

# Key Insights from the AIFS Elder Abuse Research Program

**PRESENTED BY JOHN DE MAIO**

RESEARCH FELLOW, FAMILY LAW, FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ELDER ABUSE  
RESEARCH PROGRAM | AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF FAMILY STUDIES  
ELDER AND SUCCESSION LAW AFTERNOON | WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2025





**Australian Government**  
**Australian Institute of  
Family Studies**



Discovering what works for families  
Learn more at [aifs.gov.au](https://aifs.gov.au)

# Key insights from AIFS Elder Abuse Research Program

ACT Law Society Elder Law Intensive, March 26, 2025

# Acknowledgement of Country

---



The Australian Institute of Family Studies acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

Draw on findings from two pieces of AIFS research

1. National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study (NEAPS) –
  - prevalence of abuse and mistreatment, who commits abuse, and help seeking behaviours
  - legal arrangements – wills and power of attorney
2. AIFS evaluation of the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (2019-2023)
  - appropriateness, efficiency and effectiveness of the plan
  - recommendations to guide future actions

# National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final Report

APRIL 2021

Lixia Qu, Rae Kaspiw, Rachel Carson, Dinika Roopani,  
John De Maio, Jacqui Harvey, Briony Horsfall



Qu, L., Kaspiw, R., Carson, R., Roopani, D.,  
De Maio, J., Harvey, J., Horsfall, B. (2021)  
*National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Final  
Report*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of  
Family Studies.

