



**ELDER ABUSE LIKELY TO RISE WITH AGEING POPULATION**  
*AMA Position Statement on Health and Care of Older People 2018*

Elder abuse - physical, psychological, and financial abuse and neglect of older people - is likely to rise as Australia’s population ages, the AMA says in a new Position Statement.

The AMA Federal Council has formally adopted the Position Statement on *Health and Care of Older Australians 2018*, an “umbrella” statement over a suite of position statements on aged care.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said that Australia is facing an ageing population, with more chronic, complex medical conditions than ever before, which will put extra pressures on an already underfunded aged care system.

“By 2056, more than one in five Australians will be over the age of 65. Improving the health and care of older people must be a national priority,” Dr Bartone, a GP who visits residential aged care facilities in Melbourne, said today.

“Under international law, older people have a right to the highest achievable level of health, and Australia’s systems must adapt in order to uphold this human right.

“Our senior citizens have served this country well. They have contributed to the growth and prosperity that we have come to expect, and now they deserve access to good quality, long-term care in their twilight years.

“The 2017 AMA Aged Care Survey of doctors working in residential aged care facilities revealed that more than one-quarter of respondents stated that they had identified issues with elder abuse.

“While many reported that it was rare, or a long time ago, there were reports of financial abuse through family members, and neglect due to a lack of appropriately trained staff because of limited resources.

“Increasingly, residential aged care facilities are relying on lesser-trained personal care assistants instead of registered and enrolled nurses.

“As Australia’s population ages, and without resourcing for enough appropriately-trained staff, and education for carers and health workers to identify and prevent elder abuse, neglect and abuse of older people - whether accidental or intentional - is likely to increase.

“While currently there is little data on the prevalence of elder abuse in Australia, I note that there is Government funding for a national study to examine its prevalence as part of a broader National Plan to address elder abuse.

“I look forward to seeing the results when the Council of Attorneys-General receive a draft of the National Plan later this year.

“Not acting on the needs of older people compromises their basic human right of experiencing the highest achievable level of health.

“Ignoring the needs of older people means more avoidable hospitalisations and excessive costs to Australia’s health system. The Government must invest in aged care now,” Dr Bartone said.

The Position Statement calls for information, training, and support for carers at the time the person is registered for care, to reduce the risk of elder abuse, and for education and training programs on how to recognise, intervene, and manage elder abuse for all health professionals involved in the care of older people.

It also calls for health promotion programs to ward off preventable conditions earlier in life, and for age-friendly environments within society that support healthy ageing.

The AMA Position Statement on *Health and Care of Older People 2018* is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/health-and-care-older-people---2018>

The AMA Position Statement on *Resourcing Aged Care* was released in April 2018, and is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/aged-care-resourcing-2018>. The AMA Aged Care Survey is at <https://ama.com.au/article/2017-ama-aged-care-survey>

This work will be supplemented by three further Position Statements, on *Innovation*, *Palliative Care*, and *Medical Care* for older people.

## Background

- In 2016, 15 per cent (3.7 million Australians) were aged 65 and over. This is expected to grow to 22 per cent (8.7 million) by 2056.
- At June 30 2017, of people in permanent residential aged care, 31 per cent had high care needs across all three Aged Care Funding Instrument (ACFI) domains, 52 per cent had a dementia diagnosis, and 85 per cent had at least one behavioural or mental health condition diagnosis.
- At March 31 2018, there were 108,456 people waiting for an appropriate home care package, the majority of whom have high care needs.
- Of the estimated 235,000 aged care workers in 2016, 70 per cent are personal care assistants, 15 per cent are registered nurses, and 10 per cent are enrolled nurses.
- Elder abuse includes physical, psychological, sexual, emotional, material or financial abuse, neglect or abandonment, and may be intentional or unintentional.

*Sources: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Department of Health, Office of the Attorney-General.*

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CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761  
 Maria Hawthorne 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

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