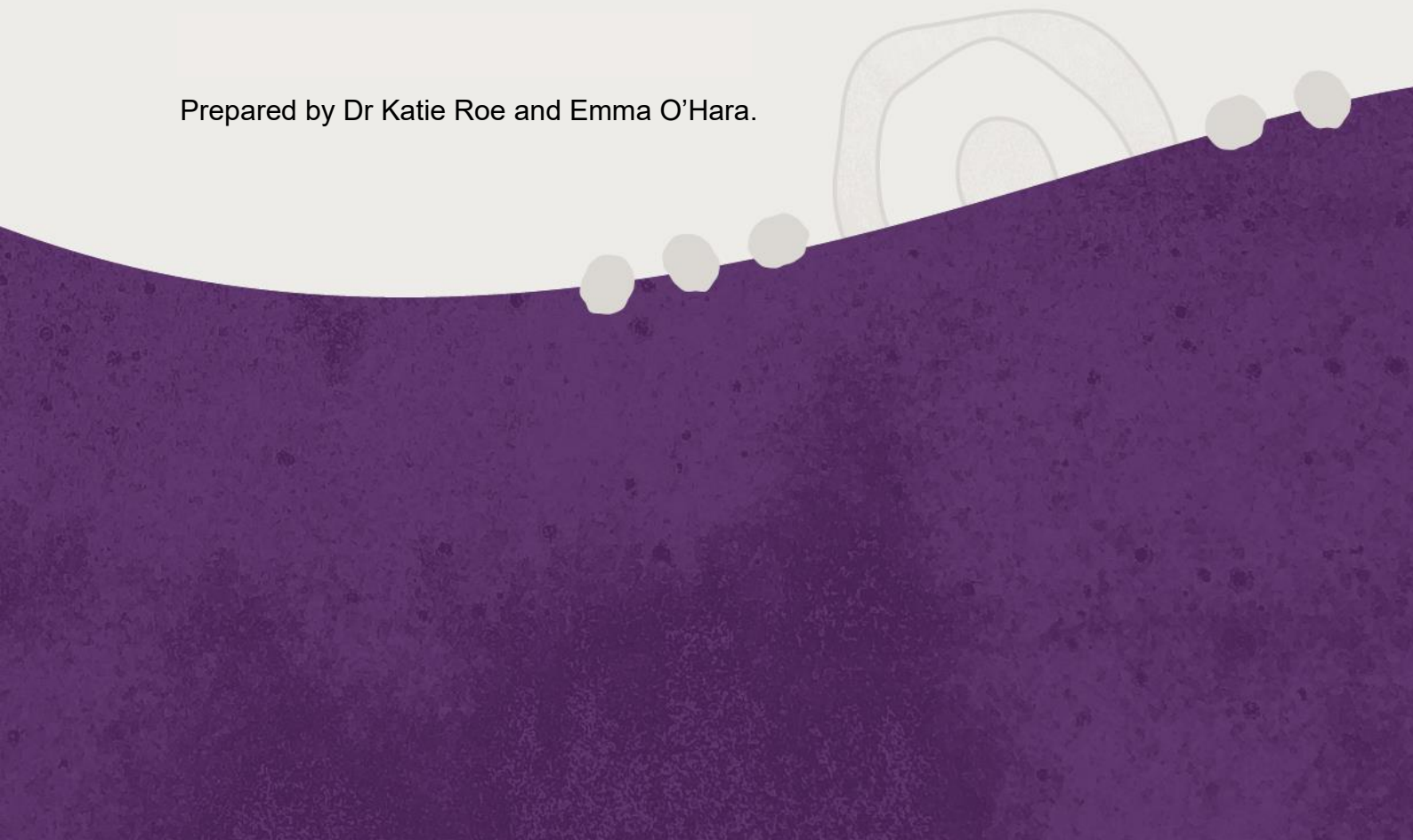
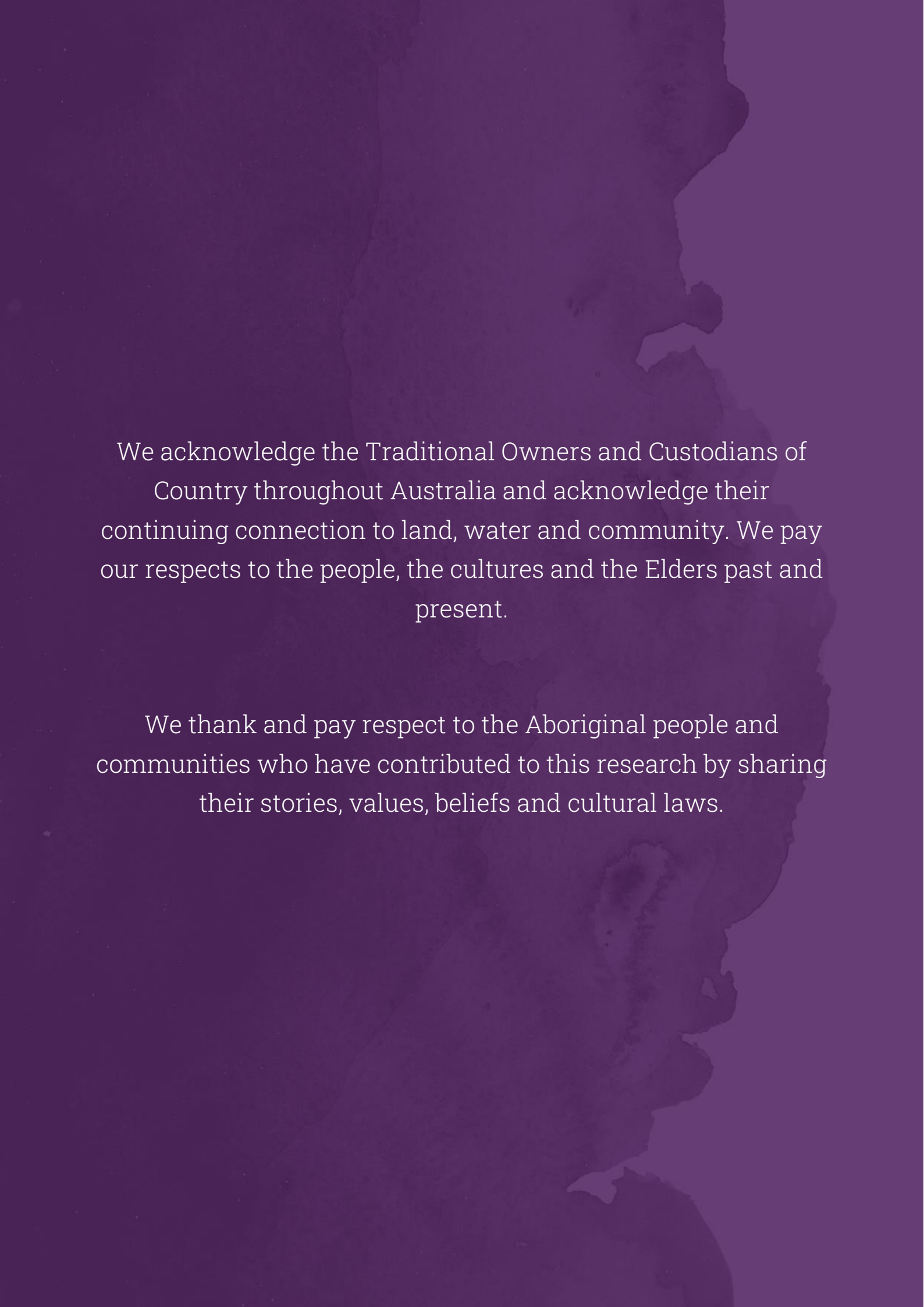


# Research into the mistreatment of older Aboriginal Australians

## 2022 Report

Prepared by Dr Katie Roe and Emma O'Hara.





We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and acknowledge their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the Elders past and present.

We thank and pay respect to the Aboriginal people and communities who have contributed to this research by sharing their stories, values, beliefs and cultural laws.



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## Terminology

Term	Definition
Abuse / mistreatment	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 (WHO, 2020)
Elder	'Elder' with a capitalised 'E' are recognised in First Nations culture as custodians of culture and community representatives
elder	Uncapitalised 'elder' refers to older people aged 50 years or more (Aboriginal and non-Indigenous)
Humbugging	An Aboriginal term used in the Kimberley to describe when someone demands money that belongs to someone else with no intention of repaying it (Kimberley Jiygas, 2020)
Neglect	Failing to provide an older person with such things as food, shelter or medical care (WHO, 2017)
Older Aboriginal person	Aboriginal person aged 50 years and over
Shame	Shame is a feeling Aboriginal people feel when they are singled out or in a circumstance that directly targets their dignity. Shame can be felt where there is a lack of respect, embarrassment, self-importance or self-promotion, rudeness or a breach of accepted Aboriginal norms and/or taboos. The feeling of shame can totally overwhelm and disempower a person (Indigenous voices, 2011)

## Acronyms

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ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ALRC	Australian Law Reform Commission
AOD	Alcohol and Other Drugs
ATM	Automatic Teller Machine
FDV	Family Domestic Violence
FEA	Financial Elder Abuse
IHP	Indigenous Housing Pool
KCLS	Kimberley Community Legal Services
NACAP	National Aged Care Advocacy Program
NARI	National Ageing Research Institute
NATSIFACP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program
OPAN	Older Persons Advocacy Network
PRG	Project Reference Group
WHO	World Health Organisation
WA	Western Australia

# Section 1

## Executive summary



## Executive summary

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This empirical research into the mistreatment of older Aboriginal people utilised qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect in-depth information from Aboriginal elders, community, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and aged care support providers to provide descriptive insights into six key lines of enquiry.

### Key lines of enquiry

- What constitutes mistreatment of older Aboriginal people
- The extent of mistreatment in WA
- How mistreatment may differ from the general population
- The unique challenges experienced by Aboriginal people related to where they live (communities)
- Risk factors and barriers to individuals seeking support from organisations
- Awareness and preventative responses to support Aboriginal people and their communities at the individual, community, and government level.

The research findings can be used to inform service delivery, government strategic policy and future research.

### Methodological overview

A Project Reference Group (PRG) which consisted of six high profile and well-respected Aboriginal women (four aged 50 years or more) from the Kimberley, Pilbara, Goldfields and South West, was formed to guide the project. The aim of the PRG was to provide feedback, expert knowledge and direction to the project, especially in terms of culture.

Engagements in four regions were conducted, the PRG selected the Kimberley, with 19% of Western Australia's Aboriginal population, the Pilbara (11%), Goldfields (6%) and the South West region including Perth with 62%. In total this captured 98% of Western Australia's Aboriginal population.

In addition to a literature review, qualitative data was obtained through one-on-one interviews and focus group sessions with key stakeholders in the research regions. Stakeholders included Aboriginal people aged 50 years and older, younger Aboriginal people that cared for older Aboriginal people, State Government staff, ACCOs, support providers and the broader Aboriginal community. A total of 72 people participated across the four regions (see Appendix 1 for more details).

An online survey, utilising quantitative type questions, was developed to capture the thoughts and views of support providers across the research regions and throughout the rest of Western Australia. The survey was sent to 900 organisations including ACCOs (such as Aboriginal Medical Services), other support service providers including community neighbourhood centres, health services, counselling, legal, aged care facilities,

local councils etc. A total of 92 responses were received. The research began in December 2020 and was completed in July 2022.

### What constitutes mistreatment of older Aboriginal people

This research found that financial abuse is the main form of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people. Importantly, financial abuse was also found to co-occur with other forms of mistreatment including verbal and, to a lesser extent, physical abuse. Other forms of mistreatment included neglect, isolation, sexual and emotional abuse, caring responsibilities, institutional abuse and homelessness.

### The extent of mistreatment in WA

The impact of intergenerational trauma and the lack of connection to culture, country and language is resulting in a continual declining of respect for elders and increased mistreatment, which is already widespread across the research regions. All participants shared stories about older Aboriginal people being mistreated across metropolitan, rural and remote areas. While many forms of mistreatment were found to be left unreported due to shame or fear of retribution, the numerous stories shared during engagements suggests a concerning high prevalence. Financial abuse, for example, is happening every Aged Pension pay day to many older Aboriginal people across the state, leaving them without money to purchase food or medicine.

ACCOs claim that elder abuse is so common it is accepted as normal behaviour, making it even harder to recognise and deal with the issue. ACCOs state that the families themselves are reluctant to address elder abuse as they benefit directly from the status quo.

### How mistreatment may differ from the general population

The Department of Communities (2019) noted in the WA Strategy to Respond to the Abuse of Older People (Elder Abuse) 2019-2029 that older Aboriginal people are at higher risk of mistreatment and neglect, less likely to seek help and may experience mistreatment in different forms to the non-Indigenous population. Many older Aboriginal people experience a poor economic and social situation, shaped by historical trauma associated with the Stolen Generations, dispossession of land and culture and ongoing discrimination (NARI, 2019). Aboriginal people also experience higher rates of dementia, homelessness and disability.

In addition to financial and social disadvantage, other factors that may affect how older Aboriginal people experience mistreatment and neglect include sexual orientation, rurality or remoteness of dwelling, whether the person has time spent in foster care, residential care, or other care settings, level of risk to homelessness, and level of physical and cognitive ability (Kaspiew, Carson and Rhoades, 2015).

The research found that there are a number of factors influencing the type and frequency of mistreatment and neglect of older Aboriginal people. There were some differences relating to geography when considering metropolitan compared to regional or remote, and also across the regions, but most factors were present in all research locations. It was also important to consider the impact of the pandemic and housing crisis, particularly in the Pilbara and Kimberley, but impacting on Aboriginal people in all regions. Overcrowded housing has been a constant issue for Aboriginal people and further exacerbated by very low housing availability, high rents and strong demand for subsidised housing.

### The unique challenges experienced by Aboriginal people related to where they live (communities)

There are a number of unique challenges experienced by older Aboriginal people and the communities in which they live. These included remoteness, isolation, cultural obligations, poverty, lack of housing, chronic health conditions, disability, alcohol and other drug abuse. Importantly, many older Aboriginal people are facing a number of these challenges on a daily basis which were found to have a direct link to the occurrence and frequency of mistreatment and neglect.

### Risk factors and barriers to individuals seeking support from organisations

The research found that there were many barriers to older Aboriginal people and their families seeking support from organisations. These included a lack of support services being available in regional and remote locations, lack of access to services due to transport challenges and being online despite high levels of digital illiteracy, lack of faith in services especially those offered by non-Indigenous service providers, overly complicated systems to access services, cultural obligations, shame and fear of repercussions.

### Awareness and preventative responses to support Aboriginal people and their communities at the individual, community, and government level.

The research found that there was a high level of awareness across all stakeholder groups of older Aboriginal people being mistreated or neglected across the research locations. Eighty percent of support service providers that participated in the survey were aware of mistreatment. Some types of mistreatment were more prevalent than others with financial abuse or humbugging the most frequent and widespread raised during consultations. Survey respondents identified institutional neglect and overcrowding in addition to financial abuse.

It was also found that while there was a high level of awareness in the community, it was rarely spoken about or acted upon due to elements of shame and the value of protecting family. Non-Indigenous support providers expressed hesitation to intervene (especially if it was outside their service remit), while ACCOs, who offer holistic support, were more willing to step in and advocate for the elder.

## Summary of findings

### What constitutes mistreatment of older Aboriginal people?

**Poverty, housing and food insecurity** is a driving force leading to family members mistreating elders to access their money or housing.

**Financial abuse or Humbugging** is the most prevalent form of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people across all regions. Perpetrators were predominantly family members, local store owners and companies that offer credit or arrange automatic deductions.

**Neglect** was widespread and found to occur in many situations – living alone, living with family or living in a care facility. Neglect in a care facility was generally related to feeling lonely and rarely being visited by family. Neglect by a care facility was linked to a lack of cultural safety and a lack of communicating with family when elders were unwell or felt lonely. Neglect in a care facility was also found to occur where older Aboriginal people had a disability or chronic health conditions and needed extra or specialist care.

