NSW Government logo
   
Ageing and disability commission

**A GUIDE TO ESTABLISHING COLLABORATiVES**

Working together to prevent abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people and adults with disability, and promote their right to live free from abuse in their family, home and community.

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* 1. **Purpose of this document**

The purpose of this document is to provide a guide in establishing new interagency partnerships, or review existing partnerships, that drive a localised response to the prevention of abuse of older people and adults with disability in each local government area across NSW. These partnerships were initially established by the Elder Abuse Helpline and Resource Unit, now the Ageing and Disability Commission (ADC), and will continue to be referred to as ‘Collaboratives’.

Collaboratives provide a way of engaging local agencies to develop protocols, practice guidelines and communications activities that are aimed at responding to the issues, risk factors and circumstances that may lead to the abuse of both older people and adults with disability. Collaboratives also support localised operations that bring together experts in abuse prevention, with a critical understanding of local issues and strategies that can assist the community to take action against abuse, neglect and exploitation.

While local protocols and guidelines will differ across each location, this document will help provide a framework that ensures links, opportunities, information exchanges, education and awareness raising activities are consistent and contribute towards a common goal of protecting older people and adults with disability from abuse, neglect and exploitation in their family, home and community.

* 1. **Our shared role and the context of abuse**

The overarching outcome for the ADC and Collaboratives is to support older people and adults with disability to live free from abuse, neglect and exploitation in their family, home and community. Interagency groups will continue to operate to suit local circumstances and resources, and the ADC will seek to support these initiatives and not be prescriptive about how local Collaborative action should unfold. The ADC will act as a central support to establish new Collaboratives and participate in existing Collaboratives within local government areas or local health districts. These may be specific to abuse of older people, adults with disability or even as part of other domestic and family violence or vulnerable person working groups.

* + 1. The Ageing and Disability Commission

The ADC is an independent agency of the NSW Government and promotes the rights of older people and adults with disability to live free from abuse, neglect and exploitation in their family, home and community. The ADC has a range of functions, including:

* Raising awareness of abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people and adults with disability in their family, home and community.
* Responding to reports of alleged abuse, neglect and exploitation of an older person or adult with disability caused by someone such as a family member, partner or neighbour. Sometimes, this may involve an investigation.
* Providing support, advice and information to ensure an older person or adult with disability is protected from abuse, neglect and exploitation.
* Providing advice to the Government to improve systems and services that can protect and promote the rights of older people and adults with disability.
* Meeting other obligations as outlined in the Ageing and Disability Commissioner Act 2019.
  + 1. Abuse of older people

Across Australia, it is estimated that as many as 185,000 older people will experience some form of abuse or neglect each year[[1]](#footnote-1). The abuse of older people can affect anyone, however particular groups may be at greater risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation. These groups include older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, older people living in regional and remote communities, LBGTQI+ and older people from First Nations communities.

In the first year of operations, 3,917 matters were received by the Ageing and Disability Abuse Helpline, which included 2,302 reports about abuse, neglect and exploitation of an older person or adult with disability. Of these reports, 1,777 involved an **older person** (including 282 reports involving an older person with disability), and over two thirds of these reports related to older women (69.6%)[[2]](#footnote-2). Overall, the most commonly reported types of alleged abuse of older people were **psychological** abuse and **financial** abuse[[3]](#footnote-3).

* + 1. Abuse of adults with disability

Research indicate that adults with disability are more likely to experience violence than adults without disability, and it is estimated that 1 in 5 adults with disability have experienced abuse before the age of 18, with up to 32% of adults with disability experiencing high to very high psychological distress[[4]](#footnote-4).

In relation to reports of adults with disability, 525 of the 2,302 reports to the Ageing and Disability Abuse Helpline involved an **adult with disability**. Just over half of these reports involved a women with disability (54.3%) and the most commonly reported types of alleged abuse of adults with disability were **psychological** abuse and **neglect**[[5]](#footnote-5).

* 1. Why establish a collaborative?

Collaboratives provide a valuable way for agencies within a local government area to develop local or regional protocols and practice guidelines aimed at responding to and preventing abuse of older people and adults with disability in the community.

