Council on the Ageing
Queensland

Pushing through the layers

The complexities of combatting abuse of older Queenslanders through advocacy & policy

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AAG National Conference

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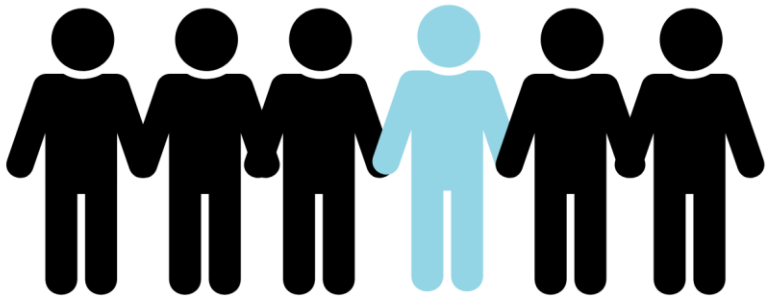
Urgency of reform

Latest evidence & role of evidence intermediaries

Hidden, under-reported, inadequately addressed or normalised

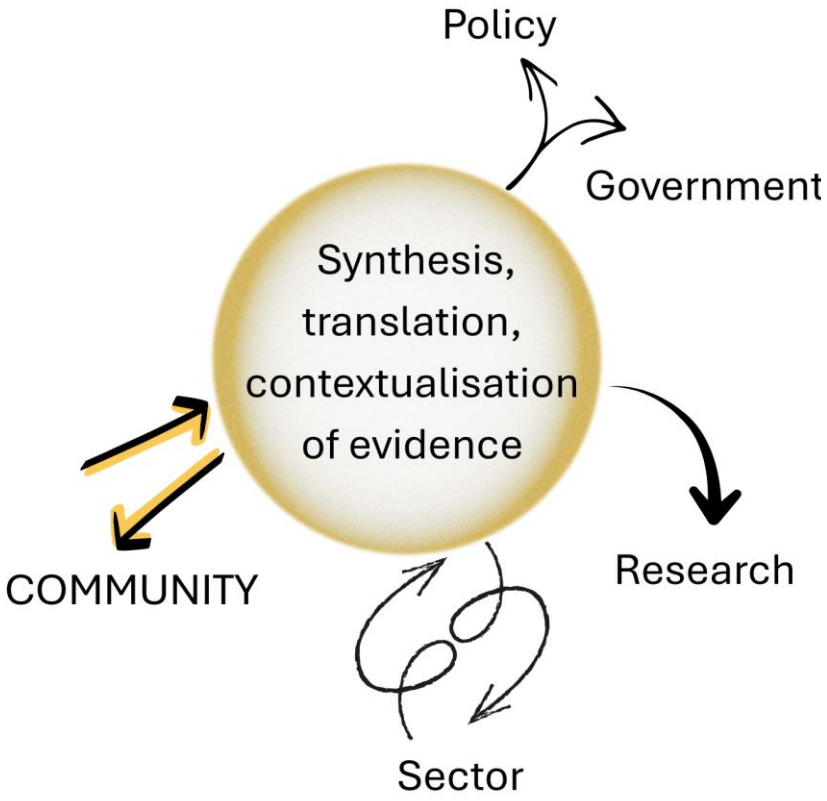


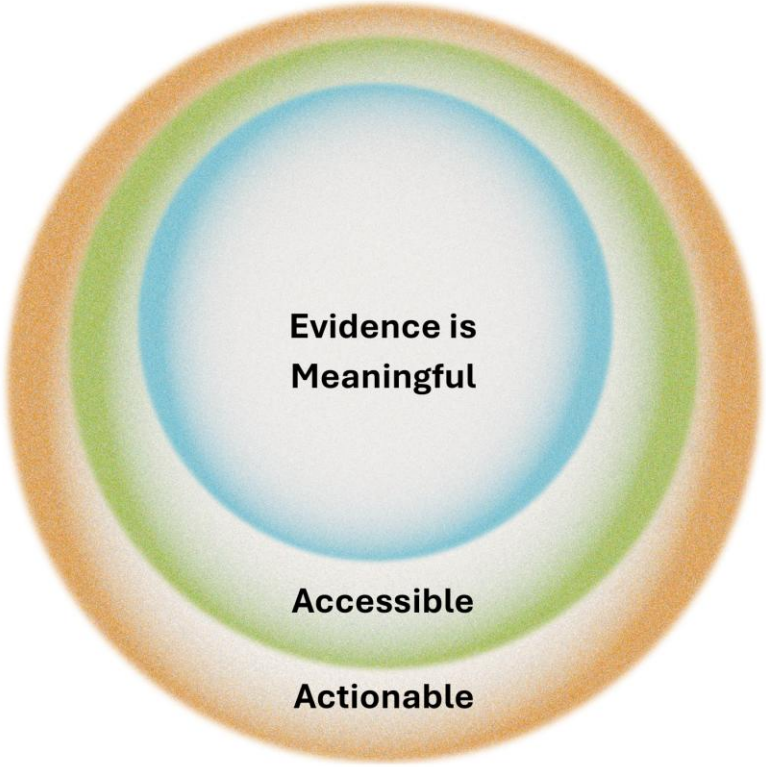
1 in 6 Australians aged 65 and over experience abuse or mistreatment