**Physical abuse, threats of violence and emotional abuse** against older Aboriginal people was typically linked to accessing their money. Withholding medication was another form of physical abuse.

**Kinship care responsibilities** where elders were caring for more children than they could financially support, or house, was identified as mistreatment.

**Sexual abuse** was identified as mistreatment and shrouded by shame leading to a concerning lack of reporting, support or discussion within community.

**Being turned away from shelters** due to not meeting criteria was identified as mistreatment and led to elders sleeping on the streets.

### The extent of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people on Western Australia

**Abuse is so common** in some areas, it is accepted as normal behaviour.

**Mistreatment and neglect are happening every day** but is rarely (if ever) reported to the authorities by the elder being abused, their family, the community or even support service providers.

**Visibility of mistreatment varies between metro and regions** with older people living in a remote community being more likely to have a community advocate, that is not a relative, raise situations of mistreatment, than those living with family in town where

elders are often confined to their homes.

**Access to culturally appropriate support** is improving but still lacking. Older Aboriginal people refuse support from non-Indigenous support service providers due to a lack of cultural safety. Elders are more comfortable approaching and accepting support from services delivered by an ACCO.

**Transportation is a barrier** to accessing support services.

**Alcohol and other drugs** are primary drivers of family and community members mistreating elders.

### How mistreatment may differ from the general population

**Cultural obligations, responsibilities within the community and connection to kin** are strong factors impacting on older Aboriginal people and influencing incidences of mistreatment, how mistreatment is acknowledged and actions taken when it occurs.

**Kinship care** is embedded in Aboriginal culture but informal care arrangements and elders caring for a high number of children is leading to financial strain and overcrowding.

**Housing crisis** is being felt in many Aboriginal communities across the state and sharing leads to communal living and overcrowding and rendering some elders homeless.

**Living off country** to access support services is impacting on mental health. This is further compounded when support services lack cultural safety.

**Financial abuse or humbugging**, which does occur in the general population, is amplified in Aboriginal communities due to their sharing culture. It is widespread and ongoing.

**Alcohol and other drug issues** are a common driving force leading to elders being mistreated.

**Disability and chronic health conditions**, especially diabetes, lead to greater dependency leading to susceptibility of being neglected.

## The unique challenges experienced by older Aboriginal people and the communities in which they live

**A high proportion of Aboriginal people live in regional, remote and very remote locations.** This limits access to support services, leads to elders being reliant on family members for transportation and means elders have to travel to receive medical treatment (often vast distances). The high incidence of disability and chronic health condition including diabetes further compound this situation.

**Aboriginal elders have limited access to culturally safe support services.** This leads to elders feeling unsafe when accessing non-Indigenous support, a sense of isolation when staying in care and rejecting support if living at home.

**Isolation**, real and perceived, was found to be a serious concern and having a detrimental impact on older Aboriginal people's mental health and fostered an environment where mistreatment and neglect occurs without detection.

**Housing instability and a lack of housing** were identified as major issues across all regions and directly linked to incidents of elder mistreatment and neglect.

**Alcohol and other drug issues** within Aboriginal communities were found to drive younger generations to threaten and mistreat elders for money to purchase drugs or alcohol.

**Poverty** and the generational cycle of welfare dependency was found to be contributing to put pressure on elders where they felt responsible to care for their family, pushing them into deeper poverty.

**Cultural obligations**, particularly kinship care, was found to put financial pressure on elders, created overcrowding in houses and impacted on elders' mental health and wellbeing.

**Technology and systems**, especially the shift to digital platforms, was found to be a major concern for elders who are becoming more and more reliant on family to help them, leaving them susceptible to mistreatment.

**Terminology**, especially elder – such as the WA Elder Abuse Helpline and Information Service and Elder Rights WA. The term elder has a cultural meaning and its use by support providers may be confusing older Aboriginal people who do not understand they are eligible for the support being offered. While an Aboriginal person aged 50 or older is an elder in terms of service provision, culturally they may not be recognised as an Elder.

## The risk factors and barriers to individuals seeking support from organisations

**Lack of services** was a key issue, especially in regional, remote and very remote locations. Where services were available in regional areas, they rarely conducted outreach activities to remote communities.

**Lack of culturally appropriate services** was found across all research regions. While the general lack of services was an issue, it was found that many of the services available were not culturally appropriate. There is a need for support services being culturally appropriate (either delivered by an ACCO or staff at non-Indigenous providers receiving cultural training), holistic and funded to ensure outreach activities are regular and ongoing.

**Accessing support and navigating complex systems** was found to be a barrier, especially aged care packages and other government support. This included digital and physical access due to a lack of transportation or reliance on family for travel. Community and elders were found to rely on their local ACCO for guidance and assistance.

**Lack of awareness of support available.** People don't know where to go or what support is available. While some were aware of non-Indigenous support services, there was a reluctance to engage due to the view that they would lack cultural competency. This finding was supported by the survey which found that a third of support service providers do not provide any cultural competency training.

**Cultural considerations and shame** are contributing to mistreatment and neglect of elders. There is a growing disregard for elders and younger generations are not fulfilling their obligations to care for them. Also, family business is private which means that elders won't seek help beyond their family for fear of bringing shame on them, or intervene on another family's business even if they are aware that an elder is being mistreated or neglected.

**Fear of repercussions,** linked to shame. Elders were found to fear the actions of perpetrators if they reported mistreatment or neglect or sought assistance from organisations.

**Lack of service mapping and coordination** was found to be a barrier. When elders and their families did seek support, many service providers lacked awareness of services available outside their offerings, reducing the opportunity for holistic care.

**Eligibility age to access the aged pension or superannuation** does not align with the reduced life expectancy as reported in Closing the Gap and was found to be a barrier for older Aboriginal people to live a better quality of life.

# Section 2

## Literature review



# Literature review

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## Introduction

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In recent decades, the mistreatment of older people has emerged as an important global problem to public health and human rights (World Health Organisation [WHO], 2020). Research from 52 studies across 28 countries indicated that as many as 15% of people aged over 60 years in low and middle-income countries experienced a form of mistreatment or neglect (Kaspiew, Carson and Rhoades, 2018; Yon, Mikton, Gassoumis and Wilber, 2017). Though early research in the field was primarily focused on defining the concept and assessing its magnitude, recent developments consider how sociocultural diversity affects methods of abuse and the barriers that prevent elders from reporting or seeking help (Lee and Lightfoot, 2014). Within Australia, almost fifteen percent of adults over 65 have experienced abuse (Qu, Kaspiew, Carson, Roopani, De Maio, Harvey and Horsfall, 2021).

Kaspiew, Carson and Rhoades (2018) state that while solid evidence about the prevalence of mistreatment and neglect is lacking, there are clear indications that the incidence of elder abuse is increasing across the country. Advocare Incorporated (Advocare), a Perth based human rights organisation that supports older Australians, and Blundell (2017) outlined the significance of the mistreatment of older people for the Western Australian community, emphasising that the Aboriginal population experiences heightened susceptibility due to a number of factors such as remote living and lack of access to services. Advocare has reported an increasing number of calls from the general population through the WA Elder Abuse Helpline and Information Service with 1,038 in 2018-19, 1,220 in 2019-20 and 1,347 in 2020-21 (Advocare 2021). It was also noted that psychological abuse and neglect represent the greatest increase, while abuse calls relating to physical and sexual abuse are relatively stable across the three years.

Qualitative data gathered through the University of Western Australia's joint initiative with Advocare suggested an increase in cases of mistreatment in the Western Australian community, especially Aboriginal people. However, due to a limited body of knowledge relating to the mistreatment and neglect of older Aboriginal people, they could not determine the true extent (Clare, Blundell, and Clare, 2011). As such, this literature review highlights gaps in knowledge which were then used to inform the research project.

## Defining older people

An older Australian, within the broader community, is a person aged 65 years or more and has an average life expectancy of 80 years for males and 84 years for females. However, First Nations people have a significantly shorter life expectancy of 69 years for males and 74 years for females (ABS, 2020). As such, First Nation's people are considered elders when they are aged 50 years and over (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet,

2019). In 2021, around 16% of the Australian population was 65 years of age or older and 16% of First Nations people were aged 50 years or older, with projections showing that this will increase. For both First Nations people and non-Indigenous people the proportion of elders is expected to increase to 21-23% by 2026 (Qu, Kaspiew, Carson, Roopani, De Maio, Harvey and Horsfall, 2021).

### What constitutes mistreatment of older Aboriginal people?

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The World Health Organisation defines elder abuse as:

**“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.” (WHO, 2020)**

The Council of Aboriginal Elders of South Australia define abuse as:

**“Bashing an elder, ripping them off by taking their food, money or medication. Threatening them with violence or that they will not see their grandchildren. Cutting them off from community support and starving them of food, money and everyday needs.”**

Aboriginal people identify control as an underlying directive leading to elder abuse (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2007). The use of physical or non-physical force is most commonly used to undermine an elder and is most usually inflicted by family. The term ‘family violence’ is used to describe the abuse and violence inflicted and extends beyond physical, sexual, and emotional abuse to include cultural and spiritual violence. It is thought that the abuse inflicted is generated through years of trans-generational experiences of fighting among families and communities (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2006).

In the last few years, the mistreatment of older Australians has become an important issue for the federal government. The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) published a report on Elder Abuse in 2017 and recommended that all governments in Australia work together and respond to increasing elder abuse (ALRC, 2017). In response, the Australian Government initiated a Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety in September 2018 which was designed to provide insight into government responses and provide recommendations and actions to improve the safety of older Australians.

Through the Royal Commission, it was found that 16% of older people have experienced mistreatment or neglect, most commonly by friends and family. It was found that 93% of reported incidents were caused by trusted friends or family members with the most common type of mistreatment being financial and physical abuse such as unexplained bruising or dwindling bank accounts.

In response to the Royal Commission, the Council of Attorneys-General released the

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National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians {Elder Abuse} 2019-2023. The Plan highlights priority areas for action which included building understanding and awareness, continuing to strengthen service responses, help people plan for the future and strengthen safeguards for older people. The Plan identifies the need to pay particular attention to the needs of older Aboriginal people and older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The Western Australian Government has invested funds into addressing these priority areas including funding research to build understanding and improving support services, especially in regional and remote areas.

Research conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found that one in three older people live in regional and remote areas (AIHW, 2022) which increases to two in three older Aboriginal people. Strengthening service response in regional and remote locations is challenging given Western Australia's vast size and relatively sparse population. As such, it is imperative to ensure services are tailored to meet community needs through a better understanding of mistreatment and neglect of older Aboriginal people.

When reviewing the research into the mistreatment of older Aboriginal people, anecdotal evidence suggests that it is prevalent and increasing, however there is little research into the types of abuse and the issues Aboriginal elders endure across the regions. There is also a need to consider culture, historical factors including intergenerational trauma, Aboriginal social structure, health and emotional wellbeing.

### Mistreatment and neglect

Mistreatment constitutes all forms of physical, psychological, emotional, financial, sexual and social abuse (WHO 2020). Neglect is failure to provide basic necessities such as food, shelter or medical care or to prevent someone else from providing them (WHO, 2017). Mistreatment and neglect can occur in a range of settings, including institutional and community-based care settings, homes, and public spaces. Perpetrators of elder abuse are typically family members or close family friends, informal and formal carers as well as social welfare, health, and legal professionals (Australian Institute of Family Studies [AIFS], 2019).

The literature states that financial abuse is one of the most commonly reported forms of abuse among Aboriginal people and is linked to entrenched poverty, alcohol and other drug abuse, and a lack of strong cultural and family structures in place (South Australian Government Department for Health and Ageing, 2017).

Physical abuse is also considered common and usually perpetrated by a family or community member. Emotional abuse and neglect, however, were found to be the most frequently and well-recorded forms of mistreatment towards Aboriginal elders (Warren and Blundell, 2018).

Sexual abuse of older Aboriginal people was rarely raised in the literature and while it was thought to occur, it was considered infrequent and generally linked to the perpetrator being affected by alcohol or other drugs. Even when it did occur, the victim would not discuss or report the incident due to 'shame' (McCalman, Bridge, Whiteside, Bainbridge, Tsey and Jongen, 2014; Office of the Public Advocate, 2005; Queensland Centre for Domestic and Family Violence Research 2019).

### The extent of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people in Western Australia

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At the Elder Abuse and Neglect Conference in Alice Springs in 2012, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Gooda, outlined that despite little awareness of the existence of elder abuse and what it constitutes, there is enough anecdotal evidence to encourage a focus on the issue (Gooda, 2012). The Commissioner highlighted the need to focus on elder mistreatment within a cultural context, including the consideration of historical and cultural differences, kinship, and cultural responsibilities. This understanding is critical to ensuring that management processes account for cultural nuances and an understanding of the loss of traditional values and culture, including respect for elders (Gooda, 2012).

Mistreatment and neglect of Aboriginal elders in Western Australia often goes undetected and is therefore difficult to identify and resolve (AIHW, 2019b). Mistreatment may be recognised by the police, local government, health, and aged care services, but is rarely disclosed by the older person due to mistrust and fear around Aboriginal peoples' past and contemporary treatment. In cases of neglect, the older person is often unable to care for themselves adequately and, in turn, is rarely able to report the mistreatment (AIHW, 2019b).

It is important to consider context and understand that elder abuse can take different forms across Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal people living in rural and remote communities in Western Australia have stronger ties to cultural practices, family and kinship which can promote family unity and empower elders (Kurrle and Naughtin, 2020). Aboriginal elders are culturally entitled to care within their familial community but when mistreated or neglected, often face challenges due to elements surrounding shame, intergenerational conflict, and keeping family business private. The elder may not want the community to know of the abuse and keep it hidden to prevent private business being aired or causing friction amongst families (South Australian Government Department for Health and Ageing, 2017).

Furthermore, if the elder is being abused by a family member, the entrenched loyalty of family has been identified as a barrier to seek assistance. Aboriginal people may also be experiencing extreme isolation through living in rural communities and may face difficulty in being able to adequately access intervention or legal/welfare amenities. Additionally, the entrenched mistrust of non-indigenous people due to the historical and contemporary treatment of First Nations People can lead to the First Nations elder feeling insecure about

accessing support through agencies that are not operated by First Nations Peoples (South Australian Government Department for Health and Ageing, 2017).

Advocare and Blundell (2017) outlined that a third of Australian older people experience financial and/or psychological abuse while about 13% experience social abuse, 10% physical abuse, 10% neglect and 1% sexual abuse. While no quantitative studies specific to the Aboriginal population could be found, Aboriginal elders are usually noted as being at very high risk of mistreatment and Blundell (2017) suggests that the proportions of Aboriginal elders being mistreated would be higher than the general population.

In the past, there has been a lack of cohesion between government and non-government institutions in efforts to identify and address the mistreatment or neglect of older Aboriginal people. This has led to challenges relating to support service provision and ensuring resources are directed appropriately across relevant departments (Clare, Blundell, and Clare, 2011).

### Financial mistreatment

Kurrle and Naughtin (2008) identified that from the limited evidence available, financial abuse appears to be the most prevalent form of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people within the community, and the perpetrator is usually a family member. A survey of elder support service volunteers, conducted by Kurrle and Haughtin (2020), found that more than half of the volunteers indicated that elders are being humbugged or abused frequently. This prevalence is potentially due to a culturally ingrained mindset of sharing resources (Boldy, Horner, Crouchley, Davey, and Boylen, 2005). The term humbug describes someone who demands money that belongs to someone else with no intention of paying it back.

The Kimberley Jiyigas' (Birds) report (2020), No More Humbug!!!, commissioned by the Kimberly Community Legal Service (KCLS), examines research undertaken into the financial abuse of First Nations elders through their engagement with the KCLS (Kimberley Birds, 2020). The research area included the townships of Kununurra, Wyndham, Halls Creek, Broome, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing and surrounding areas. The region has more than 30 Aboriginal languages and is home to more than 150 Aboriginal communities (Kimberley Birds, 2020).

