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| **H:\Documents\Waratah NSWGovt Two Colour_HiRes.jpg** | **KATHRYN MCKENZIE**  **ACTING AGEING AND DISABILITY COMMISSIONER** |
| **MEDIA RELEASE** | |

Mondy 10 February 2025

**WE’RE OVERDUE TO ADDRESS DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE OF OLDER WOMEN**

The Acting NSW Ageing and Disability Commissioner, Kathryn McKenzie, has welcomed the recent media attention on domestic and family violence of older women.

The Ageing and Disability Commission’s (ADC) handling of reports about abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people and adults with disability in their family, home, and community identifies that greater attention to this issue is overdue. Current social and economic factors are serving to heighten the risk of domestic and family violence of older people, including increased cost of living and housing pressures. The volume of reports about abuse of older people, and the level of risk involved, is high and rising, and this is expected to continue with the growth in the ageing population.

In NSW, reports to the ADC about older people increased two-fold (108%) in five years and are continuing to rise year-on-year. Of the 14,451 reports the ADC received about abuse of older people in 2019 - 2024, 67% were about abuse of older women. Most reports (63%) concern alleged abuse and neglect by relatives (63%), mainly by adult children (57%), while 13% involve alleged abuse by current or former intimate partners.

Ms McKenzie said, “While the term ‘elder abuse’ is commonly used, it fails to adequately reflect what is happening. The reality is that the majority of reports are about domestic and family violence, including coercive control, and the impact is devastating. There are serious impacts to the older woman’s safety, health, and mental health, often debilitating isolation, and a high risk of homelessness and financial destitution.”

Common scenarios include:

* An older woman is threatened, pressured, and harassed to provide money, and to sign over her assets and Enduring Power of Attorney to her adult child. The adult child threatens to harm themselves, stop her from seeing her grandchildren, and/or put her into residential aged care if she does not comply.
* A man lives with his mother, ostensibly to provide support. Progressively, he makes all the decisions about his mother’s life regardless of her wishes, takes control of her bank account, prevents her contact with family, friends and the community, and cancels the support services she needs.
* An older woman has been subject to domestic violence throughout her marriage. The abuse is continuing into older age, including physical violence, sexual coercion, and ongoing degrading comments.
* An adult child moves back into their mother’s home. The older woman lives in constant fear, subjected to verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, and physical violence, including attempted strangulation.

“We are pleased that there is improved recognition of domestic and family violence in intimate partner relationships” said Ms McKenzie. “However, more needs to be done to address domestic and family violence against older women.”

“Domestic and family violence is not a normal or acceptable part of providing care, and it is not an understandable response to increased social and financial stressors. It does not morph into something else when it is experienced by older women or when it is perpetrated by family members. It is domestic and family violence and needs to be called out for what it is.”

The Acting Commissioner noted that in the ADC’s experience, domestic and family violence of older people is poorly recognised and rarely discussed, even by agencies and services working in relevant sectors. The impact of this is significant, including that there are insufficient accessible housing and support options for older women leaving violence.

“It is vital that the experience and needs of older women and women with disability directly inform planning, policies and strategies to address domestic and family violence,” Ms McKenzie said. “It is important that there are specific and targeted strategies. The belief that older women and women with disability will adequately benefit from domestic and family violence strategies that are aimed at the broader population is misguided.”

The Acting Commissioner noted that adult safeguarding bodies like the ADC play an important role in preventing and responding to abuse of older people and adults with disability, and where they exist in Australia these agencies are in high demand. “Consistent with the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission, there remains a need for an adult safeguarding body in each state and territory that is adequately resourced to fulfil its functions,” said Ms McKenzie.

“However, it is imperative that they are supported and complemented by robust and accessible domestic and family violence public policy and service systems that are inclusive of, and informed by, the lived experience of older women and women with disability.”

Further information about the ADC including current [data](https://ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/dashboard-data.html) is available on the ADC [website.](https://ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/)