A collaborative approach to local practices can benefit older people and adults with disability by:

* Improving support opportunities for older people and adults with disability.
* Increasing awareness of abuse, neglect and exploitation and encourage earlier reporting to relevant organisations.
* Strengthening strategies for early intervention.
* Improving referral pathways among local organisations.
* Sharing better practices and ways of working.
  + 1. The effectiveness of Collaboratives

Local Collaboratives are effective in:

* Galvanizing the knowledge, skills and resources of relevant local agencies within an LGA.
* Building local capacity in identifying, responding and preventing the abuse of older people and adults with disability.
* Bringing attention to early intervention strategies and local referral pathways.
* Increasing support for older people or adults with disability in the local area.
* Promoting best practice amongst all service providers.
* Identifying patterns, trends and relevant local data to strengthen plans and responses.
* Creating awareness of the abuse of older people and adults with disability in the local community, and increase reporting to local service providers and the Ageing and Disability Abuse Helpline.
  + 1. Types of Collaboratives

Depending on the population, needs and issues identified, a collaborative may be established to support **older people** and/or **adults with disability.**

The ADC promotes the rights of both these cohorts, and therefore recognises and supports the need for Collaboratives to focus on the needs of these groups individually or together as appropriate to the local area.

For Collaboratives that have a focus on older people, alignment with [*NSW Interagency Policy on Identifying and Responding to the Abuse of Older People (2020)*](https://facs-web.squiz.cloud/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/591024/NSW-Interagency-Policy-Abuse-of-Older-People.pdf) must be considered.

* + 1. Membership profiles for elder abuse prevention Collaboratives

The focus for Collaboratives for the prevention of abuse of older people is on raising awareness of the abuse of older people in local government areas, building the capacity of local service providers to identify and respond to abuse. Consider members from service providers and agencies across government and non-government sectors such as:

* NSW Police – Aged Crime Prevention Officers, Crime Prevention Officers or Domestic Violence Liaison Officers.
* Commonwealth Home Support Program and Home Care Package Providers.
* Local Health District Coordinators.
* Medical personnel in private practice.
* Primary Health Networks.
* Legal and justice services such as legal aid or community legal centres.
* Community welfare, counselling and advocacy services.
* Seniors Rights Service.
* Multicultural services.
* Aboriginal services.
* Domestic and family violence services.
* Social housing and public housing organisations.
* Carers NSW.
* Dementia specific services.
* Mental Health – SHMOPS.
  + 1. Membership profiles for disability abuse prevention Collaboratives

The focus for Collaboratives for the prevention of abuse of people with disability is on raising awareness of the abuse of people with disability, and building the capacity of local service providers to identify and respond to abuse. Consider members from service providers and agencies across government and non-government sectors such as:

* NSW Police – Aged Crime Prevention Officers, Crime Prevention Officers or Domestic Violence Liaison Officers.
* Commonwealth and State Disability Support Providers.
* Disability support coordinators.
* Local Health District Coordinators.
* Medical personnel in private practice.
* Primary Disability Health Networks.
* Legal and justice services such as legal aid or community legal centres.
* Community welfare, counselling and advocacy services.
* Multicultural services.
* Aboriginal services.
* Domestic and family violence services who have staff experienced in disability.
* Social housing and public housing organisations.
* Primary care organisations, Carer’s NSW.
* Mental Health – SCHMOPS.
* Advocacy groups representing people with cognitive and intellectual disability.
  + 1. Naming protocols

It is recommended that Collaboratives begin by identifying the local government, followed by the primary cohort the collaborative. The ADC acknowledges the varied interpretations of the term elder abuse across NSW communities, and suggests the following naming convention:

**<LGA name> Collaborative for the Prevention of Abuse of Older People**

**<LGA name> Collaborative for the Prevention of Abuse of People with Disability**

* + 1. Where to start?

The following provides an outline of your first meeting. Please refer to reference one, which outlines the phases of establishment and the partnership with the ADC.

* **Seek expressions of interest.**

Send out an expression of interest (EOI) to potential members inviting them to become involved in the Collaborative. In this EOI, outline the purpose of the Collaborative, key cohorts and region in which the Collaborative will operate in.

* **Schedule a kick off meeting.**

Arrange a meeting date and invite interested members along to an establishment meeting.