The research involved six months of survey work and interviews with the Kimberley community and stakeholders. It was found that financial elder abuse (FEA) is normalised across Kimberley communities, occurring at a medium to high frequency and usually by the children or grandchildren of the elder. Instances of financial abuse perpetrated by partners, other relatives, acquaintances, and businesses was also found to occur (Kimberley Birds, 2020). It was identified that the most common perpetrators of the FEA were the elder's own children and grandchildren and that it was common for parents to collect payments for their children but to then not contribute to grandparent's care of the children. Furthermore, it was found that banking institutions perpetuate FEA by processing

payments without proper authority from the elder and by limiting face-to-face encounters which allowed for theft through ATM transactions. There were also some cases of direct abuse by overcharging elders, persuading them to purchase expensive items or credit cards and, in some cases, withholding customers money or cards directly (Kimberley Birds, 2020).

## Housing

While there is limited data demonstrating the extent to which access to housing contributes to cases of mistreatment and neglect of Aboriginal elders, national statistics and ongoing social disparities suggest the issue is significant. The vulnerability of Aboriginal elders is highlighted by evidence that denotes Aboriginal people are 14 times more likely to experience homelessness than the non-Indigenous population (Habibis, 2015). Aboriginal people are half as likely to be authorised a mortgage or own their own home when compared with non-Indigenous older Australians (Habibis, 2015).

Many Aboriginal people also find themselves trapped in a cycle of living in social housing in remote areas, lacking access to stable employment, making it almost impossible to save a deposit for a house. Furthermore, due to a lack of housing and the sharing culture of Aboriginal people, the public housing facilities are often overcrowded. Shelter WA (2020a) reported that Aboriginal people are 16 times more likely to live in hazardous, overcrowded situations to non-Indigenous people.

There are a number of circumstances that make Aboriginal elders more susceptible to neglect or mistreatment due to housing issues. These include a lack of public housing, family breakdown and homelessness, insecure and often unaffordable private rental market, family violence and lack of governmental funding (White, 2020). To exacerbate the issue, Aboriginal elders are typically at a greater economic disadvantage which puts them in a higher risk category when applying for private rentals and, when their applications are declined, places a heavier reliance on government subsidised housing.

The stress of housing insecurity and the ongoing threat of eviction and related emotional and financial abuse can cause immense mental and physical distress to elders leading to increased health issues (Petersen, Parsell, Phillips and White, 2014). The Department of Health (2017) stated that an impediment to improving all aspects of Aboriginal peoples' health is the lack of functional and adequate housing, and resultant overcrowding. In response to this ongoing situation, Shelter WA, with the Department of Communities, held a maintenance forum to gather feedback and recommendations from regional service providers and stakeholders to improve service delivery and housing security.

Consultation found that the processes around remote housing development and management were extremely inefficient, costly, and lacked transparency and accountability (Shelter WA, 2020a). The extent of the resultant mistreatment of Aboriginal elders is statistically unclear in the report, though it is acknowledged that outcomes for tenants are 'very poor' (Shelter WA, 2020a).

## Physical mistreatment

National data reveals physical mistreatment of First Nations people as significant, calling for more research to determine the extent and to develop and implement strategies to prevent mistreatment and provide support services to victims. There is limited literature relating to the extent that family violence directly affects older Aboriginal people.

In building understandings of family violence experienced by older Aboriginal people, it is essential to acknowledge intergenerational trauma and social disadvantage (AIHW, 2018; AIFS, 2016). Research shows that First Nations people are 32 times more likely to experience hospitalisation as a result of family violence compared to non-Indigenous people (AIHW, 2018).

Research into the extent to which family violence plays a role in the rising abuse of elders is limited, however historic tensions between families is one of the major causes of physical harm among First Nations People (AIHW, 2018). Tensions between family groups can cross generations and the strong culture of family obligation perpetuates the cycle (Clare et al., 2011). In 2017, the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing identified that 64 -74% of First Nations People assault victims were victims of family violence and that three out of four hospitalisations were a result of abuse by a partner, spouse, or family member (AIHW, 2018).

Other factors contributing to the prevalence of violence within Aboriginal communities included financial disadvantage and unemployment, inadequate housing, limited access to support services and resources, alcohol and other drug abuse, violent methods of conflict resolution and diminished levels of culture (Office of the Public Advocate, 2005).

## Barriers to identifying the extent of mistreatment

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Public recognition and social response to the abuse of older Aboriginal people lags far behind child abuse and domestic violence (Clare et al., 2011). The WA State Government committed \$50,000 towards Advocare's delivery of elder abuse awareness and education workshops to regional and rural locations (Government of Western Australia, 2019). The 'awareness roadshows' (delivered in 2020) aimed to address the issue of social isolation by contributing to the awareness of elder mistreatment in rural, regional, and remote areas through targeted strategies at the general population, Aboriginal communities, and service providers (Government of Western Australia, 2019).

It has been noted that research, policy, and practice around the abuse of older people is about thirty years behind child abuse and domestic violence (Warren and Blundell, 2018). Due to this fact, the extent of Aboriginal elder mistreatment in WA lacks conceptual clarity and parameters for research engagement are both poorly defined and understood (Warren and Blundell, 2018).

A significant barrier to identifying the extent of Aboriginal elder abuse has been the lack of research that acknowledges the high proportion of Aboriginal people living in regional, remote, and very remote locations (Warren and Blundell, 2018). The 2016 census of population and housing revealed that 39% of Aboriginal people lived in or around Perth, while 22% lived in regional areas, 13% in remote areas, and 26% in very remote areas (ABS, 2016). There are high proportions of Aboriginal populations in Kimberley where 42% were Aboriginal people and the Pilbara with 20%.

In addition to a large proportion of Aboriginal elders being geographically distant from Perth and major regional centres, other factors that increase susceptibility to mistreatment and neglect are access to adequate health services and other support agencies. Research found that many instances of elder abuse within the broader population are initially observed and identified by support service providers (Warren and Blundell, 2018). Aboriginal elders living in remote areas do not have this support which then places the responsibility of reporting the mistreatment on a carer, family member or the individual (Warren and Blundell, 2018). This is further complicated by having to report to their family or community, which can introduce elements of shame or fear of being perceived as a bad parent or grandparent (Department for Health and Ageing, 2017). These barriers limit Aboriginal people from being able to adequately access the support they need.

### How mistreatment may differ from the general population

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The WA Strategy to Respond to the Abuse of Older People (Elder Abuse) 2019-2029 identifies Aboriginal elders being at a high risk of mistreatment, less likely to seek help, and may experience mistreatment in different forms to the general population (Department of Communities, 2019).

Aboriginal elders were found to experience poor economic and social situations that were shaped by historical trauma associated with the Stolen Generations, dispossession of land and culture, and ongoing discrimination (National Ageing Research Institute [NARI], 2019).

Research by Menzies (2019) found that surviving members of the Stolen Generations were likely to suffer widespread health issues and extensive psychological issues, including chronic depression and issues with alcohol and other drugs. Furthermore, due to separation from culture and family, they have a limited support and social network and are more likely to have experienced extensive institutionalisation (Menzies, 2019). NARI (2019) found that these factors along with dementia, homelessness and disability are primary contributors to Aboriginal elders' increased susceptibility to mistreatment when compared to non-Indigenous elders. This was supported by Kaspiew, Carson and Rhoades (2015) who identified that Aboriginal elders are more likely to experience mistreatment or neglect due to financial and social disadvantage, sexual orientation, rurality or remoteness of dwelling, experiencing out of home care as a child and reduced physical or cognitive ability.



## The unique challenges experienced by Aboriginal people and the communities in which they live

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Aboriginal people have a cultural obligation to care for family and kin and to share resources (Department of Communities, 2019). While this can be a strength, it opens the door to mistreatment in the form of 'humberging' (Breunig, Hasan and Hunter, 2019; Weier, Dolan, Powell, Muir and Young, 2019). Gooda (2012) outlined humberging as an example of lateral violence that has emerged from intergenerational experiences of disadvantage, oppression, discrimination, violence, and from working and living in a society that does not reflect Aboriginal peoples' culture. Lateral violence has been described as harmful behaviours occurring between Aboriginal people as they channel anger and fear towards each other (Gooda, 2012; Wingard, 2010).

Language and cultural barriers were found to be challenges for older Aboriginal people, especially when seeking help for health or wellbeing concerns. The Department of Health (2019) noted that Aboriginal people often felt uncomfortable when medical personnel were trying to provide assistance. It was noted that the situation often led to the Aboriginal elders being neglected and not receiving the care they needed.

Research conducted by the Department of Health found the need for their non-Indigenous staff to receive cultural competency training to reduce barriers to treatment. It was also found that improved cultural competency not only provided comfort to Aboriginal elders, it also increased opportunity for staff to identify possible mistreatment or neglect (Department of Health, 2019).

Kinship care is another Aboriginal cultural element that can impact on elders. This stems from traditional values that favour interconnectedness over individualism (Warburton and Chambers, 2007), which can result in older Aboriginal women caring for their own grandchildren and, occasionally, the grandchildren of people within broader kinship and community (White, 2020). While this is a cultural norm for many language groups, the responsibility of caring for children can lead to mistreatment. Parents of the children use threats and demand the elder accept the caring responsibilities. They also take any money the elder may receive for those care duties and keep the elder in a perpetual state of economic disadvantage (White, 2020).

A case study presented by Kimberley Birds (2020) revealed that older Aboriginal people are having their credit cards stolen by family members living in the same household, often withdrawing all their money and leaving them penniless. Another remote community resident outlined they were financially abused and could not save money, and that they were repeatedly humberged (Kimberley Birds, 2020). With organisations lacking cultural knowledge to deal with these situations, Aboriginal elders become increasingly susceptible to this type of mistreatment (Kimberley Birds, 2020).

## The risk factors

The WHO (2020) has outlined four categories of factors that impact elders' susceptibility to mistreatment: individual, relationship, community and sociocultural factors. Individual risk factors that may impact Aboriginal elders include gender, physical or cognitive impairment and experience of emotional trauma, such as family domestic violence (Kaspiew et al., 2015).

Relationship risk factors include level of dependency of either the Aboriginal elder, or the abuser, in situations of shared living and stress of the elder carer (ALRC, 2017).

Relationships were found to be a significant factor linked to financial mistreatment. The Kimberley Birds (2020) outlined that some Aboriginal elders support other people on their pension allowance. Those that are caring for their grandchildren in an unofficial capacity, rarely receive the government payments from the parents to support those children. Family members were also found to exploit the carers allowance system. They would claim to be caring for their elder to get the allowance but would then not provide any supportive care despite the level of dependency (Kimberley Birds, 2020).

Community risk factors include social isolation, access to adequate support services and resources (AIHW, 2019a). Socio-cultural risk factors highlight the legacy of intergenerational trauma and colonisation, and it continues to affect the health, wellbeing, and safety of Aboriginal people (AIHW, 2019a).

Socio-cultural risk factors may include financial disadvantage (strain on relationships of dependence and limited access to aged care), cultural and language barriers, discrimination, damaged family bonds across generations, land rights and systems of inheritance, and family violence (Warren and Blundell 2018; AIHW 2019a).

Risk factors associated with the perpetrator of elder mistreatment are less known. Sense of entitlement and dependency on the older person (usually associated with humbugging), mental health issues, history of family conflict or violence, and drug and alcohol abuse are all considered significant risk factors in the abuser (Krug, Mercy and Dahlberg, 2002; Pillemer, Burnes, Rifn and Lachs, 2016; AIFS, 2019).

Risk factors identified in the National Plan (ALRC, 2017) include gender, sexual orientation, disability, and cultural and linguistic diversity. Also noted is the importance of recognising the experiences and needs of older Aboriginal people living in rural and remote communities.

## Barriers to individuals seeking support from organisations

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### Financial

Many Aboriginal elders who are eligible to receive government support are not registered for payments (Kimberley Birds, 2020). Kimberley Birds (2020) found registration and compliance to receive payments is too difficult to navigate and lacks cultural consideration. As a result, these elders become dependent on their families for financial support, which is often beyond their financial capabilities (Kimberley Birds, 2020).

Some organisations are thought to contribute to elder abuse. The Kimberley Birds (2020) identified that some support organisations were accessing elders' social welfare payments without the elder's knowledge or authorisation. This was usually facilitated by family members who sought to gain access to the money through coercion (Kimberley Birds, 2020).

There are cases of organisations perpetuating financial elder abuse by persuading elders to purchase goods or services they do not need, by overcharging them, by locking them into arrangements that incur perpetual debt (including Centrepay), and directly holding the elder customer's cards (Lowndes, Darzins, Wainer, Owada and Mihaljcic, 2009; Australian Securities and Investments Commission, 2015).

When organisations themselves are actively mistreating the elders or allowing it to occur, elders are not in a position to seek the assistance or support to stop the mistreatment.

### Remote and isolated living

A large proportion of Aboriginal elders live in regional and remote communities that have limited access to aged support services. While living on country is important to their wellbeing, the lack of access to services leads to mistreatment and neglect. It also increases their dependency on family to take them to appointments, collect medicine and provide care. Elders in remote locations experience lower levels of access to transportation or culturally appropriate services, and are subject to confidentiality and privacy issues due to community demographics, which makes identifying and addressing cases of mistreatment extremely difficult (Warren and Blundell, 2018).

Awareness of support services was found to be an issue for elders living in remote regions compounded by a lack of access to telephone support. Education about mistreatment and neglect within the community and for service providers has been identified as a means of identifying, managing and preventing mistreatment in rural and remote communities, particularly in cases of family domestic violence (FDV) (Monsey, Owen, Zierman, Lambert and Hyman, 1995; Warren and Blundell, 2018).

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) or support services designed specifically for Aboriginal people were found to be highly effective at identifying and

managing instances of mistreatment or neglect as elders felt safe to discuss situations (Warren and Blundell, 2018). Broome's Marnja Jarnadu Women's Refuge employs Aboriginal workers and was developed through consultation with the local Aboriginal community (Westnet, 2000). The refuge exemplifies an agency that provides cultural safety and appropriate support for Aboriginal people highlighting the need for more Aboriginal and age-specific services across regional and remote areas of WA.

### Legal and police responses

Aboriginal people have a tenuous relationship with the legal system and police throughout WA. Police and legal responses to the mistreatment or neglect of Aboriginal elders are most pronounced in incidents of FDV. There is a heavy reliance on the elder to report mistreatment or neglect and a need for the police to provide support (Blundell and Warren, 2018). The police may not be able to act without evidence and even their presence can result in further harm to elders if the perpetrators believe the elder will talk to the police.

There is a lack of evidence around the effectiveness and appropriateness of mainstream legal and police responses to FDV in Aboriginal communities (Westnet, 2000). Strategies for responding to FDV in rural and remote areas have previously been translated from urban and metropolitan areas (Blundell and Warren, 2018). Older Aboriginal women become more susceptible to domestic violence in smaller communities due to issues surrounding confidentiality and privacy when seeking help through court systems or accessing legal representation (Blundell and Warren, 2018). Extending from Australia's colonial past, Aboriginal victims are hesitant to involve legal authorities and external support services in FDV cases (Blundell and Warren, 2018).

### Aged care

Aged care services rarely meet the needs of Aboriginal elders who need specialised care due to very poor health and lower life expectancies meaning they typically need care earlier than non-Indigenous people. Conditions associated with ageing generally affect Aboriginal people at a much earlier age with health issues such as dementia five times more prevalent in Aboriginal populations (Flicker and Holdsworth, 2014).

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report, identified numerous issues with access to aged care. These were increased for people who lived in regional or remote areas due to a lack of support services or aged care facilities (2021). Data in the report highlights a decline in aged care services and an increased rate of homelessness, dementia, disability, and multiple health issues (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021).

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2021) evidenced a combination of factors contributing to Aboriginal people effectively accessing aged care. The most significant factors are a lack of culturally safe care, social and economic disadvantage, and the impacts of colonisation and discrimination that extend into the

present day (2021). Of concern is the high rate of Aboriginal people needing care compared to the low rate of those accessing aged care (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021).

