

WEAAD in Western Australia

On the evening of 14 June 2011 the City of Perth illuminated both Council House and the Bell Tower in purple to raise awareness of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) the following day, 15 June.

The highlight of WEAAD activities in Perth, Western Australia was the launch of the research paper “An Examination of the Extent of Elder Abuse in Western Australia: A Qualitative and Quantitative Investigation of Existing Agency Policy, Service Responses and Recorded Data.” Ninety-six invited guests gathered to witness the launch. Begun in 2009, this research examined how elder abuse information was recorded across the range of government Departments which comprise the Alliance for the Prevention of Elder Abuse in Western Australia. Three key findings were identified and twenty-six recommendations were made to facilitate future best practice. One of the recommendations made was:

* Advocate to convene a national conference on elder abuse in Perth in June 2012.

Retired District Court Judge, the Honourable Antoinette Kennedy launched the research at Citiplace in central Perth. She called on the community to act on the recommendations made by the researchers, in particular, the registration of Powers of Attorney and the auditing of Centrelink nominee arrangements. The report was formally launched with a call for the establishment of a committee to report progress on the implementation of the research recommendations to the Minister.



Photo by Judith Treby

To mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) 2011, the Office of the Public Advocate held a series of information sessions in the South-West of the State during the week of WEAAD.

Three of the five sessions were held in Bunbury, Manjimup and Wagin and catered to the needs of community members and service providers. The sessions covered the use of Enduring Powers of Guardianship and Advance Health Directives to plan for the future and minimise the risk of abuse and exploitation. Service providers' role and responsibilities regarding these powers were also covered.

On World Elder Abuse Awareness Day itself, two sessions were held in Albany. A morning session was directed at community members, focusing on the use of Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPAs) and Enduring Powers of Guardianship (EPGs) to safeguard your future and minimise your risk of exploitation and abuse. The afternoon session was tailored for service providers, to inform them on the role in promoting and protecting the rights of vulnerable adults, through the proper execution and operation of EPAs and EPGs.

Over 110 people in total attended the five sessions and feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

At another event in Bunbury, a community service agency organised a walk with banners and purple shirts. About 30 people participated. The Mayor of Bunbury read a statement condemning elder abuse and the local paper and radio publicised the event.



Photo by Andrew Robinson

The Older People's Rights Service prepared a static display outside the Seniors Centre and Library Complex in the Perth suburb of Whitfords, giving information about elder abuse and contact points for assistance.

In far away Three Springs (313 km north of Perth) some health service staff wore purple on the day and displayed posters around the facility and the doctor's surgery. Staff read the policy on elder abuse and plan to watch "Protecting Older People from Abuse" when it is shown on the Aged Care Channel in August this year.



Photo by Andrew Robinson

Residents of Narrogin, a regional centre 192 km south east of Perth, were informed of the significance of WEAAD through a Community Care Services newsletter.

Further publicity was achieved through a succession of interviews with the CEO of Advocare, Mr Greg Mahney for both radio and print media. On the morning of 15 June one of our advocates, Ms Fran Rafferty was interviewed on the ABC talkback radio program "Mornings" with presenter Geoff Hutchison.

2011 has been the biggest yet in regard to publicising WEAAD in Western Australia. Our research report re-opens the topic of elder abuse in Australia where up to date information has been lacking for some time. The report gives guidance on some ways we might begin to address the issue. Western Australia is a huge state, approximately one third of Australia in area, and it is extremely heartening to report that we now have pockets of people promoting WEAAD activities in regional centres and small towns far removed from metropolitan Perth.