* **Have a clear plan for discussion at your first meeting.**

At the establishment meeting, consider a clear agenda that will ensure potential members can:

* + establish a Collaborative name and any branding or logo requirements
  + appoint the Collaborative chair/co-chair/convener
  + agree on a common agenda and shared vision
  + discuss and identify a common understanding of the problem within the local area
  + determine boundaries about the scope of the group and any focus areas interested in
  + agree on the development of a Strategic Action Plan
  + develop Terms of Reference/membership and meeting schedule
  + discuss feedback and evaluation mechanisms
  + Understand the central support and resourcing from the ADC.

Please refer to reference **two** for an agenda template.

* 1. Principles of intervention

Participating agencies may commit to key principles of intervention that can guide interagency partnerships and strategies. These principles have been adapted from the [*NSW Interagency Policy on Identifying and Responding to the Abuse of Older People (2020)*](https://facs-web.squiz.cloud/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/591024/NSW-Interagency-Policy-Abuse-of-Older-People.pdf), and have been broadened for Collaboratives who have a focus on adults with disability in their local area. You may consider reviewing these principles when establishing your collaborative.

| **PROTECT** | All NSW community members have the right to live free from abuse, and ensuring safety is paramount. Sometimes, when the health or safety of an individual is at risk, safety may be a greater concern than privacy. |
| --- | --- |
| **EMPOWER** | Older people and adults with disability at risk of, or subject to, abuse, neglect and exploitation should be given the support and information they need to make informed decisions about how to respond. This includes access to culturally aware and competent services trained to support and equip them to understand their rights and stop abuse when it occurs.  Access to services is also contingent on the recognition that some older people or adults with disability will not be aware of the rights and services available to assist them. Persons with language and education barriers should be considered in how an agency seeks to engage with the adult when developing policies and initiatives. |
| **RESPECT** | Where older people or adults with disability can make informed decisions about responses, they should be supported to do so. Where an individual makes an informed decision not to act in response to abuse, and the abuse is not criminal, that decision should be respected.  People with impaired decision-making capacity may benefit from the involvement of an advocate, or other decision making supports. |
| **RESPOND** | Older people and adults with disability who are subject to abuse, neglect and exploitation should be supported and offered access to services. Many forms of abuse of older people and adults with disability are criminal. Where this is the case, the abuse must be treated as a crime and appropriate legal remedies and protections offered. Reports can be made to the NSW Police without the consent of the victim, although consent is always desirable and beneficial for investigations and prosecutions. |
| **SEPARATE** | Relationships can be complex, particularly where the abuser is managing the vulnerable adult’s complex needs. The needs of each individual should be considered separately and not compromise the response for the adult. |
| **COLLABORATE** | There may be a number of people from different services involved and it is important that they work together to help the older person or adult with disability. This can include the need to develop and maintain connections between the adult and the community; the need to share information and raise awareness of these issues between different services. |

* 1. Key outcome areas

Setting clear outcome areas for a Collaborative will inform the strategic action plan, and provide a working document for the group to track and review progress. Reference **three** is an example of a strategic action plan with four key outcome areas that may assist Collaboratives deliver against the purpose of promoting the rights of older people and adults with disability, and developing prevention pathways. These outcome areas are:

* Developing and communicating local protocols and service agreements for responding to abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people and adults with disability
* Raising awareness of the role of the ADC, and support available to anyone in the community.
* Improving capability of local staff to respond to abuse, neglect and exploitation through training and education, delivered by the ADC and/or other local providers.
* Development and sharing of resources and practices in responding to the abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people and adults with disability.
  + 1. Establishing local protocols and service agreements

Identifying and formalising local protocols allows for a point of contact for local agencies to seek advice or to make a referral in relation to abuse, neglect or exploitation of an older person or adult with disability. This also ensures responses or interventions consider appropriate local services.