## Culturally appropriate and safe services

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### Aged Care

Embedding cultural safety within the aged care system is a process that requires the full acknowledgment that for Aboriginal people, health and wellbeing is reliant on a strong connection to family, community, culture, and Country (Department of Health, 2021). The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety outlined that providing non-discriminatory aged care appropriate for Aboriginal elders, is an area that requires significant improvement (2021). The aged care system across Australia employs staff that have limited understanding of the needs of Aboriginal people and lack training in culturally safe practices (Parliament of Australia, 2017). Culturally safe care that acknowledges, respects and values the diverse needs of elders is required to improve accessibility for Aboriginal elders in aged care systems (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021).

Even with the assurance of cultural safety, Aboriginal people generally avoid institutional care due to historical trauma and prefer remaining within their community with appointed custodians of culture and community representatives safeguarding older individuals against abuse (Gooda, 2012). This could be addressed by resourcing existing services with Aboriginal staff or, ideally, ensuring support services are delivered through ACCOs. The result would be a system of aged care that has reduced level of neglect and supports Aboriginal elders to feel secure and safe (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021).

Care options for Aboriginal elders are very limited in rural and remote areas and require development. Focus on building services and facilities that identify the strong independent relationships between families, communities, land and culture is vitally important to support elder's care. Joint cooperation in planning and building partnerships between government and ACCOs are better achieved with the involvement of Aboriginal community members (Verso Consulting Pty Ltd, 2014).

### Financial

The Kimberley Birds (2020) found that many financial businesses are not equipped with sufficient culturally appropriate training and skills to deal with Aboriginal-specific issues, such as those that take into consideration the complex nature of Aboriginal family dynamics. This includes situations where the elder is forced to financially support others. In many ways, technology obstructs the safe and culturally appropriate service of Aboriginal elders in the financial sphere. Aboriginal elders may be subject to having money stolen more easily as a result of online services and reducing the availability of face-to-

face services (Kimberley Birds, 2020). The increased prominence of online services reduces the safety of the elders' finances, which is intensified by the higher level of competency for younger people in the community to navigate services that are technology-based.

## The awareness and preventative responses to support Aboriginal people and their communities at the individual, community and government levels

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### Financial

With regards to financial mistreatment, Kimberley Birds (2020) argued that there are few services available to Aboriginal elders that support and advocate for their particular needs, and the few that are available lack the capacity to accommodate the growing number of Aboriginal elders. They outlined that there are no initiatives or education programs targeted to de-normalise humbugging in Aboriginal communities of the Kimberley region (Kimberley Birds, 2020), and wider review of literature suggests this is the case for wider-Western Australia in regional and remote areas. Kimberley Birds (2020) call for the need to review the practices of Centrepay, including the limits on transactions, registration requirements, ongoing audits, and training, to reduce or prevent financial mistreatment towards individuals.

### Housing

Shelter WA (2020b) envisages high-quality living environments with suitable employment, training and education, to support Aboriginal health and wellbeing, and implements this philosophy into frameworks for action. In WA there are four Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations, each with less than one hundred homes being managed, and none of them registered (Shelter WA, 2020a). These community housing organisations relied on Aboriginal-led housing solutions, based on decision making involving the community. Although effective, these organisations may be improved by registering the community housing, to establish a stronger business model that allows for growing the capacity of the organisation (Shelter WA, 2020a).

To understand how to build capacity of the Aboriginal Community Housing sector, Shelter WA received a grant from the Australian Government's Department of Health to review housing programs and policies, and the intersection with Aboriginal peoples' health, to provide suggestions on how housing and health outcomes may be delivered better. One approach identified for reducing housing instability was the establishment of a national housing system focused on increasing the amount of housing through an Indigenous Housing Pool (IHP) (Arabena, Holland and Hamilton, 2020). The IHP is defined by dwellings on Aboriginal land, held in trust by Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations that are maintained by the State and serviced support health and welfare support agencies.

## Education/awareness

Since its establishment in 1987, the Commonwealth Department of Health's National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP) has been working to link elders with aged care advocates through their nine not-for-profit organisations (Older Persons Advocacy Network [OPAN], 2020). OPAN was formed in 2017 and has become Australia's peak body of aged care advocacy, providing elders, families and representatives with confidential, free, independent advocacy, education, and training (OPAN, 2020). Advocare delivers NACAP in WA and assists more than 2,800 individuals annually (note this is the general community).

Advocare services include the delivery of education sessions to residential aged care facilities and community organisations in isolated areas (OPAN, 2020). Education sessions are understood to be a significant point of entry for advocacy services for elders. Little data reveals how many of OPAN's education sessions across state and territories target rural and remote areas, and limited research reveals the impact of such visits over time. Across the year 2016-2017, Advocare reported to have visited 20 regional towns across Western Australia (Warren and Blundell, 2018). Due to the high proportion of Aboriginal people in some of these areas, it is possible that the sessions provided advocacy for Aboriginal elders, though research is needed to confirm this view.

Research has indicated that the most appropriate education programs for Aboriginal people are run by and developed in consultation with Aboriginal people. In the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse publication it is discussed in depth about the importance of programs that aim to improve community safety amongst Aboriginal people. It was found that when community education and support programs are developed through consultation with Aboriginal people, the program had greater value to the community and provided stronger avenues for success. Furthermore, programs delivered by Aboriginal people were even more successful as they were able to target particular groups and provide tailored support to victims and survivors (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (3), 2013).

Education in schools is recommended as an important step to build respect for elders (Darwin Community Legal Service, 2019). This can be further reinforced through community-based awareness activities promoting the importance and value of older people.

## Prevention: Community and individual engagement

During 2019, Advocare demonstrated significant improvements in advocacy for Aboriginal people on both an individual and community level. Advocare expanded the delivery of the National Aged Care Navigation Trial, previously located in the Perth metropolitan area, to include the Kimberley, Mid-West, and Pilbara regions of WA (OPAN, 2020). OPAN reported that in these regions, health services and the local community have welcomed Advocare warmly. The emergence of elder support services in these regional areas have reportedly helped to build relationships of trust between Aboriginal communities and local agencies and corporations involved in elder support (OPAN, 2020), and should contribute to the preventative responses for the mistreatment of Aboriginal elders in these regions.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, identified the importance of working towards a system that has the skills, flexibility and capacity to respond to the specific needs of Aboriginal people as a priority (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021). The report stated that there is an urgent need for culturally safe care for Aboriginal people. It also identified the need to adapt and keep up the growing demand for care that will increase with the growing proportion of eligible elders (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021).

### Governance: A new national system

A new model for First Nations people to access aged care was proposed in the report (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021). The new approach outlined elements such as flexible and pooled funding, as well as other 'best aspects' of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program (NATSIFACP). When the review was conducted, the NATSIFACP was found to be accessible to only a few Aboriginal elders in remote and very remote locations (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021). The new system would be implemented on a nation-wide scale, where a proposed First Nations aged care pathway would be able to provide culturally safe care to elders in any location (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021).

In order to ensure culturally safe services, the Royal Commission has recommended that a First Nations person is appointed as a dedicated Aged Care Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. It was suggested that the Commissioner will assess the needs of First Nations elders across regional and local areas and provide strategies regarding how services may be undertaken in more culturally appropriate ways (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, 2021).

The Commission has identified and raised awareness of the need for culturally safe and accessible aged care for First Nations elders. As they move towards implementation, the new system is intended to make a positive impact on the wellbeing and health of First Nations elders and communities by reducing neglect and preventing mistreatment in aged care.

### In summary

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The mistreatment and neglect of older people across Australia has been highlighted through a number of recent activities and drives governments and service providers to act and implement changes. While there is a growing body of evidence relating to older people in general, there is limited research that focuses on First Nations people. Much of the literature is based on anecdotal evidence and while this has been used to inform strategies and actions, there is a clear need to build a body of research evidence to measure whether those strategies and actions are achieving the necessary changes for First Nations people.



This literature review has been used to inform the research project to better understand the mistreatment and neglect of older Aboriginal people in WA and the impacts on individuals and communities. The review highlights the most common forms of mistreatment and neglect as they occur across the financial, emotional, psychological, social, physical and sexual domains. It also presents influencing factors that lead to mistreatment and neglect, including dependency on welfare, poverty, housing insecurity, alcohol and other drug abuse, and cultural elements such as kinship.

The impact and influence of historical trauma experienced by Aboriginal people relating to colonisation, Stolen Generations, the dispossession of culture and land, and ongoing discrimination are critical considerations in both understanding and addressing mistreatment and neglect of elders. While elements of shame make mistreatment a very challenging issue to identify and respond to, it is essential to build a solid evidence base informed directly by Aboriginal people, where discussions can include both improved understanding and potential measures for addressing this pressing issue.



# Section 3

## Discussion

## Introduction

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The discussion section of this report explores the key lines of enquiry, drawing together the literature, engagements and survey results as appropriate. The voices of Aboriginal people have been the primary source of data and comments relating to prevalence, frequency or severity of mistreatment and abuse are informed by their views. Links to mistreatment and cultural obligations are also presented as described by participants.

While many aspects were consistent across the regions researched, any differences have been identified as relevant in the discussion. Survey results have been presented as a representation of the whole of WA except where regional differences were found to be varied within the findings.

## What constitutes mistreatment of older Aboriginal people

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This section explores Aboriginal views of what constitutes mistreatment. The discussion builds on the literature and has been informed by consultations with Aboriginal elders, Aboriginal community members and ACCOs along with survey results of support service providers.

The literature review found that abuse or mistreatment of older people (in general) occurs across the domains of psychological, physical, financial, neglect and sexual, with financial abuse the most common form of abuse experienced by older people. Psychological abuse was slightly less common but found to frequently co-occur with financial abuse.

This research found that financial abuse is also the main form of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people. Importantly, financial abuse was also found to co-occur with other forms of mistreatment including verbal and, to a lesser extent physical abuse. Other forms of mistreatment included general neglect, often by family, isolation from family, friends and community, sexual and emotional abuse, institutional neglect and institutional abuse and homelessness. Mistreatment was also found to occur when family members cared for an older person. Family members nominated that they were a carer to receive the carers payment but then failed to provide that care and on other occasions a person providing the care was burnt out with fatigue providing care without respite.

When exploring what constitutes mistreatment of older Aboriginal people with Aboriginal people, it became very apparent that there is a combination of factors that interconnect to create a complex social situation leading to increasing mistreatment and neglect.

The continual impact of intergenerational trauma, loss of connection to country and culture, alcohol and other drugs and welfare dependency are placing an incomprehensible pressure on Aboriginal people to the point that mistreatment and neglect of older Aboriginal people is normalised. Despite all this trauma and ongoing challenges, the

resilience demonstrated by community members, ACCOs and most admirably older Aboriginal people, there is a strong message to listen, advocate and work as allies towards solutions.

This section explores each form of mistreatment and the interconnected relationships as identified by stakeholders.

### Financial abuse

Financial abuse was found to be the most frequent and prevalent form of mistreatment in Aboriginal communities across metropolitan, regional and remote areas. Older Aboriginal people were financially abused by family members, local store owners and even support agencies. The expectation of family members and obligation of elders to share money is linked to culture and caring for kin, however, elders are often left without any money for food or bills.

“People know when older people are getting their pension money so will hang around and ask for money because they know they are culturally obliged to provide for them. But this cultural obligation is a one-way street and they do not reciprocate by caring for older people if they have money. Younger people aren’t employed and are often on benefits. Older people give them money and then are left without enough for themselves and have to rely on food handouts.” Older Aboriginal person

### Family members

ACCOs, community members and older Aboriginal people stated that family members were the perpetrators, taking money from their elders on a regular basis. The family members most frequently mentioned were young males, generally aged 14 to 25 years, which was found to be linked to social standing within community as young males mature and gain authority over women.

Family members knew when their older relative would receive their pension money and would come to stay or visit them on payment days. Older Aboriginal people said that relatives would come and take all their cash or take their key card and empty their bank account. This left elders without any money and unable to pay for food or other essentials. ACCOs noted that it was common for older people to then have to rely on donations and charity or resort to begging on the streets.

“People know when older people get their pension and will take money from them. Older people are not left with enough money to buy food, and not helped to care for their houses.” Older Aboriginal person

“When younger people take money from elders they are left financially struggling

and need to rely on food vouchers and programs to get food.” ACCO

ACCOs and older Aboriginal people stated that the money was usually taken to purchase alcohol, illicit drugs, cigarettes or, to a lesser extent, food. Community members discussed various tactics used to access the cash including taking it directly from elders, taking key cards and loitering in shopping centres and asking elders for money. Older Aboriginal people shared incidents where elders had been driven to an ATM, made to withdraw all their money and give it to younger family members and then left on the street to make their own way home.

Children from the age of ten up to young adults are verbally abusing older family members to give them money so they can buy alcohol and marijuana. They know when they are getting their pension money. They often come home drunk, demand food and key cards. Will snatch bags to get money.” Older Aboriginal person

“Younger people will ask for money especially when they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs by verbally abusing them, and then physically if the older people say no. They know that older people cannot fight back.” Community member

It was found that younger family members would verbally abuse elders yelling and swearing at them to get money or threaten them with physical violence or emotional abuse by threatening suicide. Pushing and shoving was found to be a common means of getting money though community members said physical abuse was less frequent than verbal abuse.

“A man was totally abused and neglected by his family. They all used to rip him off. They’d come around pension day and get him drunk then take his money and his key card.” Public Servant

Poverty was also found to be a driving factor in family taking money from their elders. This was found to be less direct and rarely involved other forms of mistreatment. ACCOs, community members and State Government staff said that family members would take advantage of elders when they were in hospital or relied on them to withdraw their money for other reasons. It was found that in these instances, the family member would keep some, but not all the money.

“Abuse can be opportunistic such as stealing money when older people are getting hospital treatment.” Public Servant

#### Local store owners

Community members, ACCOs and older Aboriginal people said it was very common for store owners to take and hold onto elders’ debit cards as a way to ensure that they receive

payment for goods. This mistreatment left elders without access to their own funds to pay for other essentials including rent and bills. It was also found that family members took advantage of the situation and purchased goods on the elder's card which was, according to community members, abetted by the store owners.

### Store credit

ACCOs said that many companies in the Perth metropolitan area take advantage of and mistreat older Aboriginal people by selling them phones, laptops and televisions on credit. ACCOs claim that the elders have little to no understanding of the consequences and end up in debt, losing a large proportion of their pension for a long period of time. ACCOs acknowledged that some changes have been made to reduce these situations, though they state that not enough is being done to ensure older Aboriginal people have a complete understanding of the agreement they are entering into. They also believe stores should be held more accountable.

### Financial literacy leading to dependency

Older Aboriginal people said that many lack financial literacy, and have difficulty using debit cards and banking apps. As such, they were reliant on family members to assist with accessing their money which exposed them to mistreatment.

“Grandmother is homeless and living on the pension, so lives with her daughter but getting financially and physically abused by her son in law. He will take her key card to go food shopping and then use it to buy alcohol and drugs. She is financially illiterate and doesn't understand how to use the key card which makes her vulnerable to mistreatment. If she talks about it to her daughter, then her daughter will get in a fight with the husband, but there is nowhere else to go to speak about it or get help.” Community member

“Older people don't know how to use their key cards so they ask family to withdraw money for them, often ends in them being taken advantage of.” Community member

### Family claiming carer allowance but not providing care

Another form of mistreatment, linked to finances, was identified by ACCOs where family members would claim carers allowance but not provide any care to their elder. This was further exacerbated where they worked the system to have the elder's pension payments deposited into their own account and keep the money for themselves, leaving the elder with nothing.

### Neglect

Neglect of older Aboriginal people was found to be widespread across all the research

regions. Neglect was found to occur regardless of their living situation, it was prevalent in aged care facilities, when older people lived with family and when they lived alone.