# Prevalence

Overall prevalence rate of abuse is **15%**

**12%**



Psychological abuse

**4%**



Multiple types of abuse

**3%**



Neglect

**2%**



Financial abuse

**2%**



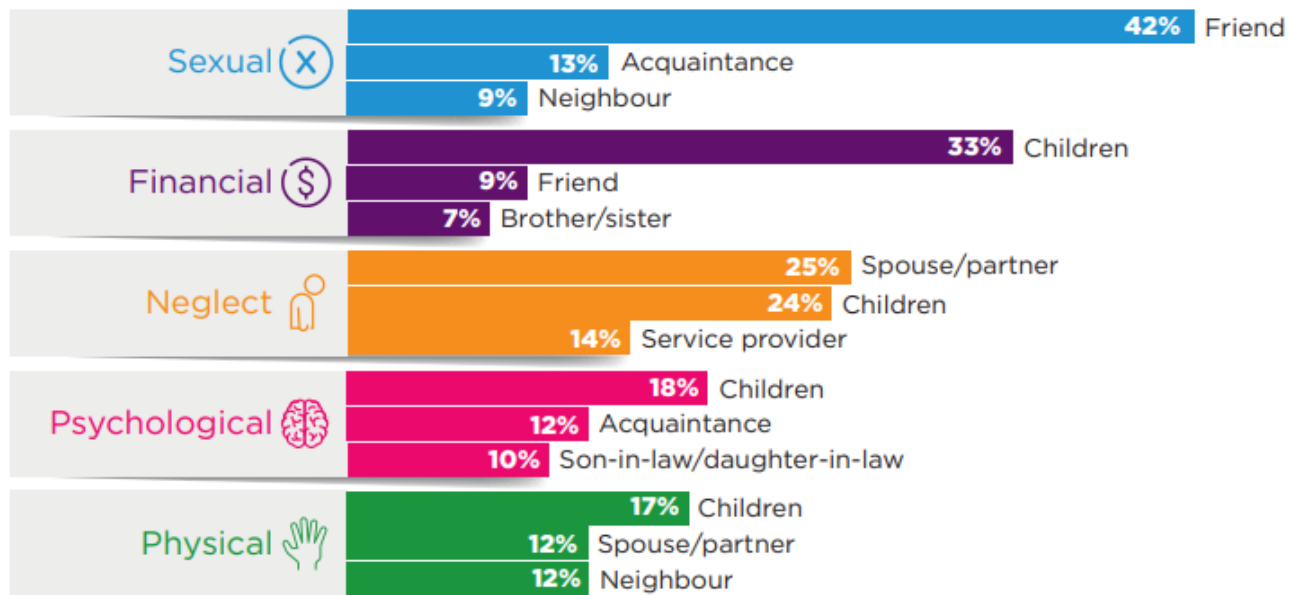
Physical abuse

**1%**



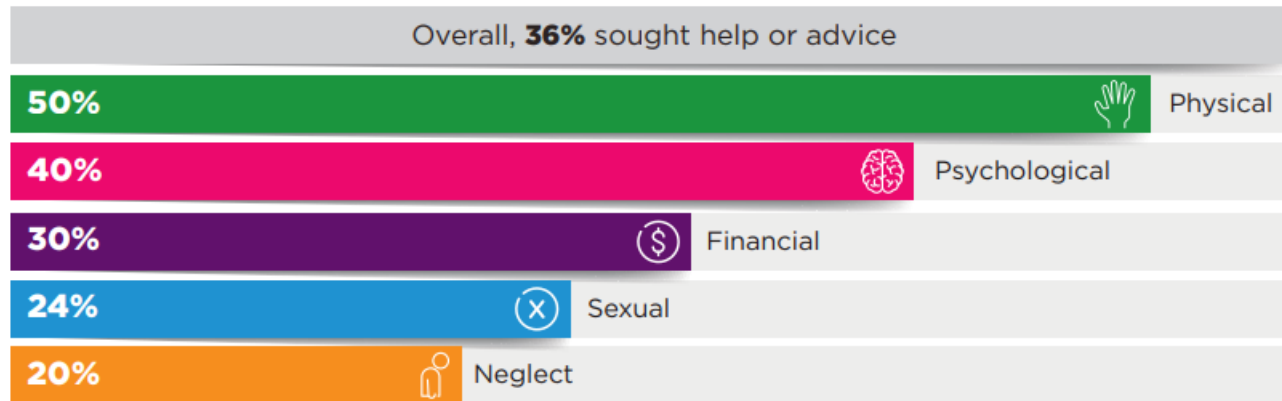
Sexual abuse

# Main perpetrator groups for each elder abuse sub-type



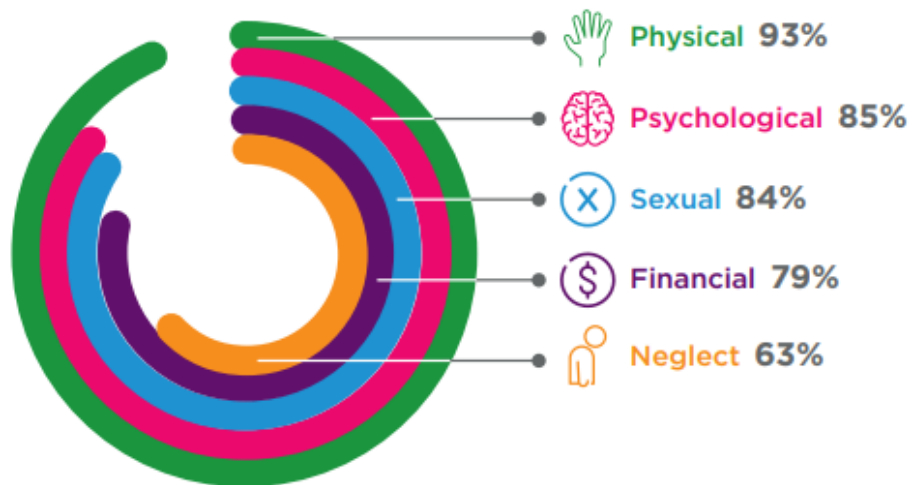


# Do people who experience elder abuse seek help?

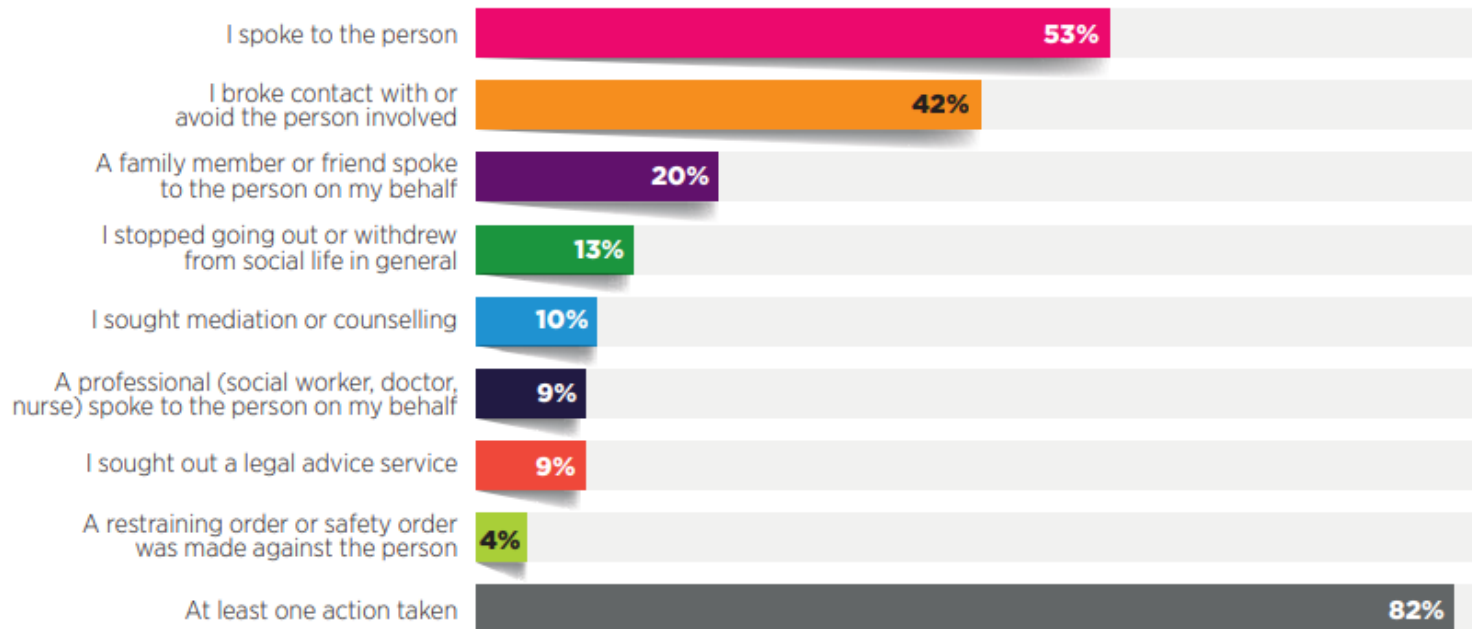




# Whether any action taken to stop the abuse



# Actions taken to stop the abuse



# How common is it for older people to have a will?



**88%** of older people surveyed had a **will**.  
Patterns were similar for men and women.



## This proportion increased with age

- 80% of those aged 65-69 years
- 91% of people in the 75-79 age group, and
- 97% in the oldest age group (85+ years)

# How common is it for older people to appoint an enduring power of attorney?



**52%** of older people had granted someone an enduring **power of attorney**.



Common  
types of  
power of  
attorney:



