



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

## **ABUSE OF OLDER WOMEN**

### **Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women**

**Marie-Claude Morin, M.P.  
Chair**

**MAY 2012**

**41st PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**



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# **THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

has the honour to present its

## **THIRD REPORT**

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied abuse of older women and has agreed to report the following:





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABUSE OF OLDER WOMEN.....	1
BACKGROUND .....	1
AWARENESS.....	1
A. Awareness Campaigns .....	1
B. Gaps .....	3
1. Data on Incidence and Prevalence.....	3
2. Resources to Respond to Heightened Awareness .....	5
3. Tools for Professionals and Other Service Providers .....	6
FORMS OF ABUSE.....	7
A. Physical Abuse and Neglect.....	7
1. Domestic Abuse .....	8
2. Abuse and Neglect in Group-living Setting .....	9
B. Financial Abuse.....	10
C. Other Forms of Abuse.....	11
RESPONSES TO AND PREVENTION OF ABUSE.....	11
A. Law Enforcement and Litigation .....	12
1. Federal legislation .....	12
2. The legal system .....	13
3. Challenges for law enforcement .....	14
B. Collaboration and Coordination.....	15
PROMISING PRACTICES.....	17
A. Awareness .....	17
B. Information and Resources .....	18
C. Coordinated Responses.....	19
CONCLUSION.....	21
LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS .....	23
APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES .....	25
APPENDIX B: LIST OF BRIEFS .....	27
REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE.....	29
SUPPLEMENTARY OPINION OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA ...	31



# ABUSE OF OLDER WOMEN

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## BACKGROUND

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women held 8 meetings on abuse of older women, and received testimony from 30 witnesses. Key themes that emerged during these hearings focussed on increasing awareness, the forms of abuse, and preventing and responding to abuse of older women. Throughout the hearings, the Committee learned of promising practices that have been developed by a range of sectors. Each of these themes is addressed in greater detail in this report.

It should also be noted that the Committee heard evidence from a wide variety of practitioners about why older women may be loathe to report abuse; this theme runs through all of this report.

It should also be noted that the Committee heard that several groups among the general population of older women are at greater risk of abuse and/or may have less access to either the supports to report elder abuse or services to assist them in escaping abuse. While more details are provided about these groups throughout the report, the terms “at-risk” or “target groups” include the following groups: Aboriginal women, recent immigrant women and their children, women with disabilities, rural women, and women whose first language is either a minority language or a non-official language.

## AWARENESS

Witnesses emphasized the need for greater awareness of elder abuse, focussing on current and recent awareness campaigns, gaps in awareness, and recommendations on increasing awareness.

### A. Awareness Campaigns

The Federal Elder Abuse Awareness Initiative, with both its promotional and research components, was recommended by the first report issued by the National Seniors' Council. This report was based on a study that took Council members across Canada to hear from service providers and other experts.<sup>1</sup>

From 2008 to 2011, the Initiative both created public awareness materials (including television commercials)<sup>2</sup> and provided significant funding for research to fill knowledge

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1 Jean-Guy Soulière, Chair, National Seniors Council, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1550.

2 Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1535.

gaps.<sup>3</sup> Several of the witnesses before the Committee reported on the results of research funded through this initiative, addressed in greater detail below.

A second federal program, the New Horizons for Seniors program, has also funded awareness programs, including a focus on financial abuse,<sup>4</sup> addressed in greater detail in a special section of this report. Projects that produced materials for particular newcomer groups were also funded under this program.<sup>5</sup>

However, some witnesses told the Committee that despite the awareness initiatives, elder abuse remains a hidden problem, due in part to reluctance by victims to report the abuse:

A lot of older women don't want to report abuse because it is done by adult children or their spouses and they fear losing those relationships. For a lot of seniors who were at home raising their families, that has been their whole life, and to separate from those relationships is a huge issue for them.<sup>6</sup>

Witnesses suggested that targeting the campaign could be helpful. For example, witnesses emphasized the importance of making children more aware of the issue:

Education, of course, must also include youth-focused programs, for it is the children and youth of today who will truly change the face of elder abuse by challenging the beliefs that this is acceptable behaviour.<sup>7</sup>

**Recommendation 1: That awareness programs be targeted across the age spectrum, including adult children and youth.<sup>8</sup>**

The Committee heard that the federal awareness initiative was not as successful among Aboriginal women and their families, and that individual Aboriginal women in their communities had developed their own approaches in their own communities.<sup>9</sup>

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3 Ibid., 1555.

4 Ibid., 1535.

5 Ellen Healey, Director, Social Programs Division, Community Development and Partnerships Directorate, Income Security and Social Development, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1615.

6 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1650.

7 Patricia Fleischmann, Police Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1600.

8 Support for this recommendation also came from Barb Mildon, President-elect, Canadian Nurses Association, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1655.

9 Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director, Native Women's Association of Canada, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1725.

The Committee also heard about the lack of awareness of services and information available to immigrant communities.<sup>10</sup>

**Recommendation 2: That awareness campaigns be customized for particular populations, including Aboriginal communities and recent immigrants to Canada.**

**B. Gaps**

**1. Data on Incidence and Prevalence**

Scholars, advocates, staff of service and police organizations, and federal officials all told the Committee that the lack of a common definition across disciplines and professions and the dearth of data with respect to the incidence and prevalence of elder abuse posed challenges in creating greater awareness among their own groups and in the wider public.<sup>11</sup>

Many witnesses referred to the World Health Organization definition of elder abuse as a good working definition. At the Committee's first hearing, a Public Health Agency of Canada official cited the definition:

The definition that the Public Health Agency employs to define elder abuse comes from the World Health Organization: "a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person."<sup>12</sup>

While witnesses agreed that this was often the basis for definitions used by many jurisdictions both domestically and internationally, the Committee heard that there are variations in provincial legislation and case law.<sup>13</sup>

The researcher whose work has focussed on common definitions and measurement told the Committee that definition and measures matter because they determine what "counts" in prevalence and incidence studies, how legislation is drafted to address the

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10 Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1710

11 Marie Beaulieu, Tenured Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1610; and Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1540.

12 Marla Israel, Acting Director General, Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada, *Evidence*, October 18, 2011, 1605.

13 Dr. Lynn McDonald, Scientific Director, National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1420.

problem, and the scope and range of services required to prevent and address elder abuse.<sup>14</sup> This was echoed by other witnesses.<sup>15</sup>

At the time of the hearing, the research project described above had not discerned a consensus definition. Since that time, a wide range of stakeholders, facilitated by the research team, reached consensus on the following definition: “Mistreatment of older adults refers to actions and/or behaviours, or lack of actions and/or behaviours, that cause harm or risk of harm within a trusting relationship. Mistreatment includes abuse and neglect of older adults.”<sup>16</sup>

As noted above, the Committee heard that elder abuse is under-reported, not only to law enforcement agencies, but also to service providers.<sup>17</sup> While some survey data on victimization and reporting of crimes are available, they do not provide information specific to abuse of elders.<sup>18</sup>

**Recommendation 3: That government encourage the development and adoption of common definitions for elder abuse as well as survey instruments so that accurate information can be collected about the incidence and prevalence of elder abuse in Canada.**<sup>19</sup>

The Committee heard from witnesses that women in some groups are multiply vulnerable to abuse, including women whose first language is not an official or majority language, women with disabilities, and First Nations women, especially on-reserve,<sup>20</sup> but without data, the extent of abuse among these groups cannot be quantified.

