

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Older People's Preferences Must Shape Australia's Elder Abuse Response

**Melbourne, VIC** – New research released today by Better Place Australia reveals that many older Victorians may be reluctant to engage with current elder abuse response systems. The findings emphasise the need for a more balanced system – one that centres early intervention, trusted relationships, and community-based responses.

Surveying 539 older Victorians, the research found that one in five older adults were unlikely to seek support if they were mistreated by a family member or carer.

When asked who they would initially turn to for support, the most common sources were other family members (54%), a friend (34%), GP or medical professional (33%), elder abuse hotline (24%), and police (24%). Men were significantly more likely to select the police as their first point of contact.

Better Place Australia's General Manager for Older Person Services, Rhonda Withers, said, "*Older men may be more likely to report abuse to police, possibly due to having fewer social connections and a greater tendency to act independently when they feel wronged. In contrast, older women are often socialised to keep family matters private.*"

Describing the type of support they would prefer to receive, survey participants expressed a strong preference for professional services that focus on advice, resolution and empowerment.

Participants suggested that older people may be hesitant to engage with support services due to fear of escalation, shame, not knowing who to contact, and concerns about negative consequences for themselves or for the person using violence.

Dr Sarah Marko, who led the research, said, "*Legal and police pathways have an important place, but they shouldn't be the default response. Older people want safe, accessible and empowering services that give them real options and respect their right to choose how to respond.*"

Better Place Australia is calling on the government to strengthen investment in early intervention and local community responses to elder abuse, complementing legal pathways with broader support services that reflect older people's preferences and lived realities.

*"Elder abuse isn't one-dimensional, and our response shouldn't be either. A one-size-fits-all approach fails to meet the diverse needs of older victim-survivors,"* says Ms Withers.

Dr Marko said, "*This research highlights that the current elder abuse response system doesn't always align with the preferences of older people.*"

**END RELEASE**

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**About Better Place Australia:**

Better Place Australia's Respecting Elders Service is a Victorian Government funded service that supports older people from experiencing any form of family conflict or elder abuse. We provide the only Victorian Specialist Family Violence service exclusively working with older people, supporting over 2,000 clients since 2018. Better Place Australia auspice an Elder Abuse Prevention Network and participates on State Level Round Tables and various family violence networks across Victoria.