#### Living in an aged care facility and feeling isolated from community

Older Aboriginal people, ACCOs and service providers noted that people living in aged care centres were often lonely and rarely visited by family. They were also isolated from community and cultural activities and unable to socialise with other elders. Aged care service providers noted that family and community seemed unaware of the isolation and its impact on the older person.

#### Poor care due to a lack of knowledge or understanding

Older Aboriginal people, ACCOs and support service providers noted that there is a lack of knowledge or understanding by family when they care for an older person. People needing a higher level of support, such as assistance with showering or a specialised diet and soft food, were rarely given this level of support.

While support service providers suggested Meals on Wheels as an option, Aboriginal community members noted it was too expensive and not culturally appropriate.

Communities stated that there was a lack of knowledge about services that can support the family and the care of their elders and ACCOs said there needs to be more culturally appropriate and targeted assistance for their elders.

Communities noted that there were incidents where family had unintentionally mistreated older people due to a lack of knowledge of their physical and medical needs. This was found to lead to serious illness and even death. ACCOs noted that in the Goldfields region, this type of mistreatment can be punishable through 'payback', where community members reprimanded the perpetrator.

Survey results indicate that 40% of non-Indigenous support service providers that deliver services to Aboriginal people do not employ Aboriginal people. It was found that being unable to successfully recruit Aboriginal staff was the main reason. Interestingly, 76% of survey respondents felt they were able to deliver culturally appropriate services which does not align with Aboriginal elders or community views.

#### Neglect linked to financial abuse

ACCOs highlighted that family members can receive an allowance of \$600 per fortnight to provide care to an elder. There were known situations where some individuals would be caring for a number of different elders to receive the carers payment but were not providing even basic care to the older people.

#### Neglected by the community

Older Aboriginal people said there were occasions when they were neglected by the broader community. Transportation was found to be an issue for older people, especially

those living out of town, whether it was to attend appointments, do shopping or attend social events. They were rarely helped with transport and struggled to get buses often missing important medical appointments as a result. As previously mentioned, it was also common for older people to be stranded in town, away from their community, once their family had taken them into town to withdraw their money on payday.

### Physical abuse

ACCOs and older Aboriginal people stated that physical abuse and the threat of physical violence was often used against older Aboriginal people to access their money. Common forms of physical abuse included smacking, pushing and shoving. More severe acts of physical abuse were noted to occur but rarely spoken about. It was also found that incidents were very rarely reported by the victim as they did not want to bring shame on their abusive family member.

Another form of physical abuse identified by community members was the withholding of medication, especially psychotropic medications used to treat mental illness. It was found that family members would control dosing, denying the older person the medication if they appeared well, and overdosing when the mental issues were present.

Community members and older Aboriginal people said that younger generations would steal various forms of medication from elders to sell or exchange for other illicit drugs or alcohol. This often left the elder without any medication and if they did get more, that would also be stolen from them.

### Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse was found to occur in conjunction with financial abuse. State Government staff said that some family members would seek to control their elders and take away their power, usually to access their money. Community members said that family members would threaten to suicide if the elder didn't give them money. It was noted that older people would almost always give in because they didn't want to be responsible for the loss of a family member.

### Kinship care

Kinship care - grandparents caring for their grandchildren or the children of other community members – is by itself not considered mistreatment, and is strongly embedded in Aboriginal culture. Community members have an expectation that elders will care for children and elders embrace the opportunity.

It was found however that elders could be in a position where they are caring for a high number of children (eight to 12) at the same time and for extended periods, leading to overcrowding and financial strain.

“High rates of young parents who cannot care for their children due to trauma and



other issues, grandparents don't want to or cannot access services to help them, they take on the grandkids to avoid them being taken into care." Older Aboriginal person

Community members said there is a sense of helplessness where the elders would always accept the children, despite their situation and the stress it placed on them. They also felt that support services were slow to provide support and held the view that there was a lack of preventative measures in place to keep children with their parents.

"Grandparents are financially stressed caring for grandkids, and not supported by [appropriate services] to care for the kids until the last minute, there is no prevention or help to care." Community member

On average, Aboriginal grandparents care for 3.5 children compared to non-Indigenous grandparents caring for an average of 2.2 children. While kinship care is a valuable and important part of Aboriginal culture, supports are needed to ensure it does not place elders in situations where they are mistreated.

#### Mistreatment or neglect by institutions or support service providers

ACCOs, older Aboriginal people and community members identified the lack of culturally appropriate support services for older people. State Government staff noted that the lack of culturally appropriate services was impacting on the elders and their family. Many elders living in regional and remote locations had to travel vast distances to receive treatment and were away from family for extended periods of time which caused them anxiety.

It was also found that where family did travel with elders during treatment periods, the non-Indigenous service providers did not provide the family with any accommodation, and they were forced to sleep on the ground waiting for their elders.

Older Aboriginal people raised concerns that some non-Indigenous service providers would manage elders to suit their need for service delivery, rather than collaborate with the elder, family and other support service providers to ensure holistic support is provided near their family. It was found that some elders were placed into care without their family's knowledge, despite the elder having mental issues. It was also noted by community members with elders in aged care facilities, that they were rarely notified if their elder was unwell or needed anything from their family.

Older Aboriginal people however, held the view that elders generally received better care in an aged care facility, especially one run by Aboriginal people. ACCOs said that there were a lot of issues with non-Indigenous service providers that offer home visits. Service providers would charge for services not provided and were considered rigid in their structure and not well suited to Aboriginal people.

“Older people will have a carer and if the carer shows up to their house and they are not there, or they do not want the care at that time, they will leave and still charge them for 8 hours because they did not cancel more than 24 hours before. Services are rigid and not culturally competent and are resistant to help from Aboriginal Organisations trying to build understanding.” ACCO

### Sexual abuse

Incidents of sexual abuse were raised by an older Aboriginal person who shared details of a family member (older Aboriginal woman) who had suffered sexual violence. The abuse was known to close family but not reported to the authorities as the victim didn't want to endure the court system or suffer payback from the perpetrator or bring shame on their family.

“But then they have to go through the court system to do that. And a lot of Aboriginal people, older people, are not willing to do that. They want to hide it, or they don't want to cause trouble, they don't want to rock the boat because it'll come back at them.” Older Aboriginal person

While sexual abuse was not mentioned by any other stakeholders, the shame element is a strong cultural consideration, and it is unlikely that sexual abuse would be openly discussed. To understand the true extent of older Aboriginal people suffering sexual abuse, further targeted research is required.

### Homelessness and being turned away from shelters

Community members and ACCOs raised the issue of older Aboriginal people coming in from remote locations to regional towns and not having anywhere to stay. It was common for elders to be found in shopping centres asking for food and money. Community members said that while some had issues with alcohol or other drugs, some were there visiting family in hospital or needed treatment themselves but didn't have anywhere to stay and were forced to beg and live on the streets.

ACCOs in the Kimberley noted that some locations offered meal services but accommodation was almost impossible to find, especially with the current housing crisis. Elders would go to sobering up shelters but were refused a bed because they were not intoxicated.

### **What constitutes mistreatment of older Aboriginal people?**

**Poverty, housing and food insecurity** is a driving force leading to family members mistreating elders to access their money or housing.

**Financial abuse or Humbugging** is the most prevalent form of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people across all regions. Perpetrators were predominantly family members, local store owners and companies that offer credit or arrange automatic deductions.

**Neglect** was widespread and found to occur in all situations – living alone, living with family or living in a care facility. Neglect in a care facility was generally related to feeling lonely and rarely being visited by family. Neglect by a care facility was linked to a lack of cultural safety and a lack of communicating with family when elders were unwell or felt lonely.

**Physical abuse, threats of violence and emotional abuse** against older Aboriginal people was typically linked to accessing their money. Withholding medication was another form of physical abuse.

**Kinship care responsibilities** where elders were caring for more children than they could financially support, or house, was identified as mistreatment.

**Sexual abuse** was identified as mistreatment and shrouded by shame leading to a concerning lack of reporting, support or discussion within community.

**Being turned away from shelters** due to not meeting criteria was identified as mistreatment and led to elders sleeping on the streets.

## The extent of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people in Western Australia

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The impact of intergenerational trauma, the lack of connection to culture, country and language is resulting in a continual declining of respect for elders and resulting in increased mistreatment which is already widespread across the research regions. All participants shared stories about older Aboriginal people being mistreated across metropolitan, rural and remote areas. While many forms of mistreatment were found to be left unreported due to shame or fear of retribution, the numerous stories shared during engagements suggests a concerning high prevalence. Financial abuse, for example, is happening every pay day to many older Aboriginal people across the state leaving them without money to purchase food or medicine and meet their daily living expenses.

ACCOs claim that elder abuse is so common, it is accepted as normal behaviour, making it even harder to recognise and deal with the issue. ACCOs state that the families themselves are reluctant to address elder abuse as they benefit directly from the status quo.

The majority of survey respondents indicated that mistreatment and neglect was common and widespread. While providers may have identified that older Aboriginal people were being mistreated or neglected, they were unable to provide support.

Aboriginal community members claim that it is difficult to reach out to and support older people within their community as they often accept the abuse as 'normal' and will make excuses for their family's behaviour. To further complicate the issue, older Aboriginal people said that they would feel responsible if their family was held accountable for any mistreatment and went to prison or received penalty from the courts.

Older Aboriginal people say that mistreatment and neglect is happening every day but highlighted that nothing is reported in the media. Aboriginal community members said there was a need to raise awareness of what constitutes mistreatment and neglect and to provide culturally safe avenues for older people to report such situations.

### Regional considerations

The research revealed some differences on the extent and severity of mistreatment across the regions. Stakeholders including ACCOs, State Government staff, community members and older Aboriginal people reported a high prevalence of neglect in the Kimberley with families struggling to care for older people who were often viewed as a burden.

Community members and ACCOs felt this linked back to the impact of intergenerational trauma and younger Aboriginal people having a declining respect for their elders. ACCOs were aware of financial, sexual, physical and emotional abuse occurring in the Kimberley, but even with their community connections, were unsure of the true extent, saying that shame meant it was rarely discussed.

Shame was found to be a powerful factor impacting on the incidence and response to mistreatment. Support providers that participated in the survey identified shame as one of the main barriers to elders seeking their support for mistreatment or neglect. Community members also identified different elements of shame.

“Families will neglect older people by not cooking for them or taking them to a doctor’s appointment. Family will not let in support services their elders are entitled to because it’s shame when they could be helping with washing, making beds and giving medication.” Support provider

Community members held the view that most service providers are not culturally competent and don’t understand the aspects of shame, that families don’t want others to know about their business. Service providers were found to be aware of this barrier to accessing their services but were unable to offer a solution.

There was also a high prevalence of mistreatment in the Goldfields due to the vulnerability of older people with declining health, limited finances and family becoming impatient with the extra support older people need. Younger generations showed little to no interest in caring for their elder family members. The situation was further exacerbated in remote communities where ACCOs and community members said that many older people were simply left alone and the infrequent visits by support services was not sufficient to ensure their welfare or wellbeing.

Support service providers identified that program resourcing was often insufficient to allow for regular visits to remote communities and were very costly in terms of funds and time. ACCOs and service providers said that most programs have KPIs which can only be met by focusing resources on servicing the regional centres leaving little incentive for providers to conduct outreach activities in remote communities.

Interestingly, ACCOs noted that financial and physical abuse was not as frequent in the Goldfields, when compared to other regions, but when it does occur it is severe. It was found that the abuse was often fuelled by drugs and/or alcohol where family members would abuse their elders when high or drunk to gain access to money. Interestingly, older Aboriginal people from the Goldfields stated that financial abuse is very common, while physical abuse is less common but also viewed as severe.

### Visibility of mistreatment

General community behaviour around mistreatment and neglect was found to differ between towns and remote communities and seems linked to the behaviour’s visibility. ACCOs, community members and support service providers held the view that elder abuse in remote communities was more likely to be addressed by the community due to community connections. It was thought that the abuse is more visible in a remote community as everyone knows everyone so a person outside the family can raise the issue and offer support. In town however, older people are always with their family and

isolated from people outside their family. As such, the mistreatment or neglect is less visible and there isn't anyone to advocate for them.

### Access to support services

Stakeholders identified that the majority of support services for older people are delivered by non-Indigenous organisations which are rarely culturally safe or culturally appropriate for older Aboriginal people. The impact of this is that families and older Aboriginal people are reluctant to approach or accept those services for support, especially in regional areas, leaving a gap in service provision.

ACCOs and community members shared situations where some non-Indigenous support agencies tried to deliver support to an older Aboriginal person who denied them entry or refused their service. ACCOs held the view that these support services were taking advantage of the older Aboriginal people by noting them as clients for the service but not actually delivering the service. While support service providers taking advantage of some clients could not be substantiated in the research, some support service providers noted that it was common for older Aboriginal people to refuse their support.

More recently however, ACCOs note there is a steady increase in support services being delivered by ACCOs, particularly in regional areas. While these services are more appealing to older Aboriginal people and the community, it was found that many of the programs are in the pilot phase or have a short-term funding cycle and the resourcing for program delivery is often limited, impacting on an ACCOs ability to deliver their support to remote areas. As previously discussed, very remote communities are often the ones that receive the most limited services.

ACCOs and community members noted that older Aboriginal people living in the metropolitan area or larger regional towns have greater access to support services in general, generally delivered by non-Indigenous providers but some by ACCOs. However, older Aboriginal people said that the services are all spread out and identified transport as a barrier to their access. Older Aboriginal people said that mobility was often a challenge and walking to a bus was too difficult.

Older Aboriginal people said that living in a smaller community, where support services are provided by their local ACCO, was preferred due to their cultural safety and also more accessible with many offering outreach services. They also identified that visibility in smaller communities reduced mistreatment and led to the broader community, including ACCO staff, advocating for their health and wellbeing.

### **The extent of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people on Western Australia**

**Abuse is so common** it is accepted as normal behaviour.

**Mistreatment and neglect are happening every day** but is rarely, if ever, reported to the authorities by the elder being abused, their family, the community or even support service providers due to cultural obligations, shame and fear of repercussions.

**Visibility of mistreatment varies between metro and regional locations**, with older people living in a remote community being more likely to have a community advocate, that is not a relative, raise situations of mistreatment, than those living with family in town where elders are often confined to their homes.

**Access to culturally appropriate support** is improving but still lacking. Older Aboriginal people refuse support from non-Indigenous support service providers due to a lack of cultural safety. Elders are more comfortable approaching and accepting support from services delivered by an ACCO.

**Transportation is a barrier** to accessing support services.

**Alcohol and other drugs** are primary drivers of family and community members mistreating elders.

## How mistreatment may differ from the general population

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The Department of Communities (2019) noted in the WA Strategy to Respond to the Abuse of Older People (Elder Abuse) 2019-2029 that older Aboriginal people are at higher risk of mistreatment and neglect, less likely to seek help and may experience mistreatment in different forms to the non-Indigenous population. Many older Aboriginal people experience a poor economic and social situation, shaped by historical trauma associated with the Stolen Generations, dispossession of land and culture and ongoing discrimination (NARI, 2019). Aboriginal people also experience higher rates of dementia, homelessness and disability.

In addition to financial and social disadvantage, other factors that may affect how older Aboriginal people experience mistreatment and neglect include sexual orientation, rurality or remoteness of dwelling, whether the person has time spent in foster care, residential care, or other care settings, level of risk to homelessness, and level of physical and cognitive ability (Kaspiew, Carson and Rhoades, 2015).

The research found that there are a number of factors influencing the type and frequency of mistreatment and neglect of older Aboriginal people. There were some differences relating to geography when considering metropolitan compared to regional or remote, and also across the regions, but most factors were present in all research locations. It was also important to consider the impact of the pandemic and housing crisis, particularly in the Pilbara and Kimberley, but impacting on Aboriginal people in all regions. Overcrowded housing has been a constant issue for Aboriginal people and further exacerbated by very low housing availability, high rents and strong demand for subsidised housing.