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14 Ibid., 1355.

15 Dr. Christine Walsh, Associate Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1645.

16 From email from Elder Abuse Project Coordinator of National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly (NICE), dated January 19, 2012.

17 For examples, see Marla Israel, Acting Director General, Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada, *Evidence*, October 18, 2011, 1605; and Dr. Christine Walsh, Associate Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1645.

18 See, for examples, “General Social Survey: Victimization,” *The Daily*, September 28, 2010. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100928/dq100928a-eng.htm>.

19 Dr. Christine Walsh, Associate Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1650; and Marla Israel, Acting Director General, Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada, *Evidence*, October 18, 2011, 1605.

20 Krista James, National Director, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1535 and Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1710.

**Recommendation 4: That surveys on the incidence and prevalence of elder abuse in Canada include special attention to at-risk populations.<sup>21</sup>**

**2. Resources to Respond to Heightened Awareness**

The Committee heard that awareness campaigns, including the federal advertisements, have been reported to increase calls to law enforcement officers and service providers.<sup>22</sup> As described by one witness,

The federal elder abuse initiative over the past few years has helped build awareness, but sometimes at a cost to communities who have few, if any, resources to support that awareness and to help individuals. Awareness and appropriate resources need to go hand in hand.<sup>23</sup>

Several witnesses highlighted the need to provide adequate resources to meet the service needs of increased reporting in response to awareness campaigns: “Public awareness of the issue has come a long way, but now we need to focus on coordinating services. If people are told to reach out and ask for help, they need the services to support them.”<sup>24</sup>

**Recommendation 5: That awareness campaigns include information about available resources.<sup>25</sup>**

The Committee also heard that older women themselves needed to be more aware of both the issue and the options available to them if they are the victims of violence:

Legal and social policy should not prioritize protectionist goals at the expense of undermining women's autonomy and personal power; rather, legal and policy strategies should be developed through a lens that focuses on empowering older women survivors of abuse. How do we do this? Some examples are: raising awareness of options;

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21 For examples, see Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director, Native Women's Association of Canada, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1635; and Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, *Evidence*, November 24, 2011, 1550.

22 Jared Buhler, Constable, Elder Abuse Intervention Team, Edmonton Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1645

23 Charmaine Spencer, Co-Chair, Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1530.

24 Elizabeth Siegel, Coordinator, Newfoundland and Labrador Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1645; and Jared Buhler, Constable, Elder Abuse Intervention Team, Edmonton Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1645.

25 Elizabeth Siegel, Coordinator, Newfoundland and Labrador Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1645.

increasing access to services [and] allowing women to make choices about what steps to take ...<sup>26</sup>

**Recommendation 6: That service providers in agencies serving seniors work to empower senior women.<sup>27</sup>**

**3. Tools for Professionals and Other Service Providers**

While the population becomes more aware of elder abuse, several witnesses told the Committee that service providers are often unaware of the risk factors for elder abuse, and do not know how to respond when they suspect abuse. In particular, the Committee heard of this gap among social workers,<sup>28</sup> health professionals,<sup>29</sup> lawyers<sup>30</sup> and other professional and occupational groups.

The Committee also heard that many front-line service organizations are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the needs of older clients, including victims of abuse:

[T]he needs of older women can be different from those of their younger counterparts and communities and organizations should be funded to create resource agencies and programs that provide support and assistance to older women who have experienced abuse, with particular emphasis on making those resources accessible to older women who are isolated in some way.<sup>31</sup>

**Recommendation 7: That steps be taken to encourage all seniors-serving organizations, e.g., banks or hospitals, to be equipped to respond to an older person reporting abuse.<sup>32</sup>**

While the Committee heard that training for police officers is being provided by

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26 Krista James, National Director, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1540.

27 Judith A. Wahl, Executive Director, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, *Evidence*, November 1, 2011, 1625; and Ellen Healey, Director, Social Programs Division, Community Development and Partnerships Directorate, Income Security and Social Development, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1615.

28 Dr. Silvia Straka, Assistant Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1555.

29 Marla Israel, Acting Director General, Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada, *Evidence*, October 18, 2011, 1605.

30 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1705.

31 Krista James, National Director, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1535.

32 Ibid.



police organizations and other partners,<sup>33</sup> another witness suggested that a national forum of police officers would assist in providing consistent responses across Canada.<sup>34</sup>

In addition, the Committee heard that the recent federal awareness initiative provided funds to six national professional organizations to develop such tools. These organizations included occupational therapists, social workers, and nurses.<sup>35</sup> In addition, the most recent call for proposals under the New Horizons for Seniors program has a focus on training “front-line personnel working with seniors, those who are best positioned to identify possible situations of abuse.”<sup>36</sup>

## FORMS OF ABUSE

Witnesses told the Committee of multiple forms of abuse: physical abuse is the most commonly understood, but financial abuse occurs the most frequently.<sup>37</sup> Each is addressed more fully in the following section. Other forms of abuse were noted, and are addressed in a third section below.

### A. Physical Abuse and Neglect

The Committee heard evidence that although Statistics Canada’s General Social Survey on victimization of violence indicates that men and women are equally likely to be abused physically,<sup>38</sup> there is a differential impact on women. As one witness pointed out, the number of older women is and will continue to be greater than the number of older men,<sup>39</sup> so that even if the rate of victimization is the same, the number of abused women will be greater than the number of abused men.

Similarly, the Committee heard that as women live longer, they are more likely to have some disability, making them more vulnerable to injury and abuse.<sup>40</sup> Another witness

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33 Brenda Butterworth-Carr, Chief Superintendent, Director General, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1640; and Patricia Fleischmann, Police Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1555.

34 Jean-Guy Soulière, Chair, National Seniors Council, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1615.

35 Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1535.

36 Ibid.

37 Jean-Guy Soulière, Chair, National Seniors Council, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1545.

38 Dr. Christine Walsh, Associate Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1645.

39 Dr. Lynn McDonald, Scientific Director, National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1600; and Marie Beaulieu, Tenured Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1605.