**79%**  
both financial  
& medical  
matters

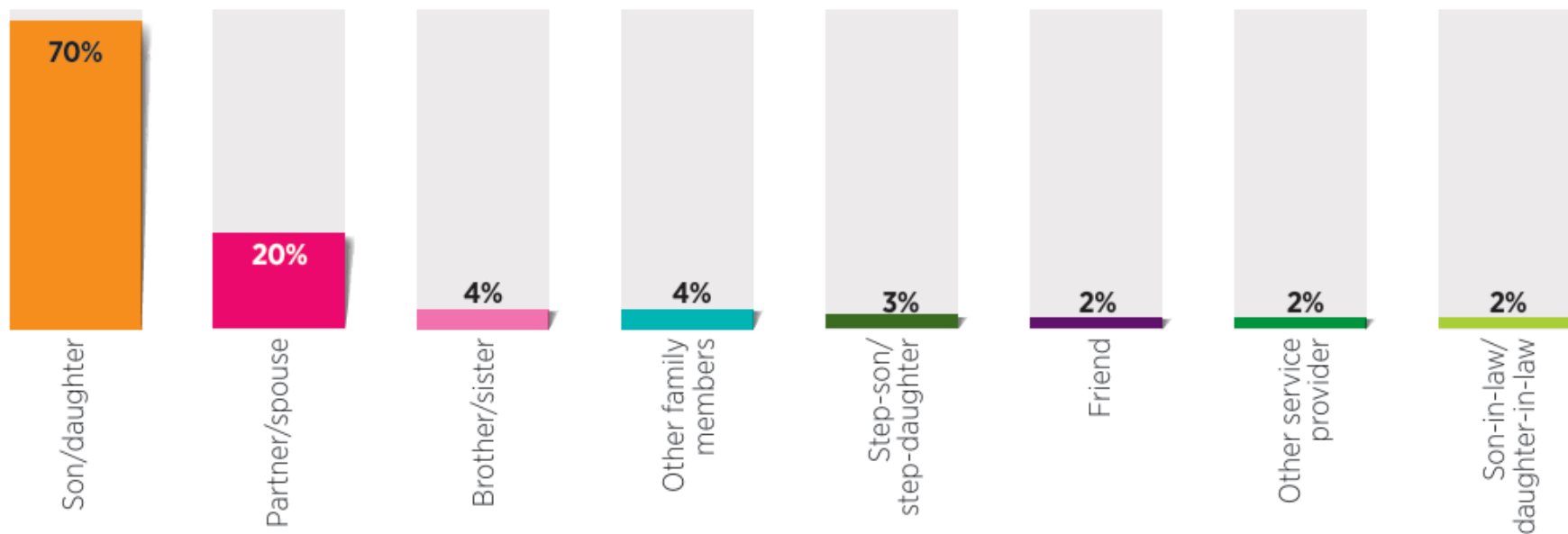


**12%**  
only  
financial  
matters



**5%**  
only  
medical  
matters

# Who is granted a power of attorney



# Advanced planning among the CALD sub-sample

Type of advance planning, by gender	Speak English only at home (%)	Speak a language other than English at home (%)
Having a will	90.2	76.5*
Having ever granted POA to someone	53.8	41.2*
Having a family agreement	2.7	4.2
<i>Number of participants (base)</i>	6,392	608

**Notes:** Weighted data and unweighted sample sizes. The asterisks indicate that the difference between the two groups is statistically significant based on a design based F-test (\* $p < 0.05$ )

# Prevalence of elder abuse and advance planning arrangements

---

- **The prevalence of elder abuse varied according to type of advance planning arrangement.**
- Having a will was associated with a lower level of elder abuse, with 14% of older people with a will reporting an experience of at least one type of elder abuse, compared to 20% of those without a will.
- Having a power of attorney was also associated with a lower level of elder abuse.
  - Thirteen per cent of older people with an active power of attorney (i.e. can be used when needed) reported an experience of elder abuse, compared to 17% of those without a power of attorney. It was 15% for those who had a power of attorney that was no longer active.





**Australian Government**  
**Australian Institute of  
Family Studies**



Discovering what works for families  
Learn more at [aifs.gov.au](https://aifs.gov.au)

# Insights from the Evaluation of the *National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019-2023*

# Background

---

- Establishment and scope of National Plan
- Issues considered in the Evaluation:
  - whether the National Plan focused efforts in response to the abuse of older people in Australia
  - how, and to what extent, the National Plan has been effective in increasing the focus on preventing and responding to the abuse of older people and creating a foundation for further action
  - whether the priority areas in the National Plan and their subsequent initiatives have been achieved, are ongoing (to continue) or should no longer be priorities for governments
  - whether the term of the National Plan was sufficient to achieve the stated initiatives and consider a suitable term for future iterations

# Research Design

Eight different elements were used to evaluate the National Plan

1



**Desktop review**

5



**Interviews with professionals**

2



**Synthesis of previous evaluations**

6



**Focus groups with professionals**

3



**Targeted consultations**

7



**Delphi survey of professionals**

4

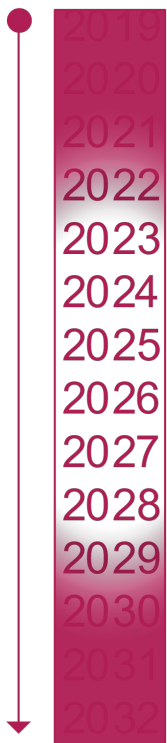


**Survey of community members**

8



**Case studies**



## **Commitment to the National Plan as a mechanism to guide the prevention of, and response to, the abuse of older people in Australia**