In Queensland:

- 13% increase in abuse notifications
- Psychological & financial abuse most reported
- Adult children as perpetrators

Evidence intermediaries





COTA QLD 2025 surveys

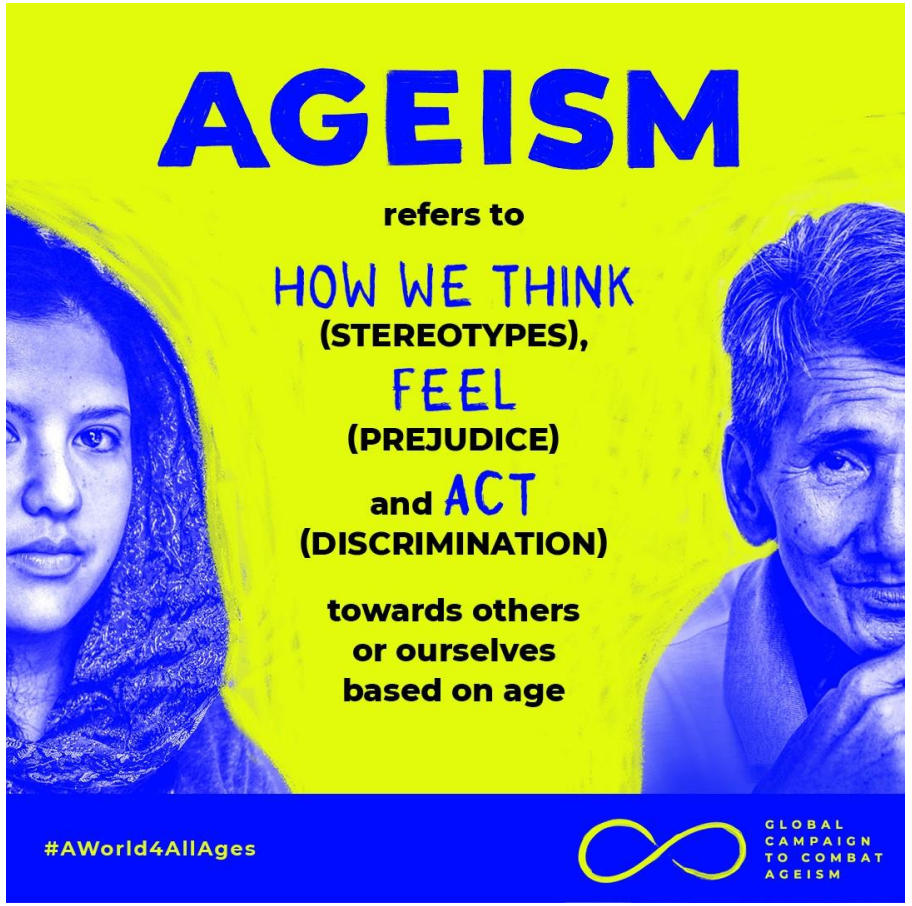
- 47% (majority of respondents 60 – 79 years) had experienced, currently experiencing or knew someone experiencing abuse & mistreatment
- 34% felt current responses to abuse & mistreatment were very ineffective

Systemic barriers

Ageism, compounded vulnerability, & fragmented systems

Ageism as root cause & structural driver

- Become a cultural norm
- Shapes how systems respond
- Systemic ageism
- Societal attitudes
- Internalised ageism
- Underpins abuse & mistreatment
- Addressed in similar way to sexism, racism & abelism