40 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1705.

told the Committee that two-thirds of calls coming into agencies dealing with elder abuse in Canada are from women.<sup>41</sup>

The Committee also heard that “when women are abused it’s far worse than when it happens to men.”<sup>42</sup> Several witnesses cited homicide statistics, which showed that most women who were victims of homicide were killed by their spouses, and that women were murdered at a much higher rate than men.<sup>43</sup>

According to witnesses, economic status and financial dependency could be contributors to abuse and to women’s reticence to report any abuse.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, witnesses told the Committee that a lack of housing alternatives and/or fear of being institutionalized could be deterrents in reporting abuse.<sup>45</sup>

Witnesses also told Committee members that the perpetrators of physical abuse were most often family members,<sup>46</sup> but could also be staff of long-term care facilities for those no longer living independently.<sup>47</sup> Domestic abuse and abuse in group-living settings are each addressed in greater detail below.

## 1. Domestic Abuse

Witnesses reminded the Committee that for some older women living independently, the physical abuse would be “domestic abuse cases ... grown old.”<sup>48</sup> The Committee heard that violence at the hands of a spouse “remains the most common form of violence perpetrated against elderly women.”<sup>49</sup>

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41 Charmaine Spencer, Co-Chair, Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1430.

42 Dr. Lynn McDonald, Scientific Director, National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1600.

43 For example, see Dr. Christine Walsh, Associate Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1645.

44 Krista James, National Director, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1600.

45 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1705.

46 Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1710.

47 Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director, DisAbled Women’s Network of Canada, *Evidence*, November 24, 2011, 1555.

48 Elizabeth Siegel, Coordinator, Newfoundland and Labrador Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1650.

49 Jared Buhler, Constable Elder Abuse Intervention Team, Edmonton Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1645.

However, the Committee also heard that these women are often caught between two systems: those services that address domestic violence and those that address elder abuse more generally.<sup>50</sup> For example, one witness said that women’s shelters “have lacked ... an understanding of some of the dynamics of intimate partner abuse after retirement.”<sup>51</sup>

**Recommendation 8: That conversations between the domestic violence and elder abuse support services be facilitated.**

Witnesses reported that shelters providing safety to women escaping domestic violence aren’t always appropriate to older women, who may have mobility issues or health needs that can’t be accommodated in shelters serving women in general.<sup>52</sup>

**Recommendation 9: That shelters consider the needs of older women, including greater accessibility for mobility impairments.**<sup>53</sup>

Family members were also among the most probable perpetrators of other kinds of abuse, according to a wide range of witnesses.<sup>54</sup>

## **2. Abuse and Neglect in Group-living Setting**

Witnesses told Committee members that both residents (or patients) and staff may be perpetrators and victims of violence in long-term care facilities or other group-living facilities for older people.<sup>55</sup>

The Committee heard that abuse by staff may have its roots in insufficient training<sup>56</sup> or inadequate resources to meet the needs of residents or patients.<sup>57</sup>

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50 Dr. Silvia Straka, Assistant Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1555.

51 Ibid.

52 Elizabeth Siegel, Coordinator, Newfoundland and Labrador Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1650 and Cathy Bennett, Acting Director, Division of Aging and Seniors, Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada. *Evidence*, October 18, 2011, 1650.

53 Elizabeth Siegel, Coordinator, Newfoundland and Labrador Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1650.

54 For examples, see Marla Israel, Acting Director General, Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada, *Evidence*, October 18, 2011, 1605; and Gloria Gutman, President, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1545.

55 Hugh Armstrong, As an Individual, *Evidence*, November 1, 2011, 1540.

56 Josette Roussel, Nurse Advisor, Canadian Nurses Association, *Evidence*, October 10, 2011, 1655; and Jean-Guy Soulière, Chair, National Seniors Council, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1605.

57 Dr. Lynn McDonald, Scientific Director, National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1600.

When asked about what changes could be made to the health system to improve outcomes for seniors, one witness pointed to the need for medication in home care and long-term care facilities to be covered by a pharmacare program.<sup>58</sup>

## **B. Financial Abuse**

According to many witnesses, financial abuse is the most common form of elder abuse.<sup>59</sup> One federal official described it as “one of the more insidious forms of abuse against seniors.”<sup>60</sup>

By way of explanation, some witnesses pointed to the dependence of some women on men for financial resources and the resulting fear of reporting the abuse they might be experiencing as contributing factors to financial abuse. This same dependence increases their vulnerability to financial abuse.<sup>61</sup> As described by one witness, “because of having fewer financial resources, a lot of older women can be even more greatly affected by financial abuse.”<sup>62</sup>

Another witness described the additional factor of low levels of financial literacy among some older women: “Though both men and women can be victimized, older women are particularly vulnerable with their general lack of financial literacy.”<sup>63</sup>

### **Recommendation 10: That support be provided to encourage greater financial literacy among Canadians, especially those who are low income.**

Witnesses described the absence of basic necessities as a symptom of financial abuse<sup>64</sup> and suggested that isolation of the victim may be both a symptom of financial abuse,<sup>65</sup> and a factor increasing the risk of financial abuse.<sup>66</sup>

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58 Hugh Armstrong, As an Individual, *Evidence*, November 1, 2011, 1600.

59 For examples, see Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1540; and Jared Buhler, Constable, Elder Abuse Intervention Team, Edmonton Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1645.

60 Cathy Bennett, Acting Director, Division of Aging and Seniors, Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada. *Evidence*, October 18, 2011, 1630.

61 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1655.

62 *Ibid.*, 1650.

63 Patricia Fleischmann, Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1555.

64 Krista James, National Director, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1555.

65 Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1610.

66 Vanessa Bevilacqua, Adviser, Advocacy, Réseau FADOQ, *Evidence*, November 24, 2011, 1545.

One witness described a direct link between income and risk of abuse: “The economic vulnerability of older women that makes them more likely to suffer abuse.”<sup>67</sup> A provincial official appearing before the Committee also flagged the importance of “enough financial benefits so that they can live independently as long as possible.”<sup>68</sup>

The Committee heard that a 2007 federal-provincial-territorial forum, hosted by ministers responsible for seniors, included a focus on financial abuse, and that a 2008 forum focussed exclusively on this form of abuse.<sup>69</sup> One witness in particular focussed on the importance of receipt of Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement benefits to financial adequacy for elderly women, and called on both the federal and the provincial/territorial governments to collaborate to ensure automatic application for these benefits.<sup>70</sup>

**Recommendation 11: That the federal government work with provincial counterparts to ensure automatic application for the Guaranteed Income Supplement available to older women.**

**C. Other Forms of Abuse**

In addition to physical abuse and financial abuse, the Committee heard of numerous other forms, including sexual, psychological, emotional, neglect, violations of human and civil rights, and institutional abuse.<sup>71</sup> In addition, the Committee heard of abuse of medication, particularly among Aboriginal communities, where prescription drugs have become the preferred substance for those addicted. A corollary was financial abuse as a means to acquire other drugs from dealers.<sup>72</sup>

**RESPONSES TO AND PREVENTION OF ABUSE**

While witnesses had specific examples of how their agency responded to and prevented elder abuse, service-providers, government officials and researchers identified two broad themes: the significant role for law enforcement, and the critical requirement of collaboration among agencies to both prevention and response.

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67 Ibid., 1530.