- Actions included service provision such as awareness-raising, education and training, advocacy, legal assistance, legislative and policy reform and safeguarding
- Longer term National Plan and regular monitoring of progress against objectives

# Findings – Appropriateness of the National Plan



- **Insights from the Survey of Community Members**
  - **Most participants unaware of the National Plan**
  - More than 2/3rds aware of information and awareness raising material about abuse of older people
- **Insights from professionals**
  - **Need for awareness-raising activities**, future research and safeguarding

# Findings – Efficiency of the National Plan



## National Plan supports sharing of information and learnings about awareness-raising, prevention and response activities

- Collaborative approach underpinned the development of National Plan
- Identification of the:
  - need to build relationships with target populations address barriers to accessing services, programs and initiatives to address their specific needs
  - importance of building and developing relationships across services and to support collaborative and coordinated and multi-disciplinary service provision
  - need for accessible information and awareness materials
  - need for support for key professionals to screen, assess and respond to abuse



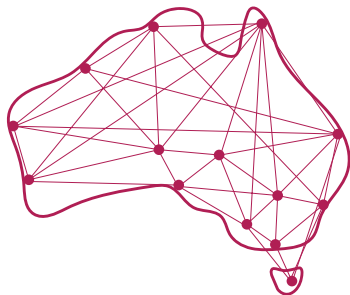
## **National Plan supported improved understanding of the abuse of older people**

However, there remains a need for:

- improvements in sector and general community awareness
- further research to understand abuse in the context of First Nations peoples
- further research to understand abuse in the context of CALD and LGBTIQ+ older people, people in aged care & older people with a disability or cognitive impairment



# Findings – Effectiveness of the National Plan



**Some jurisdictions reported effective collaboration with agencies, frontline organisations and government departments on the National Plan but that there was a need for more:**

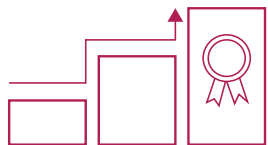
- **engagement between governments** to share knowledge and lessons learned
- **face-to-face engagement** about the National Plan



# Findings – Effectiveness of the National Plan

Findings also indicated **a need for:**

- **further training and professional development** to support professionals to better screen, assess and respond to people experiencing abuse and people engaging in abuse
- measures to address advice and actions from professionals where this was ineffective, too generalist or costly in nature



# Recommendations to guide future action

---

- **Maximise impact through increased opportunities for engagement and information sharing** including:
  - consideration of longer operational period, regular reviews & shorter-term action plans
  - examination and assessment of actions and improved data sharing
- **Build on existing knowledge about the abuse of older people and guide improvements in practice** including by:
  - building evidence-base and reviewing effectiveness of legislative frameworks

# Recommendations to guide future action

---

- **Take further action to prevent and safeguard people from abuse** including:
  - exploring potential for additional adult safeguarding measures/units and increasing focus on intervention and prevention
  - exploring opportunities to focus on older carers
- **Develop individual capacity of older people to recognise abuse and to become more aware of their rights** by:
  - exploring and increasing education and awareness raising activities

# Recommendations to guide future action

---

- **Improve the capacity of sectors and services for older people affected by the abuse by:**
  - exploring options for provision of information in more accessible formats
  - exploring systematic approach to risk assessment
  - increasing focus on culturally appropriate responses and recruitment of service staff from diverse communities
  - exploring needs of frontline services to support more responsive service provision

# Acknowledgements

---

- The Australian Government Attorney-General's Department



**Australian Government**  

---

**Attorney-General's Department**

- Australian State and Territory Government Departments supporting the evaluation
- Participants in the qualitative and quantitative components of the research
- Co-authors on the AIFS research reports and papers, particularly Dr Jade McEwen and Dr Rae Kaspiw and research partners at the National Ageing Research Institute

# Discussion





**actlaw**  
society

Law Society of the Australian Capital Territory  
Phone 02 6274 0333 | [memberconnect@actlawsociety.asn.au](mailto:memberconnect@actlawsociety.asn.au)

[actlawsociety.asn.au](http://actlawsociety.asn.au)