any action or inaction by self or others that jeopardizes the health or well-being of any older adult.  Elder abuse can take several forms, including financial, emotional, physical, sexual, medication and neglect.

Elder abuse is complex and no individual or organization can address the challenges alone. Elder abuse is a form of family violence. Like other types of family violence, the dynamics of elder abuse are complex. Abuse is a pattern of controlling behaviour. In families, an abusive person can use many ways to gain power over another family member. Shame or guilt may stop an older adult from revealing abuse. Sometimes victims simply do not have the capacity to report it.

It requires collective action on the part of many different sectors to prevent, reduce and respond to elder abuse. The most effective actions are those taken at the community level. People who are located closest to seniors and see them frequently are best positioned to spot potential abuse and intervene.

# Common Characteristics of a Coordinated Community Response

CCRs can look different in each community; however, effective CCRs share a number of common characteristics, including:

- **A common philosophical framework.** Successful CCRs have a common philosophy that underlies the way they prevent, reduce and address instances of elder abuse. To develop a philosophical framework consider the unique factors of a community, such as population, geography, available community and financial resources and the level of cooperation and commitment of practitioners and decision-makers within each agency. Developing a philosophical framework involves challenging each other and changing how a community thinks about violence.

- **A set of consistent policies and protocols to coordinate how those involved in the response will work together.** Together, these policies and protocols help define the roles of those involved in the response and how they will deliver assistance.

- **A process for coordinating information exchange and communication among those involved in the response.** Since this work involves collaboration and partnership among many individuals and organizations, information sharing and effective communication is essential.

- **Prevention measures and activities.** In addition to assisting people impacted by elder abuse, successful responses work to prevent and reduce elder abuse through education, awareness and other community prevention strategies.

- **The provision of resources and services to those impacted by elder abuse.** This starts with acknowledging elder abuse happens. Elder abuse is a complex and multi-faceted challenge requiring action from many different sectors to effectively prevent, reduce and respond to it. A successful response is about getting assistance to those who need it, when and where they need it.

- **A consent based data collection system for monitoring and tracking cases.** Data is essential, both for delivering assistance to victims and for understanding how well the response is meeting its objectives.

- **Ongoing training and evaluation.** Successful CCRs are ones that are always learning and continuously improving based on this learning.

# Coordinated Community Response Process

*CCRs help ensure "Alberta communities have capacity to work with other partners to provide coordinated supports that prevent and respond to elder abuse, including effective intervention resources."[1]*

**Building for success: five steps to develop a CCR framework**

**STARTING THE PROCESS**

**1**

- Begin the conversation
- Acknowledge elder abuse is happening in your community/region
- Engage and educate the community on elder abuse
- Identify "why now?"

**2** **BUILDING THE TEAM**

- Identify key stakeholders
- Gather stakeholders
- Compile community services inventory

**3** **PLANNING THE COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE**

- Identify gaps and challenges
- Build a strong foundation by:
  - Identifying goals
  - Identifying actions
- Create logic model
- Develop protocols

**IMPLEMENTING THE COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE**

**4**

- Communicate the plan
- Implement the coordinated community response

**EVALUATING THE PROCESS**

**5**

- Identify how success will be measured
- Celebrate your success
- Maintain the momentum
- Re-evaluate and enhance model

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[1] "Addressing Elder Abuse in Alberta: A Strategy for Collective Action" Alberta Government

The content in this toolkit has been drawn from many sources, which are cited throughout the toolkit, including experiences from other jurisdictions. It reflects best practices from others who have developed CCRs to similar social issues.

Every community has different circumstances, strengths, challenges and priorities when it comes to addressing elder abuse. You can adapt and tailor this toolkit in whatever ways are most helpful for your community's situation.

> *"The very best, most successful and most sustainable collaborative cultures have invested in the infrastructure that allows it to be part of who they are, not just what they do. For many progressive [organizations/communities], that means making collaboration not just something that's nice to have, but something that is deliberately designed for."* [2]

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[2] "Collaboration in Culture and Practice: Creating value, investing in idea, and discovering untapped internal knowledge by enabling teams to work together" Sideraworks.com. <http://l1.osdimg.com/online/dam/pdf/en/resources/wp/Sideraworks-GoToWebinar-Collaboration-in-culture-and-in-practice-white-paper.pdf> 2 August 2016.