



**OLDER & BOLDER
SUBMISSION
on
REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS
OF
*PROTECTING OUR FUTURE: THE REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON
ELDER ABUSE (2002)***

APRIL 1, 2009

1. Introduction

Older & Bolder is an alliance of eight non-governmental organisations in the age sector in Ireland. The members of the alliance are: Active Retirement Ireland, Age Action Ireland, Age & Opportunity, Alzheimer Society of Ireland, Carers Association, Irish Hospice Foundation, Irish Senior Citizens Parliament and the Senior Help Line.

The National Council on Ageing and Older People has commissioned a Review of the Recommendations of Protecting Our Future: The Report of the Working Group on Elder Abuse (2002). Older & Bolder as an alliance has not had a direct role in the formal structures established in response to the work of the Working Group on Elder Abuse though individual members have had involvement with those structures. However, as an alliance we take an interest in issues related to the wellbeing of older people and in systemic responses to those issues.

This submission makes a limited number of points and does not represent all that the individual members of Older & Bolder might wish to say in relation to the review of the recommendations of *Protecting Our Future*.

2. Health and Social Care Services for Older People

Protecting our Future recommended that the response to elder abuse should be placed in the wider context of health and social care services for older people. This recommendation was premised on the value of a holistic approach to elder abuse, based on access to integrated services and staff equipped with the skills and knowledge to respond to both the protection and wider health and social care needs of older people. The recommendation remains salient.

Similarly the associated concerns about gaps in services and uneven distribution of services for older people, expressed in 2002, remain salient in 2009.

The Elder Abuse National Implementation Group has since stated that additional inputs from the financial, legal and educational sectors are required to fully respond to the challenge of elder abuse (reference). A core criterion for these inputs must be their support for a person-centred response to the needs of vulnerable older people (DoHC, 2007).

The National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS) has the potential to provide a framework for the implementation of a cross-sectoral response to elder abuse such as the inclusion of inputs from financial, legal and educational sectors would require. Older & Bolder recommends that the NPAS address the issue of elder abuse.

3. Elder Abuse Policy and Structures

Significant progress has been made in terms of the development of elder abuse policy and staff structures by the Health Service Executive as recommended in *Protecting our Future*.

At this stage, and with regard to the development of the 2002 recommendations, there should be a particular focus on the needs of the general public and of individuals who wish to access HSE elder abuse services. This target group includes vulnerable people who may not have access to a computer or who may not know how to navigate a website. Their needs include access to sufficient information, clarity, transparency and confidence in the capacity of the service to address the elder abuse issues that they are highlighting. In practice this would mean:

- readily accessible information about the service;
- easy access to named staff of the service;
- clarity about the roles and responsibilities of individuals named as contact points for the service;
- information for potential clients about the HSE approach to assessment of elder abuse concerns; and
- the annual publication of findings from the work of the service.

These are criteria against which information currently provided might be assessed.

The management and staffing structures recommended in *Protecting Our Future* were devised with operation in individual Health Board settings in mind. The establishment of the HSE has changed the landscape and existing Steering Group structures covering four HSE areas must be thinly stretched.

The 2002 recommendations provided for Dedicated Officers with responsibility for elder abuse in each community care area.

This recommendation in turn was drawn from the evaluation of the Draft Policies, Procedures and Guidelines devised by the Working Group and piloted in 2000/2001. This evaluation highlighted the requirement for Dedicated Officers to provide support and supervision to Case Workers in terms of the core competencies of their role (Conboy, 2002). It is not evident that the line management structures that have emerged encompass these requirements for support and supervision of Case Workers. *Protecting Our Future* highlighted the need to maximise “the sense of confidence, trust and safety” with which staff could respond to older people’s welfare and protection needs. In terms of further development of recommendations on elder abuse, the area of support and supervision of case workers is an area that should be addressed in very specific terms.

The Terms of Reference for the Working Group on Elder Abuse (WGEA), and for the evaluation of the Draft Policies, Procedures and Guidelines devised by the WGEA defined elder abuse in individual terms. During the course of the 2001 evaluation, the issue of institutionalised elder abuse was raised by many respondents. Events since – including Leas Cross – have highlighted the need for a focus on institutionalised elder abuse in any national policy on elder abuse.

4. Legislation

The recommendation for legislation to establish older people’s entitlement to core community care services remains salient.

Significant work has been done since 2002, with the support of the Law Reform Commission, on the development of proposals to secure the legal protection of vulnerable older people who cannot protect themselves because of mental incapacity. The Government has published the Mental Capacity Bill (September 2008) and there has been some consultation with stakeholders about the contents of the Bill. The publication of the consultation findings would be extremely useful in terms both of the new legislation and the current review of related recommendations in *Protecting Our Future*.

5. Impaired Capacity

People with dementia and their carers remain vulnerable groups in the context of elder abuse. The recommendation that An Action Plan for Dementia should be published remains salient.

Updated recommendations on elder abuse should include a dementia specific focus to address the needs of this group of older people and their carers as outlined by the Alzheimer Society of Ireland (Alzheimer Society of Ireland, 2009).

6. Carers

Protecting Our Future recommended the provision of adequate support and services to all carers. This recommendation remains salient.

Older & Bolder regards the recent decision not to publish the Carers Strategy as a backwards step and recommends the inclusion of a recommendation to publish the Strategy in updated recommendations on elder abuse.

7. Research and Education

The establishment of the UCD National Centre for the Protection of Older People is welcome. The need identified in *Protecting Our Future* for research to underpin policy, service provision and best practice remains salient.

Older & Bolder recommends that priority be given to researching **with** older people their perceptions of elder abuse, their preferences for intervention in situations of elder abuse and their evaluation of the effectiveness of services and supports to address elder abuse.

8. Further Information

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References

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