68 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1705.

69 Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1535.

70 Vanessa Bevilacqua, Adviser, Advocacy, Réseau FADOQ, *Evidence*, November 24, 2011, 1530.

71 Gloria Gutman, President, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1540.

72 Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director, Native Women’s Association of Canada, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1640.

## A. Law Enforcement and Litigation

### 1. Federal legislation

Witnesses told the Committee that several sections of the *Criminal Code* relate to elder abuse. In addition to specific sections of the Code that might apply depending on the nature of the abuse, the Committee heard about the section that permits judges to take the age of the victim into account in sentencing. However, in response to questioning, a witness reported that research had shown how rarely age was mentioned in sentencing for crimes related to elder abuse, particularly in cases involving sexual assault.<sup>73</sup> However, taken together, witness testimony was divided on the sufficiency of the *Criminal Code* to respond to elder abuse.<sup>74</sup>

#### **Recommendation 12: That Parliament support tougher sentences for those who abuse seniors.**

Some witnesses suggested that lawyers and others in the criminal justice system may simply not be knowledgeable about how existing laws can be used to argue cases with respect to elder abuse. As described by one witness, “there is a need for awareness, not just among police forces, but among lawyers, around what can be done with existing legislation.”<sup>75</sup>

#### **Recommendation 13: That awareness be increased among law enforcement officials about how existing laws can be used in elder abuse cases.**<sup>76</sup>

The Committee was also advised to consider federal legislation beyond the *Criminal Code* that can have an impact on the incidence and severity of elder abuse. In particular, the Committee was advised that privacy concerns often trump the safety of women experiencing abuse,<sup>77</sup> although the law in most jurisdictions makes exceptions in the case of suspected danger. As an example, one witness flagged the pending Bill C-12, one clause of which could have the unintended consequence of informing family members

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73 Krista James, National Director, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1535.

74 For examples, see Jean-Guy Soulière, Chair, National Seniors Council, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1605; and Patricia Fleischmann, Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1555.

75 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1705.

76 Ibid.

77 Jared Buhler, Constable, Elder Abuse Intervention Team, Edmonton Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1645; and Isabelle Coady, Detective, Elder Abuse Unit, Ottawa Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1710.

of suspected financial abuse, when the family member may be the perpetrator of the abuse.<sup>78</sup>

There was also a range of views and opinions on the merits of mandatory reporting, whether in long-term care facilities or more generally, according to witness testimony.<sup>79</sup>

## 2. The legal system

As described in greater detail below, many challenges face law enforcement with respect to investigating crimes of elder abuse. However, some witnesses focussed on the legal system itself as a part of the problem in responding appropriately to elder abuse.

In reporting on the National Seniors Council research on elder abuse, its chair noted that the legal system itself can become a barrier to pursuing legal remedies:

[O]ne of the things we found was that the legal system is so complex it scares certain older people from complaining and from going before the courts. They are scared of the system. So one of the things we mentioned in our report is to try to simplify this and make it more accessible for older people. As we heard, a lot of people were so scared of the legal system that they didn't complain about their abuse.<sup>80</sup>

Another witness described elder abuse as “under-prosecuted:”

[W]hen it comes to abuse of seniors, particularly women who are seniors, it's not only underreported, it's under-prosecuted, so that the numbers are really quite deceiving in terms of prosecuting.<sup>81</sup>

The Committee also heard that some aspects of elder abuse, for example, financial abuse, might not be seen as a criminal matter at all: “The complainant is commonly advised it's a civil matter, when clearly it is appropriate for criminal intervention, especially in cases of financial abuse.”<sup>82</sup>

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78 Judith A. Wahl, Executive Director, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, *Evidence*, November 1, 2011, 1545.

79 For examples, see Constable Patricia Fleischmann, Police Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1555; and Detective Isabelle Coady, Detective, Elder Abuse Unit, Ottawa Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1715.

80 Jean-Guy Soulière, Chair, National Seniors Council, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1610.

81 Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1720.

82 Patricia Fleischmann, Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1555.

Witnesses also told the Committee that the lack of access to legal aid would also serve as a deterrent to women pursuing legal remedies to abuse.<sup>83</sup>

### 3. Challenges for law enforcement

The Committee was told that competing demands for resources combined with officers who may not be familiar with all the complexities of elder abuse could contribute to the low level of prosecution of elder abuse cases.<sup>84</sup> One police officer said that officers often fail to see a crime in elder abuse.<sup>85</sup> In addition, witnesses said that the time required of officers in such prosecutions was a deterrent to proceeding, particularly with complex cases.

One witness offered an example of the time required to investigate a case of financial abuse:

It was a case of multiple offences by a [personal support worker] who was financially abusing seniors. They were all small amounts of financial abuse. Cumulatively, she had stolen thousands. To do that investigation on all those small bits, the police don't necessarily get the supports to do that.<sup>86</sup>

However, police witnesses at the national, provincial and local level all described the unwillingness of many victims to press charges against the perpetrators of abuse, particularly when that person is a trusted family member. Rather, it was suggested, victims simply want the abuse to stop.<sup>87</sup>

In these cases, and in others, witnesses said it is important that police work with networks of other service providers and professionals to provide alternative ways to address the abuse.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the Committee heard that victim services of police operations can provide support even when charges are not laid.<sup>89</sup>

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83 Krista James, National Director, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1400; and Judith A. Wahl, Executive Director, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, *Evidence*, November 1, 2011, 1550.

84 Patricia Fleischmann, Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1555.

85 Jared Buhler, Constable, Elder Abuse Intervention Team, Edmonton Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1720.

86 Judith A. Wahl, Executive Director, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, *Evidence*, November 1, 2011, 1545.

87 Isabelle Coady, Detective, Elder Abuse Unit, Ottawa Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1700.

88 For examples, see Isobel Fitzpatrick, Detective Sergeant, Coordinator, Eastern Regional Abuse Issues, Ontario Provincial Police, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1650; and Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, *Evidence*, November 24, 2011, 1615.

89 For examples, see Jared Buhler, Constable, Elder Abuse Intervention Team, Edmonton Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1645; and Isobel Fitzpatrick, Detective Sergeant, Coordinator, Eastern Regional Abuse Issues, Ontario Provincial Police, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1720.



**Recommendation 14: That police forces be encouraged to establish and maintain close connections with local service providers for the elderly.**

Other witnesses described the unwillingness to report to any agency, fearing the loss of relationships that are important to them or retaliation by the perpetrators.<sup>90</sup>

**B. Collaboration and Coordination**

Witnesses described competing priorities among service providers, highlighting possible contradictions between protecting older women and supporting them to make their own decisions.<sup>91</sup>

For example, one witness described the risk in seeking legal remedies, and their possible impact on the autonomy of women:

One of the challenges with a legal approach is that what we see thus far in Canada is that for a lot of the legislation and policy that identify remedies and circumstances of risk and abuse, they're often protective remedies, protective measures that take control, independence, and power away from the vulnerable woman.<sup>92</sup>

Another described this dichotomy, citing “a real tension... between a risk-and-protection scenario versus an empowerment scenario.”<sup>93</sup>

**Recommendation 15: That responses to elder abuse respect “women’s autonomy and personal power.”<sup>94</sup>**

Despite these different approaches with respect to protection and autonomy, witnesses from all sectors emphasized the importance of collaboration among all partners, and the need for locally determined solutions to issues of elder abuse in each community.<sup>95</sup> Officials from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada told the Committee that

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90 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1650.

