

MEDIA RELEASE

14 June 2013

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day highlights urgent need for national approach to assist seniors at risk

On the eve of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, seniors advocate COTA Australia has called for a national "zero tolerance" approach to the protection of older Australians at risk of harm and abuse.

COTA Australia Chief Executive Ian Yates said to experience the best life possible without fear of violence and mistreatment is a fundamental human right, from the very beginning to the very end of life.

"Assault, theft, fraud and discrimination are unacceptable at any age and no less so because a person is old," Mr Yates said today.

"It's a sad reality that victims of elder abuse often suffer from the actions of a family member, friend, carer or other community member known to them. This can often make it difficult for vulnerable older people to speak out or seek action - becoming the 'silent victims'.

"Governments have a responsibility to ensure they do all they can to keep seniors safe from all forms of abuse – from physical, emotional and sexual threats or harm to discrimination and financial exploitation.

"A coordinated, Australia-wide approach could deliver effective intervention or prevention programs for elder abuse, promote best practice solutions and ensure a safety net for all older Australians, regardless of where they live", Mr Yates said.

"Awareness raising activity such as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is vital, but it must be matched by strong legislation and resources from government.

"It is time for the Federal government to step up and take a leadership role to get a consistent approach across all states and territories including legislation, resources and advocacy and support services.

"A national, coordinated approach should include:

- common reporting protocols for suspected elder abuse by medical and health professionals and community care workers;
- tightening up of the regulation of powers of attorney; and
- a national hotline through which older people can access advice and obtain professional support and assistance on their own behalf, or others," he said.

Media contact: Ian Yates 0418 835 439, Jane Garcia 0434 489 533