The following factors were found to influence mistreatment and neglect of older Aboriginal people. Many of these factors have already been raised in the report and it was difficult to prioritise or order these factors as they are interconnected and vary across the regions.

### Culture

Community members, ACCOs and older Aboriginal people identified links between Aboriginal culture and mistreatment of elders. Cultural obligations, responsibilities within the community and connection to kin are strong factors impacting on older Aboriginal people, and influencing incidences of mistreatment, how mistreatment is acknowledged, and actions taken when it occurs.

Community members explained that Aboriginal culture is one of sharing, what's yours is mine and what's mine is yours. They also explained that their culture has a great deal of respect for their elders and younger generations will dedicate time and effort into caring for elders in their community. However, the loss of culture in younger generations has led to them taking advantage of an elder's willingness to share, often taking all their money and food leaving them with nothing.



Older Aboriginal people explained how culture further impacts on these situations because the elder does not want to speak poorly of their family and, as a result, won't report mistreatment or neglect. Community members shared situations where elders were offered help to stop mistreatment but the elders denied anything was happening and defended their family to avoid shame.

### Kinship care

Linked to culture but raised as an issue, kinship care is care that is provided by relatives, or friends, of a child who cannot live with their parents. This type of care is central to a child's wellbeing by focusing on family, culture and community. Older Aboriginal people are frequently drawn into kinship care, caring for their grandchildren. While culturally appropriate, the government is strongly focused on placing Aboriginal children with kin, often their grandparents.

Community members and older Aboriginal people emphasised the importance of children being placed with family but the current approach has led to older Aboriginal people being mistreated. Community members held the view that the government does not always provide sufficient money to care for the children, especially when the care is meant to be short term. They also explained that the process to get financial support for children in care was complicated and many elders gave up.

“Grandparents caring for 11 grandchildren in a four-bedroom house, five of the children have been placed with the grandparents through the Department of Communities, but six of them haven't. The grandmother's health is deteriorating, she is losing hair and teeth and is struggling to talk and cannot make her medical appointments because of care duties. The grandparents receive financial support for the children officially in their care, but not the other six children and haven't been linked in with other support services.” Community members

Older Aboriginal people explained that when the elders did get money to care for the children, the 'middle generation' would arrive on pay day and take the money from the elders. This left them to care for the children without any financial assistance. Grandparents have a strong sense of obligation to accept the care of these children despite already struggling with housing, finances and basic necessities.

“Grandparents are full time carers for their grandchildren while their parents are getting the support payments for it and spending it on drugs.” Community member

Young boys growing up with their grandma created another layer of cultural complexity leading to mistreatment. As the boys mature, culture leads to them becoming the leading authority in the household. ACCOs cited situations where grandsons would start to dictate how their grandmother was to live. It was also noted that there were instances where grandsons would start to take drugs with their friends which often led to them selling drugs from the house. The elder had no power or ability to stop the activity.

“Obligation for grandparents to care for their grandkids because their parents are facing drug and alcohol issues. Grandparents may raise young boys and once they are teenagers they take control of the house, they bring friends over and deal drugs in the grandmothers house.” Older Aboriginal person

### Housing crisis, communal living and overcrowding

Many regional locations are experiencing a housing shortage and subsidised government housing is in very high demand yet no stock is available. Older Aboriginal people and ACCOs noted that older Aboriginal people are given housing priority, especially if they have a disability. Family, often with no other option, move into the home staying for extended periods of time and often to the point of overcrowding. This places pressure on the older person who is responsible for paying the bills and feeding their kin.

The older Aboriginal person is being mistreated but culture is strong and values caring for family. Older Aboriginal people said that no one would throw out family who have nowhere else to go. They also said that overcrowding has been used to displace the older person out of the home completely with little regard for their welfare exemplifying the lack of respect some people have for their elders.

### Living off country

ACCOs said that a lot of older Aboriginal people have health conditions and require regular treatment. Those living in remote locations, especially the Kimberley and Pilbara, don't have access to adequate health care and some have to move to regional towns. This means they are living off their country and away from their family support network. Older Aboriginal people said this generates a sense of isolation and loneliness. While there may be other Aboriginal people in the community, service providers said that there aren't a lot of opportunities for older people to connect when they don't already have networks. Older Aboriginal people are not met with the same empathy as non-Indigenous people in the community.

Service providers and ACCOs did note however, that when there are events for Aboriginal people in a regional town, older people are very active and in high attendance.

ACCOs and service providers said that more and more culturally appropriate support services are being made available to Aboriginal people in regional and remote communities. They saw this as an important step forward to enable older Aboriginal people to stay on country and with their kin. Benefits they identified included improved mental health, family support and connection to community which was thought to reduce incidence of neglect.

### Money matters

Financial abuse or humbugging was identified as the most frequent and widespread form of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people. ACCOs, community members and older

Aboriginal people said that, in general, Aboriginal people have a low level of financial and general literacy. This was worse in regional locations and worse still in remote locations.

It was found that a lot of older Aboriginal people are reliant on younger relatives to help them use their ATM card and online banking apps which left them vulnerable to mistreatment, often without even being aware that their younger relatives were taking their money.

“Older people don't know how to use their ATM cards or are physically unable to walk to the bank, so left with no option but to give their key cards to family. They are very vulnerable to abuse” Older Aboriginal person

State Government staff discussed the difference between younger generations with cashless debit cards compared to elders on a pension or disability support and the resultant mistreatment of elders.

"On the Cashless Debit Card you can only get a third of your money in cash. You've only got access to \$100 cash for the next fortnight. So, who's the next one you're going to rob? The most vulnerable. Who's got the access to cash? Because I want \$50 to go to the TAB. You're going to rob your granny, aren't you?" Public Servant

ACCOs identified older people with disabilities as particularly vulnerable for financial mistreatment as they had access to their full payment as cash and were reliant on family to take them to the ATM.

“Non-verbal and wheelchair users are particularly vulnerable to financial and other abuse. Family take them to the bank to take their money and leave them to get their own way home.” ACCO

### Alcohol and other drugs

ACCOs, community members, older Aboriginal people, other support providers and State Government staff all mentioned that alcohol and other drugs drove a lot of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people, especially financial abuse. ACCOs said that alcohol and drug use was out of control in many communities and considered it a root cause for so much harm to the Aboriginal people.

“To get money for drink or gunja, younger people verbally abuse elders, threaten them with violence and in some instances threat to kill themselves if they aren't given the money.” ACCO

### **How mistreatment may differ from the general population**

**Cultural obligations, responsibilities within the community and connection to kin** are strong factors impacting on older Aboriginal people and influencing incidences of mistreatment, how mistreatment is acknowledged and actions taken when it occurs.

**Kinship care** is embedded in Aboriginal culture but informal care arrangements and elders caring for a high number of children is leading to financial strain and overcrowding.

**Housing crisis** is being felt in many Aboriginal communities across the state and sharing leads to communal living and overcrowding and rendering some elders homeless.

**Living off country** to access support services is impacting on mental health. This is further compounded when support services lack cultural safety.

**Financial abuse or humbugging**, which does occur in the general population, is amplified in Aboriginal communities due to their sharing culture. It is widespread and ongoing.

**Alcohol and other drug** issues are a common driving force leading to elders being mistreated.

## The unique challenges experienced by older Aboriginal people and the communities in which they live

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There are a number of unique challenges experienced by older Aboriginal people and the communities in which they live. These included remoteness, isolation, cultural obligations, poverty, lack of housing, alcohol and other drug abuse. Importantly, many older Aboriginal people are facing a number of these challenges on a daily basis which were found to have a direct link to the occurrence and frequency of mistreatment and neglect.

There are two important demographic elements when considering the challenges faced by Aboriginal people, where they live and the age of the population. Aboriginal people live throughout the state of Western Australia and the research locations were selected due to their high Aboriginal population. When considering the unique challenges experienced by Aboriginal people, it is important to note that of the approximate 100,000 Aboriginal people living in WA there are 38,000 (38%) living in remote or very remote locations (AIHW, 2020). Around 40,000 (40%) live in the metropolitan area and the remaining 22,000 (22%) live in regional areas.

The age of the population is also important to consider. Fifty percent of Aboriginal people living in WA are aged 25 years or younger, 27% are 26 to 44 years of age and 23% are aged 45 or older (ABS, 2021). The importance of these demographics will be discussed as relevant to each challenge.

### Living in remote communities and isolation

The majority of the WA Aboriginal population (60%) live in regional, remote or very remote locations. Living on country with their family and actively participating in community events was found critical for older Aboriginal peoples' health and wellbeing. However, those that live in remote or very remote communities faced a number of challenges that were exacerbating mistreatment or neglect. These included a lack of aged care support services, derelict housing and a general lack of housing (all regions), transportation challenges to attend medical appointments and poor hygiene due to overcrowding in housing.

Both ACCOs and non-Indigenous support service providers said that it was very difficult to service remote and very remote communities as they were rarely given adequate program resourcing to cover travel to the communities which was expensive in both fuel costs and time. Older Aboriginal people said that they had to leave their community and drive to a regional location to attend appointments but relied on others for transport which often resulted in missing appointments, not having adequate medication or regular treatment as prescribed.

Community members said that older Aboriginal people were dependent on family for transport such as driving to receive support or medical treatment and said that this was unreliable and resulted in the older people being neglected.

Older Aboriginal people shared a sense of isolation, especially if they had mobility challenges and were not able to access walking aids or other support devices.

Interestingly, this sense of isolation was identified by people that lived in metropolitan regional and remote locations. They said that being isolated meant that they were unable to interact with the broader community to share their stories and cultural knowledge, a critical part of Aboriginal culture and elder responsibility. Older Aboriginal people said this was having a detrimental impact on their mental health.

Elders living on their own were also found to live in fear as they were subjected to younger relatives breaking into their home to take their money, often beating the elder to keep them quiet. Community members said that the loss of culture and lack of respect for elders was one of their greatest challenges and harming the whole community and that isolation also meant that issues of neglect or mistreatment were not observed and other community members could not advocate for them if they needed assistance and support.

### Living in the metro area and off country

Older Aboriginal people living in the metropolitan area and large regional towns were found to have greater access to support services but many of the providers were non-Indigenous organisations and stakeholders felt they were not culturally appropriate and, as a result, not utilised by the elders or supported by family members. Survey results found that 60% of non-Indigenous support service providers operating in the metropolitan and major regional towns employed Aboriginal staff to service their Aboriginal clients. It was also found however, that 30% of these providers did not employ Aboriginal staff, despite having an Aboriginal clientele.

Support services were also spread throughout the metropolitan area and ACCOs, community members and older Aboriginal people again identified transport as a challenge to receiving support.

ACCOs, community members and older Aboriginal people said that elders living in the metropolitan area were also isolated from their community and that isolation was not only limited to regional or remote communities. This isolation was not only detrimental to their health and wellbeing, it meant that if they were being neglected or mistreated, no one would know.

### Stable housing

Housing was identified as a critical issue for Aboriginal people in the metropolitan area and across all regions. ACCOs and community members identified that housing availability is extremely limited, with zero vacancies in places such as Kununurra and many houses being in a state of disrepair throughout remote and very remote locations.

The lack of housing in all research regions was highlighted as a major issue thought to directly contribute to older Aboriginal people being mistreated. Stakeholders from the Kimberley said that the current rental crisis was making a bad situation even worse and there were 'no fixes on the horizon'.

It was also found that housing allocation was not considered culturally appropriate with an older Aboriginal person only qualifying for a one-bedroom home. This meant that if they needed live in care on a temporary or permanent basis, the carer would not have their own

room. Also, it was found that older Aboriginal people needed a home with at least two bedrooms to have space for family as they visited to meet cultural commitments.

ACCOs said that older Aboriginal people were more likely to be assigned housing, due to their age, and knew how to keep a house to a certain standard and meet any rental obligations. Younger generations do not have that same understanding of standards and rent and have less access to housing. ACCOs and community members said that younger Aboriginal people are in constant survival mode, trying to care for themselves, and their children, but unable to secure stable housing.

As a result, younger Aboriginal people were using their elders in any way they could to secure housing. ACCOs cited numerous examples where older people that had secured stable housing, had their houses taken over by extended family because there was nowhere else for them to stay. Older people felt both pressured and vulnerable in this situation as there is a cultural expectation that they will share what they have with family, despite their house being very overcrowded.

ACCOs that managed Aboriginal housing said that these situations deteriorated quickly and the houses fell into a state of disrepair due to overcrowding and lack of care. Older Aboriginal people that had been in this situation said that some family members became verbally and physically abusive to the elders, who lacked the power to fight back and often lived in fear. Non-Indigenous service providers were aware of the housing situation, and subsequent mistreatment of older Aboriginal people, but were generally unwilling to work outside their remit to address the situation.

ACCOs that manage houses in the Goldfields noted that they support elders in this situation by taking the blame for family being moved on and out of the home. While the ACCO held the view that this was effective, older Aboriginal people said that family members came up with other ways to take advantage of their elders to stay in the homes.

In the South West, older Aboriginal people stated that some family members would say they were 'carers' of the elder and use threats of violence to keep their elder in fear and too afraid to speak up about the mistreatment. They would use this carers role as justification to stay in the elder's home and also access a carers fee from the government. Despite living in the home and claiming a carers role, older Aboriginal people said that the family member rarely cared for the elder and continued a cycle of mistreatment that included neglect and taking their money.

### Alcohol and other drugs

There is a strong link to alcohol and other drug (AOD) abuse and mistreatment of older Aboriginal people. State Government staff noted that in regional communities, where there is a high rate of AOD use by Aboriginal people, there is also a high prevalence of domestic violence and elder abuse. ACCOs noted that younger Aboriginal people mistreated their elders when they were high on substances and wanted money, seeing older people as an easy target and, if related, knew they would not report abusive family members to the authorities.

“You’ve got so much dysfunction in a family, where you’ve got people that are drugging and alcohol, and bonging on. It’s not a conducive space for keeping your family strong.”

AOD use by Aboriginal people with children was also resulting in children being cared for by their elders (discussed below) regardless of their capacity or capability to provide that care.

### Poverty

ACCOs raised poverty as an ongoing challenge faced by most Aboriginal people. They emphasised that the ongoing effects of trauma through the stolen generation had led to people not being in control of their lives and too dependent on welfare. It was noted that around 65% of Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley are on welfare with, according to ACCOs, little prospect to change.

Older Aboriginal people and community members said that getting a job and learning how to manage money was more challenging in some regions than others and depended on role models within the family. Younger people often followed the same path as their parents and it was very difficult to break generational cycles of welfare dependency.

Older family members felt responsible for caring for their family and shared what little they had. State Government staff noted that elders would often bring their family to social groups to access the food provided.

### Cultural obligations

Aboriginal culture is complex and varies from family to family. The elements of culture discussed here were raised by most stakeholders and focus on family obligations which were relatively consistent across all research regions.

There is a cultural norm for older Aboriginal women to care for children and grandchildren of people within the broader kinship and community. This can lead to some older people caring for a large number of children which is acceptable, and often expected, within the community. It was found that this situation often results in overcrowding and the elder struggling to feed and clothe the children. Community members and older Aboriginal people stated that it was common for elders to care for the children while the parents kept any welfare money allocated to the care of the children, placing the older people in financial hardship.

“There’s an expectation that they will house, feed and take the little ones to school but the parents will keep any money they receive for the children’s care without handing it over to the elder.”



Community members and older Aboriginal people said that the parents often used the money to purchase alcohol or other drugs, and would come and take food from the elder's house, further exacerbating the situation. The elders were then reliant on external support to care for the children and themselves.

Public Servants had observed instances where families used shame to control an elder, guilt them into looking after their children even though the elders needed support themselves.

“Shame is the social norm, not to speak out when something is happening to that is deemed as failure. This exists alongside a declining respect for elders.” Public Servants

ACCOs raised concern for the elders' mental health when they had an obligation and desire to care for the children but not the financial means. This was thought to influence an elder's ability to seek help or ask for support for fear of losing the children placing them in a very challenging situation where they were being mistreated and also trying to fulfil their cultural obligations.

