



Gold Coast Sun
Wednesday 1/03/2017
Page: 1
Section: General News
Region: Gold Coast QLD, AU
Circulation: 192901
Type: Regional
Size: 384.00 sq.cms.



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SHOCKING

'New wave of violence' strikes elderly

A MASSIVE surge in the occurrence of physical, financial and psychological abuse as well as neglect has seen a 19 per cent increase in the number of elderly people seeking legal support in what has been described as 'a new wave of violence'.

LAURA NELSON reports, page 3

'New wave of violence' on aged

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THERE has been a massive 19 per cent surge in elderly people seeking legal support with a warning that elder abuse is the 'new wave of violence'. Latest figures released by the Community Legal Centres Queensland (CLCQ) coincide with the Gold Coast being identified in a parliamentary report as 'an area of need' that urgently requires more legal services for a rising ageing population at risk of elder abuse.

The CLCQ figures, which were collected over five years, show a growing number of people over the age of 65 are reaching out to community legal centres for a range of reasons, including financial abuse, psychological abuse, neglect and physical abuse. A similar report by the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit shows a 20 per cent increase in reported cases of financial abuse from 2014-15 to 2015-16.

The reports follow the release recently of shocking details about a 77-year-old who was found on a veranda in a Bundaberg aged care facility covered in his own faeces. A number of

other families are alleging mistreatment at the same facility.

CLCQ director James Farrell said elder abuse was a new wave of violence and the Gold Coast urgently needed more legal services for the elderly. He said this was confirmed by a Uniting-Care submission to a State Government inquiry which showed that 10.5 per cent of their calls from the elderly came from the Gold Coast, followed by the Sunshine Coast (8.2 per cent) and Rockhampton (four per cent).

"The Gold Coast has been identified in a parliamentary report as the area most in need of additional legal services for the elderly," Mr Farrell said.

This was echoed by Ross Lee, president of the Robina Community Legal Centre, who said the number of older people seeking legal help from community legal centres was definitely higher than the state average.

"We have been operating for three years and we always have a high elder law client base," he said. "Studies show the Gold Coast is a priority need for elder law assistance."

Mr Farrell said unfortunately, elder abuse was notoriously under-reported.

"It is widely understood that one in

four people don't report elder abuse due to shame, reliance on the abuser for care, love for the abuser, fear of being placed in aged care and fear of

breaking up the family," he said. "Many victims also suffer cognitive impairments such as dementia and are unable to provide clear and reliable evidence."

He said the problem was aggravated as there was no adult, protective legislation and little, cost-effective, legal recourse for elder abuse victims.

"For example, if they want to pursue someone for misusing an enduring power of attorney, they need to file a civil action, defend the presumption that any transfer of money from parent to child is a gift and then prove undue influence or unconscionable conduct. People who have lost all their money can't afford to do this and are more likely to do nothing."

CLCQ is calling for new laws to protect older residents against elder abuse, including implementing the recommendations from the Queens-

land Law Reform Commission's Review of Guardianship Laws and the criminal codes relating to this issue.

It is also calling on the State Government to better fund seniors

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legal services.

“Unfortunately, only half the people who contact one of our community legal centres are able to get the help they need,” Mr Farrell said.

“The remaining 50 per cent are turned away because we just don’t have the resources to provide help for everyone who qualifies.”

“In July this year the Federal Government will cut almost 30 per cent of funding to community legal centres across Australia. We are calling on Malcolm Turnbull and George Brandis to reverse this decision to ensure people experiencing elder abuse get the legal help they need and the protection they deserve.”