* + 1. Raising awareness of abuse, neglect and exploitation

The ADC supports Collaboratives in their awareness raising events through the provision of media kits, flyers, communications tools as well as support and guidance as needed. Key communications and media strategies that Collaboratives may consider including in their actions plans are:

* **Media interviews via local media & community radio**
  + Local media partnerships can be an effective way to broadcast key prevention and awareness messages related to abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people and adults with disability. Consider partnerships with community radio and local papers. The ADC can assist Collaboratives with media guidance as required.
* **Distribution of flyers, brochures and resources** 
  + Collaboratives can access all ADC communications resources for use at any relevant event. These events may include Senior’s week, White Ribbon Events, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, shopping centre stalls and local community events.
  + Collaboratives may also create their own brochures and flyers to distribute to local medical centres, pharmacies, libraries and other targeted audiences identified in their local action plans. These locally created resources can be made available to all Collaboratives to utilise if appropriate via the ADC Collaborative Hub.
* **Social media**
  + Social media can be an effective tool to raise awareness and reach a broader audience. Collaboratives can share posts from the ADC’s Facebook and Twitter pages, and create their own social media content to share with their local communities.
    1. Improving local capabilities to respond to abuse, neglect and exploitation

Collaboratives provide opportunity to deliver training and education for frontline operators to improve their detection and response to abuse, neglect and exploitation of older people and adults with disability. Action plans can outline the approach to training, which could include seminars delivered by the ADC as well as sessions by members and associated organisations.

* + 1. Resources and information sharing practices

The network of Collaboratives across NSW provides a platform for shared learning, resources and experiences that can assist each collaborative in their different stages of establishment. Communication and support between Collaboratives is facilitated by the ADC in a number of ways, including:

* A buddy system that will pair new and established Collaboratives to gain insights into meeting structures, members and conversations.
* Sharing collateral from each collaborative via the Collaborative Hub, and access to the latest information and data from the Ageing and Disability Abuse Helpline.

6 Evaluating effectiveness

Every Collaborative provides a summary of their annual activity, which is included in a report shared with the ADC and other interested parties. Evaluations help to identify areas of success and opportunities to strengthen the agreements and practices in place.

Evaluations are typically completed via an annual review process, which includes reviewing action plans and activities outlined in your establishment, or at the beginning of the year. These reviews will cover activities, outputs, short and long term impacts achieved, and work that may carry over into the following year.

It may also be an opportunity to review terms of references developed at the establishment of a Collaborative, provide members with an opportunity to consider the need for any necessary changes. This may include the frequency of meetings, or the role of the chair and/or convener.

Additionally, an annual review provides opportunity to re-engage members and identify any membership gaps. This is a good time to also seek a re-commitment of Collaborative members.

Please refer to reference **four**, annual review template, for further guidance.

7 Support

The role of the ADC is to ensure the appropriate level of support and access to information is provided for Collaborative members to deliver on their projects and goes. The ADC is able to offer the following mechanisms to every Collaborative:

* attendance at quarterly meetings (or as required) to input on progress, provide relevant updates or information that the Collaborative chair requires
* representation at events, talks and training seminars
* access to resources
* Training.

In addition, the ADC will host an annual Community of Practice, with one representative from each Collaborative to attend and share learnings and experiences with other Collaborative partners.

1. Contacts and further information

For more information, please email [commissioner@adc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:commissioner@adc.nsw.gov.au). You can also visit the [ADC website](https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/for-professionals/collaborative-hub/resources/_nocache) for more information and to access all templates and resources from this guide.

* [Reference one](https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/for-professionals/collaborative-hub/collaborative-establishment-guide) – steps to establishing a Collaborative.
* [Reference two](https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/for-professionals/collaborative-hub/collaborative-establishment-guide) – agenda template.
* [Reference three](https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/for-professionals/collaborative-hub/collaborative-establishment-guide) – strategic action plan template.
* [Reference four](https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/for-professionals/collaborative-hub/collaborative-establishment-guide) – annual report template.

1. [National plan to respond to the abuse of older Australians 2019 – 2023](https://www.ag.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-03/National-plan-to-respond-to-the-abuse-of-older-australians-elder.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Ageing and Disability Commission Dashboard Data (1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020](https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/dashboard-data)) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Ageing and Disability Commission Dashboard Data (1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020](https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/dashboard-data)) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Australian Institute Health and Welfare, People with Disability Report September 2019](https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dis/73-1/people-with-disability-in-australia/justice-and-safety/violence-against-people-with-disability) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Ageing and Disability Commission Dashboard Data (1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020](https://www.ageingdisabilitycommission.nsw.gov.au/tools-and-resources/dashboard-data)) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)