91 Dr. Silvia Straka, Assistant Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1600.

92 Krista James, National Director, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1540.

93 Dr. Silvia Straka, Assistant Professor, As an Individual, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1600.

94 Krista James, National Director, Canadian Centre for Elder Law, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1605.

95 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1700; and Ellen Healey, Director, Social Programs Division, Community Development and Partnerships Directorate, Income Security and Social Development, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1610.

the most recent call for proposals by the New Horizons for Seniors program focussed on such cross-disciplinary work.<sup>96</sup>

A consistent theme during this study was the need for cross-sectoral collaboration. From the law enforcement agencies, the Committee heard of the need for such coordination, particularly when pursuing prosecution is either not feasible or not desired by the victim. From the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), the Committee heard:

We know that the police play a vital role in protecting seniors from abuse, but we also know that we cannot do this alone. We rely on the wisdom and experience of those who work with seniors fulltime to assist us ... We rely heavily on community experts who have a wealth of experience that we quite often tap into.<sup>97</sup>

From the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the Committee heard the same message:

While the RCMP takes great strides to promote elder abuse awareness and prevention, we recognize that we simply cannot do it alone. We stress the importance of establishing networks and/or formal partnerships with external community partners that can assist us in conducting research on elder abuse and delivering prevention and awareness programs.<sup>98</sup>

Other witnesses who provided services to older women identified the need for greater coordination as well: “By approaching this issue in a comprehensive, multi-faceted way, we can lay out a strategy that will build the culture of caring, dignity, and respect that our older Canadians deserve,” said a representative of Canadian nurses, and called for “a comprehensive strategy.”<sup>99</sup> A witness with experience implementing Ontario’s elder abuse strategy told the Committee: “We call for an aging strategy for Canada that highlights the challenges for older women. However, the strategy must be comprehensive and cut across the silos to include other levels of government and the private sector.”<sup>100</sup>

These and other witnesses called for a national approach to facilitating the needed coordination and collaboration.

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96 Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1535.

97 Isobel Fitzpatrick, Detective Sergeant, Coordinator, Eastern Regional Abuse Issues, Ontario Provincial Police, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1650.

98 Brenda Butterworth-Carr, Chief Superintendent, Director General, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1640.

99 Barb Mildon, President-elect, Canadian Nurses Association, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1640.

100 Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1715

## PROMISING PRACTICES

The Committee heard of many success stories, programs and initiatives that witnesses have described as effective. To the greatest extent possible, to ensure accuracy and to reflect the positive nature of the results, descriptions have been taken verbatim from the testimony of the witnesses.

### A. Awareness

- The Canadian Nurses Association "... has partnered with the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario on the PEACE program, which is promoting the awareness of elder abuse in long-term care homes. ... Ten long-term care settings were selected from across Canada to participate in the project. Each of these PEACE partners has developed and implemented tools, such as an education curriculum for health care providers, patients, and families, as well as printed materials, that are enhancing resident safety and quality of care."<sup>101</sup>
- "The Grandmother Spirit project was undertaken [by the Native Women's Association of Canada] to raise awareness of senior abuse, safety, and well-being for senior [A]boriginal women in Canada. The project was based on the belief that grandmothers, senior [A]boriginal women, hold tremendous life experience and wisdom, and that they should guide work carried out on the issues of senior abuse, as well as identify what needs to be done to help ensure that senior [A]boriginal women are safe and well in their communities... one grandmother had started a local radio show to raise awareness and talk about issues of senior abuse."<sup>102</sup>
- "In Alberta and British Columbia, the [Aboriginal Circle of Educators] initiative has what is referred to as the ageless wisdom initiative. This initiative was developed in consultation with the National Aboriginal Policing Services branch [of the RCMP] and Aboriginal Policing Services in British Columbia. It's a series of workshops, targeted specifically to seniors groups, about issues concerning safety, frauds and scams, abuse, and victim services."<sup>103</sup>

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101 Barb Milton, President-elect, Canadian Nurses Association, *Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1640-1645.

102 Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director, Native Women's Association of Canada, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1635-1640. This project produced related information and resources in the form of a video and pamphlets, also available online.

103 Brenda Butterworth-Carr, Chief Superintendent, Director General, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1640.

## B. Information and Resources

- “Seniors Resource Centre ... developed a speakers bureau about elder abuse and an interagency elder abuse committee to discuss the issue and share information. They did a guide, *Looking Beyond the Hurt: A Service Provider’s Guide to Elder Abuse*, to help service providers understand where to refer people affected by elder abuse.”<sup>104</sup>
- “*Free From Harm* ... is a best practices guide for women who have experienced abuse, which [the Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse] released in 2007.”<sup>105</sup>
- The 2008 federal-provincial-territorial forum on elder abuse resulted in “a new series of eight fact sheets for seniors on financial planning and protection from financial abuse.”<sup>106</sup> Also, federal funding has been dedicated to “a new TV ad focusing on financial abuse” planned to air in early 2012.<sup>107</sup>
- “In Manitoba, the RCMP collaborated with the Winnipeg Police Service and partner agencies to develop the “It’s Everybody’s Business” video, which is designed to get the word out that the prevention of elder abuse really is everybody’s business.”<sup>108</sup>
- “The RCMP national crime prevention services have also developed the *Seniors’ Guidebook to Safety and Security* ... The publication was recently updated to include more in-depth information on the subject of elder abuse, and it will be going to print shortly.”<sup>109</sup>

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104 Elizabeth Siegel, Coordinator, Newfoundland and Labrador Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1640.

105 Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1705.

106 Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1535.

107 Ibid.

108 Brenda Butterworth-Carr, Chief Superintendent, Director General, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1640.

109 Brenda Butterworth-Carr, Chief Superintendent, Director General, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1645.

