

MEDIA RELEASE

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ACTION NEEDED TO STOP ABUSE OF OUR MOST VULNERABLE

Emotional and financial abuse against the aged and the disabled are too often being dismissed by police and other authorities as 'family issues', according to a peak advocacy body.

A senate inquiry will today issue a report into violence, abuse and neglect towards people with a disability (including the aged) in institutions and in-home care.

The inquiry heard disturbing reports of guardians and decision makers - often family members - appointed to help and protect vulnerable Australians, instead using their authority to misappropriate money for themselves, or cut off vulnerable people from family, friends and other loved ones.

Queensland Aged and Disability Advocacy (QADA) CEO Geoff Rowe said action needed to be taken at a state and federal level to protect our most vulnerable members of society.

"We have seen numerous instances in which a person has been granted legal responsibility to make decisions in the interests of an older person or a person with a disability, but abused that position to fund their own lifestyle," Mr Rowe said.

"Sadly, there is a reluctance to treat this as criminal behaviour simply because it happens to a family member.

"We all know violence within families is unacceptable and this financial abuse, which is fraud, should be taken just as seriously."

QADA representatives gave evidence before the inquiry and provided a submission which outlined cases of emotional and financial abuse of the aged and those with a disability.

These included cases where a woman was appointed to have decision making responsibility for her brother, a young man with an intellectual disability, but used that authority to make her brother mow her lawn, then used her brother's money to pay a friend for gardening services at above market rates.

QADA also provided examples of relatives using their position of authority to stifle complaints about their abusive behaviour, including ordering nursing homes to ban contact from friends, relatives and even professional advocates such as QADA.

The not-for-profit group identified that vulnerable Australians seeking to overturn an enduring power of attorney may be expected to fill out a 19-page application form, accompanied by a 10-page doctor's report.

"We need to give more power back to those with a disability and not assume they cannot speak for themselves. I am calling for easier, independent ways in which people can raise their serious concerns and be heard. Rather than the matter being heard by QCAT, it should be heard in the Magistrates Court which can direct restitution and refund of monies. That would be fairer, and be recognition of the true injustice that has been done. "

Media contact: Nathan Scholz, Cole Lawson Communications, (07) 3221-2220