It was also found that many older Aboriginal women do not have partners and were therefore more vulnerable to mistreatment and neglect. They also take on a more caring role and will do anything to keep a family together when parents cannot take care of their own children. Older Aboriginal males, however, note that many men have lost their cultural way in society and no longer speak out. This coupled with the younger generation's loss of respect for their elders has created an environment where mistreatment and neglect are prevalent across all research sites.

Support service providers also discussed this situation and said that they were limited in the support they could provide within their KPI's. ACCOs said that non-Indigenous service providers struggled with the capacity to meet their Aboriginal clients' needs and needed to adopt a holistic approach rather than a restricted service.

ACCOs are part of a community with established personal relationships and are better placed to know a person's full situation and offer holistic support. ACCOs emphasised the importance of this approach and the need for more support services being delivered to Aboriginal people by ACCOs.

Aboriginal community members and ACCOs identified the need for education to raise awareness and respect for the role of Aboriginal Elders within their communities. It was thought that if the younger generations understood and were more connected to older Aboriginal people in their community, it may reduce the incidence of mistreatment and neglect.

### Technology and systems

More and more systems are going digital, and this is a challenge for all older people and Aboriginal elders have the additional challenge of having access to a computer or smart

phone. ACCOs and older Aboriginal people discussed the increasing reliance on young family members to help with technology and that lack of understanding was making them vulnerable to mistreatment.

“They don’t know how to navigate white systems. They don’t have the confidence or self-esteem to be in control of their own lives and money.” ACCO

Another point raised was the term elder and its use in advertising or promoting support services for older people. The term elder has a meaning in Aboriginal culture, it is not a title simply given to someone when they reach a particular age but a recognised position within community giving them a level of authority and respect. The use of the term elder by support providers may be misunderstood by older Aboriginal people that are not recognised as Elders within their community and they may not understand they are eligible to receive those support services.

#### Attitude of older Aboriginal people relating to the challenges

During consultations, older Aboriginal people shared a lot of challenges faced by Aboriginal people but also shared their wisdom.

“I know we've been through lots of trauma. I know families are suffering from poverty, dispossession, trauma, incidents with the law. But we have to rise above it. We have to work out ways of rising above it and helping people. When you go out on country, some... I've been on this trip recently, and it was like, I saw people change their whole physical demeanour, their eyes came to life. And I'm not saying everybody should go back on country, it's also when you're in town, how you live your life in town, and the respect you show each other, and the value, it's actually the value. You have to value each other. Now, if you don't value each other, then, obviously, you're abusing the other person.” Older Aboriginal person

“So, how do we value older people? Maybe those older people had problems with alcohol and drugs, trauma, mental health, whatever. Maybe they had problems bringing up their own kids. But not everybody is like that. In every family we've all got people with the different things, mental health, drug and alcohol, whatever. People that work well, got good jobs, and I think that's working, I don't know whether you do family gatherings or something, about valuing each other's role. You can't be living with abuse all your life. And it's too late when they're gone.” Older Aboriginal person

These comments have been included to demonstrate the impact and acknowledgement of trauma, the resilience of First Nations' people and that older Aboriginal people can guide the way forward.

### **The unique challenges experienced by Older Aboriginal people and the communities in which they live**

**A high proportion of Aboriginal people live in regional, remote and very remote locations.** This limits access to support services, leads to elders being reliant on family members for transportation and means elders have to travel to receive medical treatment (often vast distances).

**Aboriginal elders have limited access to culturally safe support services.** This leads to elders feeling unsafe when accessing non-Indigenous support, a sense of isolation when staying in care and rejecting support if living at home.

**Isolation**, real and perceived, was found to be a serious concern and having a detrimental impact on older Aboriginal people's mental health and fostered an environment where mistreatment and neglect occurs without detection.

**Housing instability and a lack of housing** were identified as major issues across all regions and directly linked to incidents of elder mistreatment and neglect.

**Alcohol and other drug** issues within Aboriginal communities were found to drive younger generations to threaten and mistreat elders for money to purchase drugs or alcohol.

**Poverty** and the generational cycle of welfare dependency was found to be contributing to put pressure on elders where they felt responsible to care for their family pushing them into deeper poverty.

**Cultural obligations**, particularly kinship care was found to put financial pressure on elders, created overcrowding in houses and impacted on elders' mental health and wellbeing.

**Technology and systems**, especially the shift to digital platforms, was found to be a major concern for elders who are becoming more and more reliant on family to help them leaving them susceptible to mistreatment.

**Terminology**, especially elder – such as the elder abuse helpline. The term elder has a cultural meaning and its use by support providers may be confusing older Aboriginal people who do not understand they are eligible for the support being offered. While an Aboriginal person aged 50 or older is an elder in terms of service provision, culturally they may not be recognised as an Elder.

## The risk factors and barriers to individuals seeking support from organisations

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The research found that there were many barriers to older Aboriginal people and their families seeking support from organisations. These included a lack of support services being available in regional and remote locations, lack of access to services due to transport challenges, lack of faith in services especially those offered by non-Indigenous service providers, overly complicated systems to access services, cultural obligations, shame and fear of repercussions.

### Lack of services being available

Western Australia is a large state and Aboriginal communities reside in regional, remote and very remote locations. Stakeholders noted that there was a lack of support services in many regional and remote communities and that those servicing nearby towns rarely conducted outreach services.

The metro area and regional towns had better service provision in general but ACCOs, community members and older Aboriginal people said that they were mostly non-Indigenous providers and lacked cultural understanding or holistic support. While it was acknowledged that ACCOs are being funded to provide more services, State Government staff noted that culturally appropriate support services for older Aboriginal people being mistreated or neglected is severely lacking. They said that while health service providers generally have Aboriginal health workers, they have been observed to focus on young and middle-aged people and seem to lack knowledge of how to support an elder that may be experiencing mistreatment or neglect.

Survey results show that 62% of support service providers do not believe they are able to provide older Aboriginal people with the support they need. Reasons cited included client needs exceeding services offered, a lack of resources, demand exceeding supply (resourcing and funding) and the need for holistic and ongoing support which is not supported by most service delivery models.

ACCOs emphasised the importance of support services being culturally appropriate, holistic and being funded to conduct regular outreach activities into remote and very remote communities on a regular basis.

### Accessing support and navigating complex systems

State Government staff identified that Aboriginal family members don't know how to access government support to care for older people, such as Aged Care Packages. The long and complicated system is difficult to navigate and people rarely start let alone complete the process to secure support. This view was strongly supported by ACCOs in the Kimberley who noted the low uptake of government care packages due to systems being too difficult to navigate.

“It took one family six months to secure support services and they were told by the support provider that they were the first to persist with the process and secure gardening and cleaning support.” ACCO

Community members said that older people that consider themselves as capable and educated have felt disempowered when dealing with government systems. It is very difficult for them to navigate and often requires the assistance of someone who can advocate for them. ACCOs state that older people rely on the community around them, especially when caring for their grandchildren because they don't know how to access government supports. The supports are there and they would be entitled to the support but the process is too difficult, especially as they rarely know how long they will be caring for the grandchildren.

"Maybe a family member's going through a crisis and so then the kids come and stay for a couple of weeks, six months or one year. The variation in the time that the support's required is so great that to try and put a rigid system around it, it just adds another burden of management." ACCO

Physical access to support services due to transportation was identified as a barrier by community members and older Aboriginal people. While elders were aware of support they could access, it was difficult for them to go to the providers or even call them for assistance as they did not have a phone. The shift from land lines to mobile phones has meant that a lot of households no longer have an active landline for the elders to use.

ACCOs in the South West noted that they offer a range of supports to elders including clothing and teaching cooking skills, but said there was a low level of usage because it is not advertised well due to limited funding.

Transport is a real issue for older Aboriginal people in community." Non-Indigenous support provider

Survey results indicate that while most believe their services are easily accessible, 25% do not and identify challenges such as lack of communication (no phone to call), being too proud to ask for assistance, fear of shame, general lack of awareness and language barriers.

#### Lack of awareness of support available

State Government staff noted that Aboriginal families and elders have little knowledge of the aged care support available to them. There are many State Government services which people access, such as child protection, disability support and family support but the State Government does not provide aged care supports. Aged care supports are the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government, this causes confusion and people don't know where to go.

This view was reinforced by older Aboriginal people who were unable to suggest any

avenue for elders being mistreated or neglected to seek help or support. Some suggested their local ACCO such as Bloodwood, Kimberley Community Legal Service or AMS Social and Emotional Wellbeing Unit as a potential avenue but were unsure of the support they could provide. There was an awareness of non-Indigenous support services for elder abuse, such as Aged Care support services, but most stakeholders emphasised reluctance to engage with services they did not feel were culturally appropriate or culturally safe.

Kimberley Jiyigas released research in 2020 No More Humbug!!! which detailed financial abuse of Aboriginal elders. Despite the research, increased awareness and a number of prevention and intervention strategies, ACCOs noted that nothing had been actioned to address the financial abuse.

ACCOs and older Aboriginal people said that the lack of action, even when evidence is presented with viable prevention and intervention strategies, reinforces a sense of hopelessness that even if older people speak out, nothing changes.

Support agencies participating in the survey noted referral from other agencies (75%) as the main way older Aboriginal people would be aware of and connect to their service. This was followed by walk-ins (50%) and phone calls (50%). Agencies also identified how they reached out to Aboriginal people to promote their services with outreach activities and being present in the community attributing to 60% of their promotion.

#### Lack of faith in non-Indigenous support services

There is an ingrained lack of faith in services that involve the police, welfare authorities or housing. State Government staff noted that Aboriginal people did not view reporting situations to the police as helpful. Aboriginal people often felt victimised by the police and welfare authorities and knew of situations, or had experienced severe repercussions where they had lost their housing as a result of reporting incidents.

Community members stated a lack of faith in support being provided to an elder being mistreated, especially if it involved financial or emotional abuse. They said it began with a widespread mistrust of police who would only act on incidents of physical abuse and were unable to act in situations involving financial or emotional abuse without physical evidence, even if the situation was formally reported.

ACCOs noted that most aged care services are provided by non-Indigenous providers and identified this as a major barrier in all regions. Culturally appropriate care and a holistic approach were noted as essential in providing support to those being mistreated or neglected.

The lack of culturally appropriate services was also identified by State Government staff who said that there needs to be a choice of providers, both ACCOs and non-Indigenous service providers. Organisations, such as the Red Cross, service many of these regions

and conduct check ins with older people but their 'western' ways are not viewed as culturally appropriate.

ACCOs said there is a reluctance to use non-Indigenous support providers as they lack cultural competence and don't understand the influence of shame and people's reluctance to let them know about their private business. While the support provider has the best of intentions, ACCOs said they don't understand the implications of accepting their help.

Survey results support this view where 30% of support agencies don't provide any cultural competency training to their staff and 21% only provide training once during a staff member's period of employment. Reasons cited for a lack of cultural competency training included low need overall, identified need but not actioned and an expectation that staff will engage in their own training externally.

This situation is even more pronounced when considering aged care. ACCOs state that older Aboriginal people are very reluctant to move into an aged care facility and can't see the benefits. They fear isolation from their family, even if they are currently being mistreated or abused by their family.

### Cultural considerations and shame

Aboriginal culture including dedication to family has been identified as a barrier to individuals seeking support from non-Indigenous organisations. Older Aboriginal people also have a cultural right and expectation of younger generations to respect and take care of them. Older Aboriginal people will stand by their family, even if they are being mistreated or neglected by them as they won't bring shame upon their family or share personal business. Matters of shame are rarely spoken about within families or the wider community and even less with organisations.

"There's this thing with our older people where they really don't want to ruin the life of somebody even though there's that level of violence." ACCO

"Older people don't identify abuse because they want to take care of their family, or they may have some understanding of it and just accept it." ACCO

"They're struggling to identify that they are also being abused, because their heart is to give, and they want to give. I think any parent wants to give to their family members." ACCO

Older Aboriginal people, community members and ACCOs said that the younger generation have a growing disregard for their elders and are less connected to their culture as a result. Aboriginal culture is shared through storytelling, an important role for elders. Community members said that younger generations are being harmed by alcohol and other drugs and less inclined to want to learn about their culture from their elders.

Community members said that even if they were aware that an elder was being mistreated or neglected, they were reluctant to intervene into another family's business and had the expectation that the elder would reach out for help if they needed it. Older Aboriginal people said that community members hear about financial abuse but don't do anything about it as the elder's lack of action is viewed as acceptance. Older Aboriginal people said that it is not acceptance, it is a sense of being powerless that drives the inaction.

This highlights the entrenched nature of shame within Aboriginal culture and the difficulty of identifying, discussing and acting on mistreatment or neglect.

"We try and support them as much as we can. But to a point where we don't want to meddle in their business. And so, if they need help, I'm sure they'd reach out to us. But they haven't reached out to us. I just think that they can keep managing it."  
Community member

"And the abuse of older people is becoming more visible, I wouldn't say accepted or condoned. People, when that's happening, they have to make a decision whether they either intervene or they don't intervene, or they just try and work things out to keep the peace." Older Aboriginal person

Service providers also raised culture as a barrier to seeking their support for mistreatment or neglect and wanted to understand how they could engage with older Aboriginal people without causing issues. ACCOs said that their provision of holistic support meant that they had regular contact with people and could not only identify situations of mistreatment or neglect but were able to engage and intervene without causing shame or disrespect.

Interestingly community members said that it was not the support providers responsibility to intervene into family business and that families should be taking care of their elders. They also identify however, that in large communities with a lot of social challenges, it may be necessary for other people to offer support.

Community members also said that older people need to be the ones to put a stop to the abuse by acting and calling the police. They also shared frustration at how much mistreatment and neglect elders tolerate from their family. These views don't seem to consider the cultural barrier of shame or lack of power older people may have in accessing organisational support.

Another cultural consideration raised was family responsibilities and elders caring of grandchildren. Interestingly, elders seeking support from an organisation to support the grandchildren was considered shameful.

"Family leaving grandkids with the grandparents are expecting them to provide for them but not allowing them to receive the support payments from Centrelink. It's an expectation that the grandparents will take on the caring but have to fork out their own money" Older Aboriginal person



## Fear of repercussions

All stakeholders stated that older Aboriginal people being mistreated or neglected have a number of fears restricting their ability to seek help which included:

- The perpetrator would be made to move out and leave the older person alone to care for themselves (ACCO)
- If the elder is living with the perpetrator they may lose their accommodation, so they stay quiet to stay in the home (Older Aboriginal person)

"If you're living with the people who are abusing you how do you get away? And if you report it, it's going to come back to you, so you put up with it, and I think that's what happens." Older Aboriginal person

- Family members that intervene are subjected to backlash from the perpetrator or other family members that benefit from the mistreatment or neglect (Community member)
- Older people put up with mistreatment or neglect due to dependence on the perpetrator for help with getting to hospital appointments and other support (ACCO)
- Older people avoid upsetting the perpetrator as they rely on them to visit them in the aged care facility, help them navigate government systems, drive them to appointments or help them use their phone (ACCO)
- Older people don't want to disgruntle their family by reporting mistreatment or neglect as they fear they will become further isolated and abused if the agencies cannot help them (ACCO and Public Servants staff)

"Older people don't report because they are fearful of the consequences." ACCO

- In remote communities, where there is a lack of police, elders won't speak out for fear of violence (Public Servants)

"They don't want to say nothing, they're too scared they'll come back and threaten. That's happening everywhere, all through our community." Community member

"Older people do not report because they don't want their family to be investigated and punished." ACCO

There are also repercussions when family steps in to address the mistreatment or neglect. State Government staff shared examples where family members intervened to stop other family from financially abusing their grandmother by becoming the administrator of their money. Not only did this result in retaliation from the perpetrators it also caused the older

Aboriginal person anxiety.