- In a 2011 Toronto Police initiative entitled Youth in Policing, "... students produced a one minute and thirty second video on elder abuse that will be uploaded shortly to the Toronto Police YouTube site."<sup>110</sup>

### **C. Coordinated Responses**

- The Newfoundland and Labrador model of coordinated response includes "a central elder abuse resource line; a provincial office; regional elder abuse consultants; response teams—these are multi-disciplinary teams to discuss cases; senior navigators in communities, who actually are trained seniors within communities who can be there as another person for seniors to talk to if they want help; a seniors' advocate office; and basic standards of supports for abused seniors."<sup>111</sup>
- "[T]he Nova Scotia elder abuse strategy ... provides direction and leadership to all partners in preventing and addressing the abuse of seniors. ... It outlined four strategic areas: education and awareness; prevention of financial abuse; community-based networks; and resources and support. ... We also started a toll-free senior abuse line."<sup>112</sup>
- In Ontario: "seven regional consultants are our key resources. Of the seven, two are francophone consultants and one is a multicultural consultant. They support local elder abuse committees and networks. They strengthen partnerships among them. They facilitate and undertake education and training initiatives for professionals, volunteers, and seniors. They promote information sharing. They also are helpful in developing model protocols and assisting in grant writing."<sup>113</sup>
- "In one on-reserve community, [the Grandmother Spirit project] learned about an innovative program in which local RCMP officers visit and have tea with elders who the community or community health staff have identified as vulnerable or who they think may be experiencing abuse but not reporting it."<sup>114</sup>

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110 Patricia Fleischmann, Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1600.

111 Elizabeth Siegel, Coordinator, Newfoundland and Labrador Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1640.

112 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1700.

113 Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1705.

114 Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director, Native Women's Association of Canada, *Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1640.

- “Manitoba RCMP ... partnered with seniors and students to develop the Seniors are Cool program. The program promotes discussion with students on issues such as abuse and neglect and focuses on what students can do to promote respect for older adults.”<sup>115</sup>
  
- In Ontario, “... provincial coordination between the OPP and other police services in Ontario in the area of abuse and neglect of older persons, with our provincial coordinating committee, known as LEAPS or Law Enforcement Agencies Protecting Seniors. This committee meets regularly to discuss challenges and shares best practices across the province. Committee members also liaise regularly by email to support each other when challenging issues are presented.”<sup>116</sup>
  
- The Edmonton Police Service has “a memorandum of understanding to deal with the agencies we work with. I was once asked how that works, and I said it’s actually harder but the results are better. It’s complicated to bring people from different philosophical perspectives together to work on the same problem with competing policies, and sometimes even competing goals or mandates, who are all supposedly working toward the same goal.”<sup>117</sup>
  
- In Quebec, “[a] telephone line was set up for referral purposes. Any senior in Quebec can call a single number if they feel they have been the victim of abuse. Their call is immediately transferred to the health and social services centre in their area. And right away, they come under the care of a social worker.”<sup>118</sup>

The Committee heard that funding for these practices is often short-term, and even if they are successful, they are unable to continue. For example, funding for a senior safety line in Ontario that had received more than 10,000 calls in the three years it has operated was expected to end within months.<sup>119</sup> Another witness described the limitations of short-term funding for service-delivery organizations:

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115 Brenda Butterworth-Carr, Chief Superintendent, Director General, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime Prevention Services, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1640.

116 Isobel Fitzpatrick, Detective Sergeant, Coordinator, Eastern Regional Abuse Issues, Ontario Provincial Police, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1655.

117 Jared Buhler, Constable, Elder Abuse Intervention Team, Edmonton Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1710..

118 Vanessa Bevilacqua, Adviser, Advocacy, Réseau FADOQ, *Evidence*, November 24, 2011, 1545.

119 Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1705.

Much of the money comes in on a project basis rather than as core funding. The agencies, including the elder abuse network in Ottawa, spend so much of their time justifying their existence, writing grant proposals, sending in interim and final reports, hoping they get the next one, and worrying about whether they have to lay off staff because they haven't heard yet.<sup>120</sup>

Witnesses also flagged the need for funding for local organizations to implement emerging promising practices.<sup>121</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Committee heard from active, engaged, passionate and expert witnesses on the scourge of elder abuse, particularly as it affects women. Witnesses identified a range of themes, from the urgent need to know more about how often such abuse occurs and in what circumstances, to the common commitment to sharing resources and building networks to prevent and respond to such abuse. Collectively, witnesses told the Committee that awareness is increasing, but much remains to be done.

The Committee was impressed with the number of promising practices currently in place throughout Canada, as evidenced by the many success stories related to ongoing programs and initiatives.

With praise for the federal government's recent awareness and research initiatives, witnesses identified the need for on-going development of resources for professionals working with seniors and for older women themselves, and for continuing attention to this issue.

Recent announcements with respect to *Criminal Code* amendments are intended to result in tougher sentences for those who are guilty of crimes associated with abuse of older people, and the Budget 2012 announcement with respect to continuing funding for the Family Violence Initiative among federal agencies, combined with the New Horizons for Seniors funding for initiatives related to elder abuse, are important indications of the federal government's on-going commitment to prevent and reduce elder abuse.

The Committee thanks witnesses for providing a full picture of elder abuse, and for their recommendations with respect to prevention of elder abuse and enforcement of existing laws that can contribute to that goal.

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120 Hugh Armstrong, As an Individual, *Evidence*, November 1, 2011, 1620.

121 Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1705.





## LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

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RECOMMENDATION 1: THAT AWARENESS PROGRAMS BE TARGETED ACROSS THE AGE SPECTRUM, INCLUDING ADULT CHILDREN AND YOUTH.....	2
RECOMMENDATION 2: THAT AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS BE CUSTOMIZED FOR PARTICULAR POPULATIONS, INCLUDING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES AND RECENT IMMIGRANTS TO CANADA.....	3
RECOMMENDATION 3: THAT GOVERNMENT ENCOURAGE THE DEVELOPMENT AND ADOPTION OF COMMON DEFINITIONS FOR ELDER ABUSE AS WELL AS SURVEY INSTRUMENTS SO THAT ACCURATE INFORMATION CAN BE COLLECTED ABOUT THE INCIDENCE AND PREVALENCE OF ELDER ABUSE IN CANADA.....	4
RECOMMENDATION 4: THAT SURVEYS ON THE INCIDENCE AND PREVALENCE OF ELDER ABUSE IN CANADA INCLUDE SPECIAL ATTENTION TO AT-RISK POPULATIONS.....	5
RECOMMENDATION 5: THAT AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS INCLUDE INFORMATION ABOUT AVAILABLE RESOURCES.....	5
RECOMMENDATION 6: THAT SERVICE PROVIDERS IN AGENCIES SERVING SENIORS WORK TO EMPOWER SENIOR WOMEN.....	6
RECOMMENDATION 7: THAT STEPS BE TAKEN TO ENCOURAGE ALL SENIORS-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS, E.G., BANKS OR HOSPITALS, TO BE EQUIPPED TO RESPOND TO AN OLDER PERSON REPORTING ABUSE.....	6
RECOMMENDATION 8: THAT CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ELDER ABUSE SUPPORT SERVICES BE FACILITATED.....	9
RECOMMENDATION 9: THAT SHELTERS CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF OLDER WOMEN, INCLUDING GREATER ACCESSIBILITY FOR MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS...	9
RECOMMENDATION 10: THAT SUPPORT BE PROVIDED TO ENCOURAGE GREATER FINANCIAL LITERACY AMONG CANADIANS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE LOW INCOME.....	10
RECOMMENDATION 11: THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WORK WITH PROVINCIAL COUNTERPARTS TO ENSURE AUTOMATIC APPLICATION FOR THE GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT AVAILABLE TO OLDER WOMEN.....	11
RECOMMENDATION 12: THAT PARLIAMENT SUPPORT TOUGHER SENTENCES FOR THOSE WHO ABUSE SENIORS.....	12
RECOMMENDATION 13: THAT AWARENESS BE INCREASED AMONG LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS ABOUT HOW EXISTING LAWS CAN BE USED IN ELDER ABUSE CASES.....	12