Compounded vulnerability

- Individual & structural factors ⬆ risk of harm
- Factors - dependency on others, cognitive changes, financial hardships, housing precarity & digital inequity
- Social isolation & loneliness rated as highest risk factors by older people

(57% of COTA QLD survey respondents)

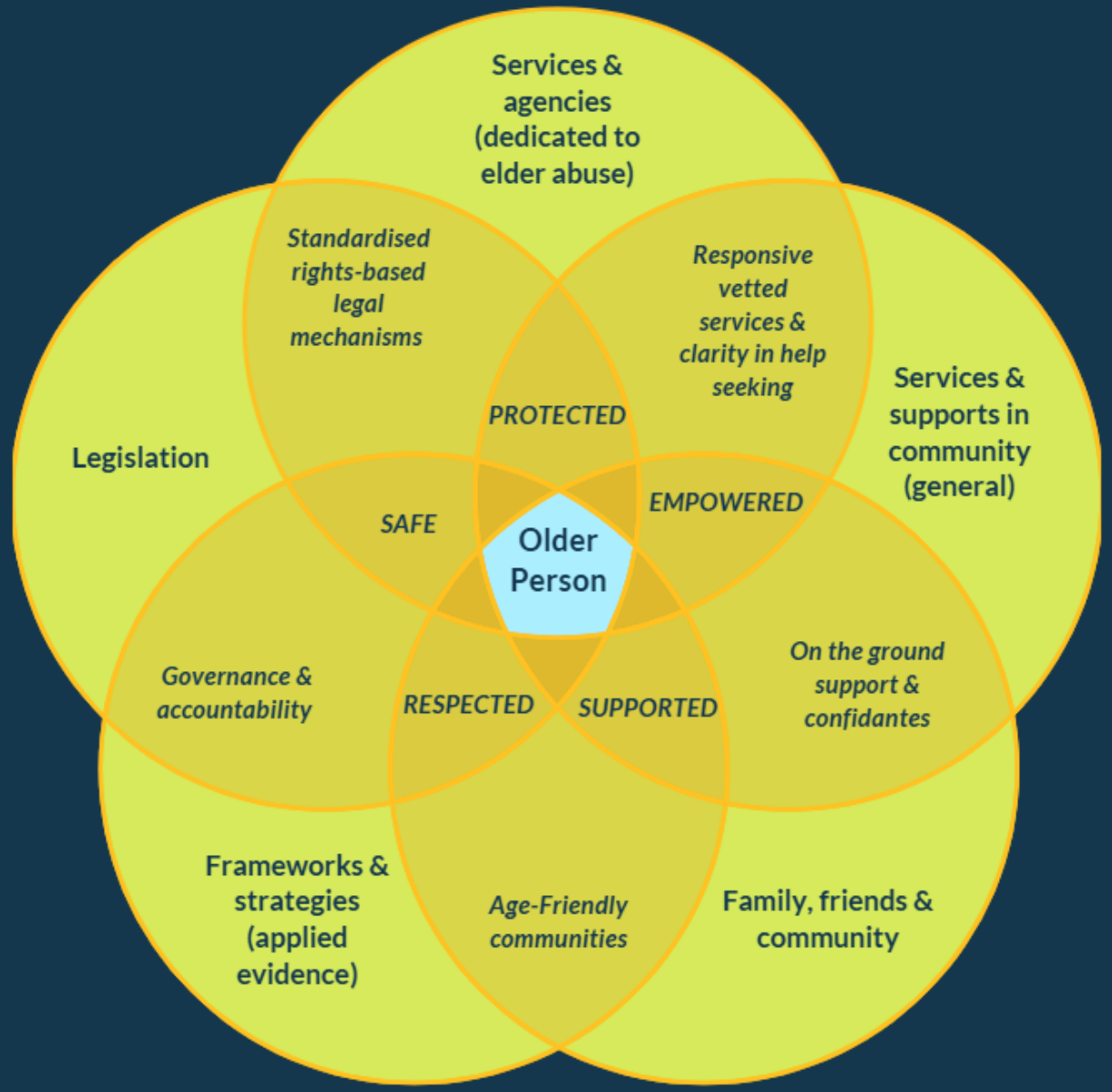
Fragmented systems & barriers to access

- QLD context – systems evolved reactively & siloed
- Barriers to safety, protection, & justice
- Examples of persistent issues include barriers to accessing legal supports, misuse of EPoA, court delays, inaction or bias
- Challenge of finding clear help-seeking pathways, service gaps, long wait times for assessment
- Navigation of multiple service systems at once (& limited integration)

