

## Groundswell of activity around seniors' rights

I WAS FORTUNATE to be involved in the symposium on elder abuse and neglect in Hobart late last year. Over 60 representatives from aged care, the legal profession, police, unions, clinicians, policy makers and academic researchers came together to examine the social, legal, and clinical dimensions of elder abuse and neglect in Tasmania.

Tackling elder abuse needs a whole-of-society approach and so being part of such a diverse think tank was a positive experience, and our group will now work to progress seven key recommendations.

Around the country there is a groundswell of activity related to the rights of older people. There are two state-based guardianship reviews, in NSW and Tasmania, while the 5th Elder Abuse Conference took place in February.

The AAG has identified that elder abuse is an



Associate Professor Christine Stirling, president of the AAG

important topic by supporting a special interest group. It's possible that the recent revelations about child abuse in Australia have shone a spotlight on all vulnerable people, particularly those living in institutional settings. Those who are frail and dependent on care living either in residential aged care or at home can certainly

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fall into this category.

With our ageing population it's an important time for us to reflect on the role that each one of us can play in preventing elder abuse, be it physical, psychological, sexual or financial abuse or neglect.

For the individual, if you believe that an older person's rights to dignity, respect, autonomy, liberty

or physical safety are being breached then it is important to report your suspicions.

Organisations need to ensure they have appropriate policies and procedures for staff or clients to report suspected elder abuse, and that outline what appropriate action will be taken.

For governments, they can adopt the Australian Law Reform Commission's recommendations on elder abuse to improve our laws so that adults have greater safeguards.

Overall, if we can give older people a voice, respect and time, we can make a difference to this issue and make sure that future generations don't look back at us wondering why we were inactive and silent. ■



## Time for action to support ageing population

THE POPULATION of older Australians is accelerating at such a rate that in just seven years the number of people aged 70 or over will be 50 per cent higher than what it was four years ago, reaching almost 3.5 million people by 2025.

The fact this is occurring is not only a function of demographics but also of medical and technological advances and changing lifestyles, which we should all celebrate.

Our ageing population requires governments and the community to act now on many different fronts. Getting serious about defeating ageism, tackling issues for older workers, housing, impacts on health – all these issues require policy across the spectrum.

ACSA's remit, however, is aged care. With multiple government reviews and reports underway, the

year ahead presents an opportunity for politicians to take a long-term view and make lasting changes for the better.

Government should prioritise ways of ensuring people with means can contribute more to the care they receive – making aged care more affordable for the taxpayer.

More action is also needed for aged care providers in rural and remote areas where current funding arrangements and service models mean many struggle to remain viable.

Aged care policy must also account for vulnerable older Australians and ensure equity of access for indigenous and homeless individuals who may otherwise struggle to get access to support services.

On home care and regulation, action is needed too. Government must increase the investment

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in home care so 100,000 people don't remain waiting for a package but get the help they need.

When reviewing regulatory practices, government should enshrine those that protect transparency and the free flow of information between



Pat Sparrow, CEO of ACSA

an older person, family member, government or a provider.

I'm hopeful the 2018-19 Budget may take some steps towards addressing the long list of actions above. This is important not just for aged care providers but for the ageing population as a whole – and each of us counted in that. ■