RECOMMENDATION 14: THAT POLICE FORCES BE ENCOURAGED TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN CLOSE CONNECTIONS WITH LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS FOR THE ELDERLY..... 15

RECOMMENDATION 15: THAT RESPONSES TO ELDER ABUSE RESPECT “WOMEN’S AUTONOMY AND PERSONAL POWER.” ..... 15

# APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
<b>Public Health Agency of Canada</b> Cathy Bennett, Acting Director, Division of Aging and Seniors, Centre for Health Promotion Marla Israel, Acting Director General, Centre for Health Promotion	2011/10/18	4
<b>Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse</b> Charmaine Spencer, Co-Chair <b>Canadian Nurses Association</b> Barb Mildon, President-elect Josette Roussel, Nurse Advisor <b>International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse</b> Gloria Gutman, President <b>National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly</b> Lynn McDonald, Scientific Director	2011/10/20	5
<b>Canadian Centre for Elder Law</b> Krista James, National Director <b>National Seniors Council</b> Jean-Guy Soulière, Chair <b>Newfoundland and Labrador Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse</b> Elizabeth Siegel, Coordinator <b>Nova Scotia Department of Seniors</b> Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer <b>Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse</b> Teri Kay, Executive Director Manon Thompson, Regional Consultant	2011/10/25	6
<b>As individuals</b> Marie Beaulieu, Tenured Professor Silvia Straka, Assistant Professor Christine Walsh, Associate Professor <b>Native Women's Association of Canada</b> Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director	2011/10/27	7
<b>As an individual</b> Hugh Armstrong, Professor	2011/11/01	8

**Advocacy Centre for the Elderly**

Judith A. Wahl, Executive Director

**Department of Human Resources and Skills  
Development**

2011/11/03

9

Ellen Healey, Director,  
Social Programs Division, Community Development and  
Partnerships Directorate, Income Security and Social  
Development Branch

Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister,  
Income Security and Social Development Branch

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police**

Brenda Butterworth-Carr, Chief Superintendent,  
Director General, National Aboriginal Policing and Crime  
Prevention Services

Barbara McMorrow, Constable,  
Policy and Program Analyst, National Aboriginal Policing  
Services, Contract and Aboriginal Policing

**Edmonton Police Service**

2011/11/22

11

Jared Buhler, Constable,  
Elder Abuse Intervention Team

**Ontario Provincial Police**

Leslie Craig, Inspector,  
Manager, Crime Prevention Section

Isobel Fitzpatrick, Detective Sergeant,  
Coordinator, Eastern Regional Abuse Issues

**Ottawa Police Service**

Isabelle Coady, Detective,  
Elder Abuse Unit

**Toronto Police Service**

Patricia Fleischmann, Police Constable,  
Community Mobilization Unit

**DisAbled Women's Network of Canada**

2011/11/24

12

Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director

**Réseau FADOQ**

Vanessa Bevilacqua, Adviser,  
Advocacy

# APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

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## Organizations and Individuals

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Canadian Centre for Elder Law



# REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings ([Meetings Nos. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 17, 21, 24, 25, 26 and 29](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Marie-Claude Morin, M.P.

Chair





## Supplementary Opinion of the New Democratic Party of Canada

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The New Democrat Members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women are concerned that the final report on the Abuse of Older Women does not reflect the scope of the testimony heard from the 30 witnesses who testified before the committee. The committee heard about widespread dangers faced by senior women in Canada and federal actions that are needed to address the complex problem of abuse against older women. While we agree in general with the recommendations in the report, some recommendations listed in the final report do not accurately describe what was recommended to the committee by expert witnesses. Instead, the recommendations in this report exclude directives to the federal government to take the concrete steps necessary to end violence against elder women.

In contrast to the report “Abuse of Older Women,” New Democrats would like to draw attention to a report published in 2011 by a bi-partisan ad-hoc parliamentary committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care, “Not To Be Forgotten: Care of Vulnerable Canadians”. The third section of this report is entirely focused on senior abuse and while many of the witnesses interviewed were the same as the ones heard by the Status of Women Committee, New Democrats find that the palliative and compassionate care report and its recommendations are thorough, accurate and faithful to testimony and expert advice. It is our recommendation, therefore, that this report on palliative and compassionate care be tabled in the House of Commons and that the government should respond to the recommendations made in this report.

### **Federal Elder Abuse Strategy**

New Democrats echo the sentiments expressed by the palliative and compassionate care committee’s report. We believe that responding to elder abuse requires coordinated, collaborative and comprehensive actions to be taken in all sectors of society, including all levels of government. The federal government is well positioned to spearhead such an initiative as they did with the 2009-2011 Federal Elder Abuse Awareness Initiative (FEAAI).

The committee heard that multiplying factors such as immigrant status, aboriginal status, disability, and living in a rural community can make women more vulnerable to abuse. In many cases, the Federal Elder Abuse Awareness Initiative did not reach out far enough to marginalized women. Culturally appropriate awareness campaigns and services must be provided to senior women, particularly in cases of elder abuse. Disabled women of all ages, being more vulnerable or dependent, experience extremely high rates of abuse that are similar in kind to the crimes of elder abuse.

**New Democrats recommend that the government develop a National Elder Abuse Prevention Strategy in collaboration with the provinces, territories as well as law enforcement agencies, non-governmental organizations and community organizations.**

**We also recommend a National Elder Abuse Prevention Strategy be inclusive of the special needs of marginalized women and that organizations representing these women be involved in the development of the strategy.**

## **Prevention of Elder Abuse**

Redressing the factors that cause elder abuse is a crucial step towards eliminating violence against seniors. While seniors from every culture, background, income and gender are the victims of abuse, the committee heard that social determinates such as income and social status, gender, education and housing security can render a person more or less vulnerable to abuse. Older women are more often the victims of abuse not because they are necessarily physically weaker than their male counterparts, but because senior women in Canada suffer from significantly higher rates of poverty and housing insecurity.<sup>1</sup>

The committee heard about the lack of support to caregivers in Canada, 90% of whom are women.<sup>2</sup> Many informal caregivers juggle caring for elderly relatives, young children and work, leaving them overstretched. Many caregivers do not benefit from government initiatives aimed at caregivers because either their income is too low or they are not eligible for employment insurance benefits because they do not have enough hours accrued.