Queensland legislation & key supports

Currently, in Queensland, there is no clear framework for the safeguarding of at-risk adults. Rather, the safeguarding system includes a number of agencies and services that work to ensure that people who may be 'at-risk' are protected from harm and able to access support services. Public Advocate (Qld) 2022*

There are existing legislative mechanisms for the protection of the rights of older adults specifically, and broadly for the protection of the rights of adults across all aged cohorts.



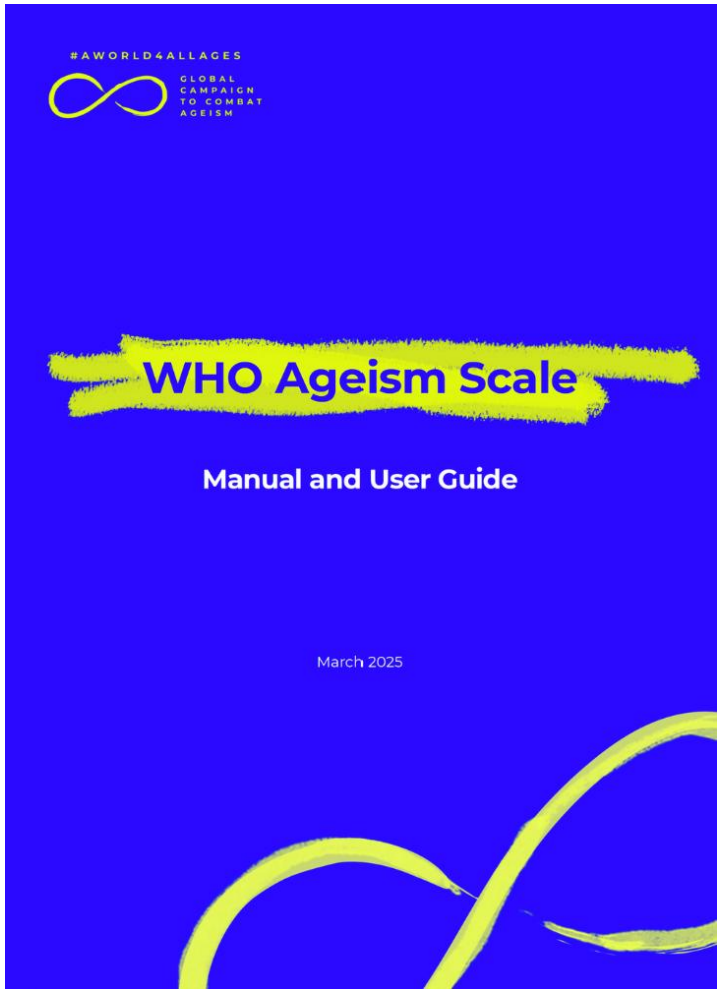
*Public Advocate (Qld), (2022). *Adult Safeguarding in Queensland, Volume 2: Reform recommendations [November, 2022].* *https://www.justice.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/749027/adult-safeguarding-vol-2-final.pdf*

Recommendations

Next steps to enact systemic change

1. Coordinated state strategy

- Whole-of-system, whole-of-government collaboration
- Evidence-based best practices
- Evaluation
- Embedded knowledge sharing
- Tailored actions for priority groups
- Recognition of vulnerability in diverse contexts
- Embedded anti-ageism education & awareness raising
- Routine audits for ageism
- Statewide campaigns
- Age-inclusive policies



2. Strengthen information, navigation & legal protections

- Age-inclusive policies
- Increased resourcing for vital existing services such as Elder Abuse Helpline
- Network of navigators & non-legal advocates
- Informal safe disclosure environments
- Investment in digital inclusion & digital supports
- Enduring Power of Attorney (EPoA) laws strengthened & EPoA training
- Trauma-informed approaches
- Elder abuse training for frontline services
- QLD Civil & Administrative Tribunal (QCAT) responses strengthened
- Recognition of diverse living contexts of older adults
- Rights focussed

Thank you

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