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COTA Australia welcomes commitment to ending the abuse of older people

The Federal Government's release of its national plan to end the abuse and mistreatment of older people is an important step towards ensuring every older Australian can live free from abuse, COTA Australia says.

COTA Australia Chief Executive, Patricia Sparrow, said addressing the shockingly high number of older Australians experiencing abuse - often at the hands of someone they trust - must be a national priority.

"Too many older Australians experience abuse behind closed doors, often from someone close to them, like a family member," Ms Sparrow said.

"For the first time, this national plan recognises that ageism itself can drive the abuse and mistreatment of older people. If we are serious about ending elder abuse, we also need to confront the ageism that allows it to occur.

"Elder abuse is not the only place where ageism needs to be tackled, but it's one of the clearest examples of the harm ageism can cause.

Ms Sparrow said older people and the community have been waiting for the plan for some time and were pleased to see it launched.

"The Federal Government's strategy marks an important shift from responding to abuse to preventing it," Ms Sparrow said.

"The first national plan was largely focused on how we respond when abuse occurs, which is crucial, but now this plan starts to focus on prevention and on tackling the underlying causes.

"It's clear that no single system can solve this problem on its own. Preventing abuse requires coordinated action across government and the community, which is why the cross-portfolio approach to the issue is so important.

"Crucially, this plan also rightly frames abuse of older people as a human rights issue. Older Australians are not simply vulnerable recipients of services - they are rights-holders who deserve dignity, autonomy and protection from harm."

While welcoming the direction of the strategy, Ms Sparrow said the real test would be whether the five year action plans that will sit underneath the strategy include meaningful action and investment.

"A national plan sets the direction, but real change will depend on whether it is backed by concrete action and funding.

"It's been many years that we've discussed inconsistencies in Power of Attorney laws across Australia, so it is frustrating to see the strategy putting greater consistency of these laws over a multiple year horizon.

"Financial abuse is one of the most common forms of elder abuse, and inconsistent Power of Attorney laws across the country make it harder to prevent and respond to it."

"Harmonising these laws should be an important priority if we are serious about protecting older Australians by addressing elder abuse."

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