The committee also heard about “Elder Abuse Consultants”.<sup>3</sup> In Manitoba the consultants’ functions include education, awareness and training presentations; working to develop community response/monitoring teams to ensure that resources and supports are available and accessible; and acting as a consultant to other government departments and community groups.

**New Democrats recommend that the Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement transfers be immediately increased to lift all seniors out of poverty and that the age of eligibility of OAS remain at 65.**

**We also recommend that the federal government, in consultation with the provinces and territories, provide a more flexible and generous Employment Insurance Compassionate Care Benefit to permit family members to take up to 6 months leave from work to tend to relatives near the end of their lives, up from the current 6 weeks; and**

**Introduce a new Caregiver Benefit, modeled after the Child Tax Benefit, to assist low and middle-income families in tackling the costs of everyday needs while caring for family members;**

**We further recommend that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to develop and support Elder Abuse Consultants.**

## **Service Provision**

Since the FEAAI ended, witnesses identified a great need to not only continue the awareness campaigns it began, but also to move beyond awareness in order to coordinate much needed service provision to Canadian seniors who are facing abuse and violence. Awareness programs across the country succeeded in creating a

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<sup>1</sup> Vanessa Bevilacqua, Adviser, Advocacy, Réseau FADOQ, *FEWO Evidence*, November 24, 2011, 1534.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 1615.

<sup>3</sup> Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1707.

significant increase in reporting the crimes of elder abuse and therefore an increased demand for services.<sup>4</sup> However, dedicated service providers across the spectrum, from healthcare to legal advocates, lack the funding and resources to respond to this growing need and victims are not getting the help they request.<sup>5</sup> It is an unbalanced approach for the government to bring awareness of elder abuse into focus and not to provide support for treatment, service provision and prevention. The committee heard that both Nova Scotia and Ontario, among other provinces, have a toll-free senior abuse hotline whose calls predominately come from senior women seeking help.<sup>6</sup>

**New Democrats recommend that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to support organizations, agencies, NGOs and specialists who are dedicated to responding to and preventing senior abuse.**

**We also recommend that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to support a pan-Canadian toll-free elder abuse hotline.**

### **Research and Statistics**

Canada needs statistics on senior abuse. A lack of current data was identified by many witnesses as being a serious problem.<sup>7</sup> In order to understand how to treat a problem, it is necessary to understand the specific nature of that problem. Without up to date research and information, service providers are disabled. The Conservative government has hobbled the capacity for research in Canada by scrapping the mandatory long form census, ending the Status of Women Agency's Independent Research Fund and by restricting the Women's Program from funding research or advocacy projects. The last study of prevalence of elder abuse was done over a decade ago in 1999.

**New Democrats recommend that the Federal government support Statistics Canada and other expert organizations to complete a current study prevalence of elder abuse in Canada and collect other relevant data on an on-going basis.**

### **Housing**

New Democrats firmly believe the autonomy of all women, including seniors, is key to redressing systemic gender discrimination. Lack of housing robs senior women of their status and autonomy.

Housing insecurity was identified by many witnesses as a prevalent problem for seniors, particularly for women.<sup>8</sup> Statistically, women of the older generation have substantially less personal income than their male counterparts. In 2008, the average income of a

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<sup>4</sup> For example see: Jean-Guy Soulière, Chair, National Seniors Council, *FEWO Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1546; Judith A. Wahl, Executive Director, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, *FEWO Evidence*, November 1, 2011, 1610; and Constable Jared Buhler, Elder Abuse Intervention Team, Edmonton Police Service, *FEWO Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1730.

<sup>5</sup> For example see: Charmaine Spencer, Co-Chair, Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *FEWO Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1615; Claudette Dumont-Smith, Executive Director, Native Women's Association of Canada, *FEWO Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1640; and Constable Patricia Fleischmann, Police Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1635.

<sup>6</sup> Valerie White, Chief Executive Officer, Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1635; and Teri Kay, Executive Director, Ontario Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, *Evidence*, October 25, 2011, 1707.

<sup>7</sup> For example see: Marla Israel, Acting Director General, Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada, *Evidence*, October 18, 2011, 1605; and Jacques Paquette, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Income Security and Social Development, Branch, Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, *Evidence*, November 3, 2011, 1552.

<sup>8</sup> For example see: Barb Mildon, President-elect, Canadian Nurses Association, *FEWO Evidence*, October 20, 2011, 1650; and Dr. Christine Walsh, Associate Professor, As an Individual, *FEWO Evidence*, October 27, 2011, 1647;

senior woman was \$24,100 while the average income of a senior man was \$38,100.<sup>9</sup> Women's dependency on family members is therefore greater. When a woman is being abused by a spouse or other family member she must have a safe way to leave her home. There are not enough women's shelters and secondary housing and social housing designed to accommodate the needs of senior women.<sup>10</sup>

**New Democrats recommend that the government work with the provinces and territories to establish a National Housing Strategy to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing for all Canadians that would also meet the needs of senior women.**

**We also recommend that funding be restored to the homeowners Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program and the Affordable Housing Initiative to increase the supply of affordable housing, in partnership with the provinces and territories;**

### **Judicial Advocacy**

Witnesses who work in the legal justice system on behalf of seniors identified major problems with the way cases of seniors abuse are mishandled at all stages, from first response to prosecution.<sup>11</sup> Ageist attitudes, misunderstanding the nature of elder abuse and a lack of age appropriate services was identified as being prevalent within the legal justice system. Judges often throw out cases of senior abuse because lawyers and police are not trained on how best to proceed with them. This problem was also identified as paramount in the Palliative and Compassionate Care Committee report:

*"We need to develop adequate judicial measures enabling us to successfully prosecute cases of elder abuse. This requires educating judges, prosecutors and police. It also requires developing forensic psychological and financial expertise in the area of elder abuse, with experts capable of giving effective testimony in court. An attitudinal shift is needed in the legal culture which recognizes the seriousness of elder abuse and no longer tolerates it."<sup>12</sup>*

**New Democrats recommend that police, lawyers and judges be trained in best practices regarding elder abuse and that the federal government support legal aid in order to increase senior women's access to the legal justice system.**

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<sup>9</sup> Statistics Canada, Women in Canada, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 336, March 2012.

<sup>10</sup> Cathy Bennett, Acting Director, Division of Aging and Seniors, Centre for Health Promotion, Public Health Agency of Canada. *Evidence*, October 18, 2011, 1653; and . Bonnie Brayton, National Executive Director, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, *Evidence*, November 24, 2011, 1631.

<sup>11</sup> For examples see: Constable Patricia Fleischmann, Police Constable, Community Mobilization Unit, Toronto Police Service, *Evidence*, November 22, 2011, 1557; and Judith A. Wahl, Executive Director, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly, *FEWO Evidence*, November 1, 2011, 1645;

<sup>12</sup> Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care, *Not to be Forgotten: Care of Vulnerable Canadians*, p 102, November 2011.