### Support provider and other agencies' lack of awareness of programs and program coordination

In addition to older Aboriginal people and their families having a lack of awareness of the support programs available, service providers and local councils also lacked awareness. Service mapping and program coordination were identified by ACCOs as necessary to provide older Aboriginal people with holistic care.

Engagements with local councils in the Pilbara found that they had a limited knowledge of culturally safe programs for Aboriginal elders. They were unable to provide elders with referrals to support providers for instances of mistreatment or neglect.

It was also found that while local councils offered a range of free activities to older people, they did not actively promote the programs to Aboriginal people, who may not be aware of the activities available or that they are provided for free. It was noted by a local council in the Pilbara that if an older person participates in a lot of activities, they start to charge them a fee to cover the administration. Charging for activities that are promoted as free was found to cause confusion and discourage attendance from any activities for fear of being charged.

Local councils identified the importance of investing time into developing relationships with the Aboriginal community, especially older Aboriginal people. Fostering these relationships was found to encourage engagement where people felt comfortable asking for advice and guidance to support services. This was an important avenue where people being mistreated or neglected could seek support and connection to an appropriate organisation. It was found that this level of support was dependent on the individual in the local council rather than any standard of service.

### Eligibility age to access the aged pension

Closing the Gap reports that an Aboriginal person's life expectancy for men is 8.6 years less than a non-Indigenous man and 7.8 years less for women. Despite this, there is no adjustment made to eligibility age to access the aged pension or superannuation which remains the same as non-Indigenous people at 66 years of age (to be increased to 67 in 2023).

## Overall community view

Community members shared their thoughts on barriers to seeking help.

“The main reasons people don’t seek help is because they don’t know where to get help, they don’t want to talk about what’s happening to them because of shame, and they fear repercussions such as physical violence or becoming isolated if they do speak out.” Community Members

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### The risk factors and barriers to individuals seeking support from organisations

**Lack of services** was a key issue, especially in regional, remote and very remote locations. Where services were available in regional areas, they rarely conducted outreach activities to remote communities.

**Lack of culturally appropriate services** was found across all research regions. While the general lack of services was an issue, it was found that many of the services that were available were not culturally appropriate.

**Accessing support and navigating complex systems** was found to be a barrier, especially aged care packages and other government support. This included digital and physical access due to a lack of transportation or reliance on family for travel. Community and elders were found to rely on their local ACCO for guidance and assistance.

**Lack of awareness of support available** people don’t know where to go, they don’t know what support is available and while some were aware of non-Indigenous support services, there was a reluctance to engage due the view, real and perceived, that they would lack cultural competency. This finding was supported by the survey which found that a third of support service providers do not provide any cultural competency training.

**Cultural considerations and shame** are contributing to mistreatment and neglect of elders. There is a growing disregard for elders and younger generations are not fulfilling their obligations to care for them. Also, family business is private which means that elders won’t seek help beyond their family for fear of bringing shame on them or intervene on another family’s business, even if they are aware that an elder is being mistreated or neglected.

## Summary of findings continued

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**Fear of repercussions**, linked to shame. Elders were found to fear the actions of perpetrators if they reported mistreatment or neglect or sought assistance from organisations.

**Lack of service mapping and coordination** was found to be a barrier. When elders and their families did seek support, many service providers lacked awareness of services available outside their offerings reducing the opportunity for holistic care.

**Eligibility age to access the aged pension or superannuation** does not align to the reduced life expectancy as reported in Closing the Gap and was found to be a barrier for older Aboriginal people to live a better quality of life.

## The awareness and preventative responses to support older Aboriginal people

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The research found that there was a high level of awareness across all stakeholder groups of older Aboriginal people being mistreated or neglected across the research locations. Eighty percent of support service providers that participated in the survey were aware of mistreatment. Some types of mistreatment were more prevalent than others with financial abuse or humbugging the most frequent and widespread raised during consultations and survey respondents identified institutional neglect and overcrowding in addition to financial abuse.

It was also found that while there was a high level of awareness in the community, it was rarely spoken about or acted upon due to elements of shame and the value of protecting family. Non-Indigenous support providers expressed hesitation to intervene, especially if it was outside their service remit while ACCOs, who offer holistic support, were more willing to step in and advocate for the elder.

This section explores the awareness and preventative responses to support older Aboriginal people.

### Support at the individual level

Engagement with community members, ACCOs, service providers and State Government staff found that support at the individual level was generally driven by an individual's need or desire to assist an elder being mistreated or neglected rather than any organisational driver. Public Servants identified a lack of a coordinated approach by government and while ACCOs provide holistic support to their community, identification and response to mistreatment or neglect was inconsistent and limited due to concerns of shame, capacity and resourcing.

Older Aboriginal people emphasised that there are young people in the community that respect and care for their elders. While they had previously stated that the younger generations had a growing disrespect for elders, they clarified that it wasn't widespread and that there were many younger people who called in on elders, spent time with them and offered any assistance. The older Aboriginal people said that as a result, these younger people were more in touch with their culture and looked up to their elders.

ACCOs said that they would raise any issues they had observed or become aware of with other family members that were not perpetrating the abuse in a non-official capacity. ACCOs offered the family members guidance and support to address issues of mistreatment or neglect but generally utilised a subtle approach to avoid getting into family business.

Engagements with Public Servants in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields found that some were very active in their community and they shared experiences where they stepped outside their remit to advocate for elders or family members. Public Servants in the South West had less contact with the Aboriginal community and identified a need to foster stronger relationships and build trust.

Service providers were also found to be driven at a personal level, rather than by the organisation. The survey found that most service providers refer older Aboriginal people to an ACCO or a non-Indigenous provider for financial abuse (79% refer), mistreatment or neglect (85% refer). Through interviews, some service providers said that they take a personal interest in helping people whether that be directly through their service or through advocacy as needed.

### Support at the community level

Stakeholders identified a number of community-based approaches to raising awareness and responding to mistreatment and neglect. It was found that these actions are often initiated or driven by an individual who advocates for an older person but then gains momentum with others also choosing to help.

Community members said that to counter the current 'normality' around abuse there needs to be active talking and listening about it throughout the community. It was suggested that this could be led by an ACCO and community Elders to ensure it is widespread and a whole of community approach.

Community members and older Aboriginal people said that older men could play a bigger role in changing the current situation. It was found that older men stay silent and don't discipline the younger generation. This responsibility falls onto the older women of a community and men won't step in to support them as it goes against their culture. Community members and older Aboriginal people said this had to change as younger generations were out of control and held the view that older men could help.

Community members in the Kimberley shared experiences where young men, who were drinking a lot and behaving very badly, were mentored by an older man and taken out on country for lore. The young man that returned was completely different and now had a network of support around him to stay connected to country and culture. Community members emphasised the value older Aboriginal men bring to young men especially and felt this should be encouraged.

Older Aboriginal people, community members and ACCOs said that responding to incidents of mistreatment and neglect were critical but it was also important to address the underlying issue of a disconnect from culture and diminished respect for elders in general. In addition to getting older, men involved in mentoring younger men, supporting elders to engage more frequently with community was considered valuable for all involved, especially the young people. ACCOs suggested that a support provider could drive elders

to places like the youth centre or basketball courts and just spend time watching and yarning with the youth.

This concept was also suggested by older Aboriginal people that said helping elders engage with community would improve their quality of life and sense of isolation. They suggested that elders be supported to help with and attend all social activities to increase their presence in community.

Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) in the research areas were found to provide a lot more than medical services and utilising a holistic care approach. This means that when elders or their family members visit the AMS, they feel comfortable and are able to raise and discuss life issues. While mistreatment or neglect may not be raised directly, the engagement provides AMS staff with an opportunity to identify situations and offer subtle wrap around support as appropriate. The AMS' would also actively engage with family members that are caring for elders and connect them to various support providers, such as Carers WA, which is the peak body that represents the needs and interests of carers in WA. ACCOs held the view that this approach would ensure carers are given much needed support and respite to minimise mistreatment or neglect due to built-up resentment for the time it takes caring for older people.

Strong Aboriginal leadership within a community was found to have a profound impact on the awareness and response to mistreatment and neglect of older Aboriginal people. An Aboriginal network of 26 respected Elders representing 13 language groups across the Pilbara was formed in 2017. The network works in collaboration with government and agencies to provide a unified voice and guide decisions that impact on Aboriginal people and the broader community. Community members said that they feel safe and able to approach Elder groups to raise concerns knowing that they will receive the support they need.

The reach of the Aboriginal network broadens to ACCOs within the Pilbara as many of the members are connected to an ACCO. This provides the ACCOs with a strong connection and understanding of community needs and an ability to provide holistic support across a number of language groups.

“We are working together with the Aboriginal network to help an elder create a trust for their money to stop them being financially abused by their family. It has taken more than a year to get into place and we’ve had to fight the family every step of the way.” ACCO

The Aboriginal network and Pilbara ACCOs have a strong commitment to their community and won't turn anyone in need away. This has created a situation where community members, and older Aboriginal people, feel safe to raise issues, despite potential shame.

In the Kimberley however, ACCOs state that despite the number of other service providers, it was difficult to identify where to go for support regarding elder abuse. ACCOs felt many organisations won't take responsibility for the issue and support elders. However, it was also found that some organisations work with elders and have a dedicated elder advocate.

ACCOs noted that a number of older Aboriginal people live in a local aged care facility but don't want to be there. ACCOs said that families get desperate when their houses are overcrowded and their only option is to place their elders in care.

The Kimberley was found to have a centralised hub for older Aboriginal people run by an ACCO. The hub focused on social events and providing support to people that care for elders, rather than formal support for elders themselves. While the hub didn't have any support services as such, they had a good understanding of support available in the region and provided referrals to family and elders. Other ACCOs in the Kimberley were found to provide holistic support to elders, including support for mistreatment or neglect, especially for humbugging.

The Pilbara however, lacked a centralised or coordinated approach and ACCOs said that families and elders found it difficult to identify who could provide them with the support they needed. It was also noted that activity programs for elders were biased towards women and older men had very little to keep them occupied. As a result, older men often frequent shopping centres to be around other people but get moved on for loitering.

A number of non-Indigenous support service providers actively work to be culturally appropriate and ensure elders feel welcome. An aged care facility in the Pilbara has been making a number of changes to be more culturally welcoming. They have incorporated Aboriginal names into their facility, cater to cultural dietary requests and provide transport to enable residents to attend cultural events. They also engage an Aboriginal elder to provide cultural awareness training to their staff.

In the Goldfields, the ACCOs provide wrap-around, holistic support to elders and their families. This may include sourcing housing, keeping elders safe in their houses and helping them manage overcrowding. It also puts the ACCOs in a position where they may observe mistreatment or neglect and can offer support to the elders. ACCOs noted that they do not receive any specific funding to assist elders but recognise the importance of elders being viewed positively in the community to create change and increase respect for elders.

"In terms of our Aboriginal community and who we support and all the wraparounds that we do provide, it's really important, because it's the only way that we're going to stop generational change." ACCO



Community Resource Centres (CRC), funded by the State Government, were found to be used by Aboriginal people seeking access to, and assistance with, technology such as video calls and the Internet and in navigating government services such as Services Australia. CRCs were also found to provide information and links to other services and coordinate community events. CRCs noted that they work to create a welcoming environment for older Aboriginal people and actively encourage their engagement with CRC services and activities.

"People come in here because they don't necessarily know where else to go, and they need to sort out some sort of business which is, obviously, beyond their capacity to do by themselves, and we'll just do whatever needs to be done."

Service Provider

Currently, CRCs do not provide any specific support or referrals for people experiencing mistreatment or neglect, though they do have general information available relating to domestic violence, abuse against women and elder abuse. Additionally, CRC staff are only given basic cultural competency training and would not necessarily have the capability to identify and support an elder being mistreated or neglected.

A number of stakeholders referred to the Home and Community Care (HACC) program which provided meals and financial counselling to older Aboriginal people through home visits. It was noted that the program is no longer available for older people. From 1 July 2018, older people receiving HACC were transitioned to the Commonwealth Home Support Program. State Government staff noted that HACC program was a good touch point for understanding what was happening in the community in terms of mistreatment and neglect and made issues visible within people's homes. There is concern that the new program does not provide the same visibility.

Survey respondents suggested community information sessions, direct engagement through outreach, improve coordination of service delivery and offering older Aboriginal people a single contact point to connect to different services as improvements to raise awareness.

Almost all participating support service providers (86%) wanted to improve their service provision to Aboriginal people and identified four key factors to achieve improvement. Adequate resourcing and improved networking and links to other support organisations to mitigate service duplication. Along with better coordination of service provision and additional training, especially cultural competency training.

### **The awareness and preventative responses to support Aboriginal people and their communities**

Stakeholders identified a number of opportunities to raise awareness and enhance preventative responses to mistreatment and neglect of older Aboriginal people. These included:

- Older Aboriginal people being provided with opportunities to be active within the community to interact with the youth and have a greater presence in community activities. This would lead to greater respect for elders, fostering relationships and trust.
- Community to raise awareness that the normalisation of mistreatment and neglect of older people is not acceptable and needs to change at the community level.
- Men in the community be encouraged to speak out against mistreatment and neglect and encourage connection to culture and country, especially for the youth.
- Communities with strong leadership led to increased awareness and response to mistreatment and neglect. Provide safe avenues for elders or family to raise incidents of mistreatment or neglect without fear of shame.
- Aboriginal Medical Services to provide holistic care which aligns with Aboriginal culture. This includes engagement with family members to ensure carers have the knowledge and support they need to care for their elders.
- Support providers to have a level of cultural competency and be able to provide support to older Aboriginal people experiencing mistreatment or neglect in such a way that is appropriate and empowers the older person.

# Section 5

## Appendix

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## Appendix 1: Methodology

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This empirical research into the mistreatment of older Aboriginal people utilised qualitative research methods to collect in-depth information from the target audience to provide descriptive insights into the key lines of enquiry.

### Key lines of enquiry

- What constitutes mistreatment of older Aboriginal people
- The extent of mistreatment in WA
- How mistreatment may differ from the general population
- The unique challenges experienced by Aboriginal people related to where they live (communities)
- Risk factors and barriers to individuals seeking support from organisations
- Awareness and preventative responses to support Aboriginal people and their communities at the individual, community, and government level.

The data collected was used to develop a summary of findings to inform service delivery, government strategic policy and future research.

### Project Reference Group

The project was guided by a Project Reference Group (PRG) which consisted of six high profile and well-respected Aboriginal women (four aged 50 years or more) from the Kimberley, Pilbara, Goldfields and South West. The aim of the PRG was to provide feedback, expert knowledge and direction to the project, especially in terms of culture.

1. Katina Law (Kimberley, Traditional Owner - member of the Dambinangari Native Title Group, Tribal Group is Worrora and also Walmajarri, older Aboriginal)
2. Jahna Cedar (Pilbara, Traditional Owner - member of the Niyyaparli and Yindjibarndi Native Title Group, Community Leader)
3. Helen Skiadas (Kimberley, Traditional Owner - member of the Dambinangari Native Title Group, Tribal Group is Worrora and also Walmajarri, older Aboriginal)
4. Maureen Kelly (Pilbara, Elder, older Aboriginal)
5. Melinda Ely (South West)
6. Danie Zappa (South West)

The PRG guided the early stages of the project to inform methodology and the ethics application. The PRG identified regions where their network and connection will facilitate effective community engagement within the budget for the project.

### Regions for research

Regions for the research were selected through a workshop held on 6 July 2021 with the research team and PRG to determine the most appropriate locations based on Aboriginal

population and other considerations. The PRG also advised on a number of important elements to enhance engagement which included the importance of anonymity and protecting research participants by ensuring that reporting is based on a regional level, rather than a town or community level. They also suggested approaching large communities to ensure that participants could not be easily identified.

The budget for the project allowed for engagement in four regions and the regions selected were the Kimberley, with 19% of Western Australia's Aboriginal population, the Pilbara (11%), Goldfields (6%) and the South West region including Perth with 62%. In total this captured 98% of Western Australia's Aboriginal population.

### Data sources

### Literature

A comprehensive review of peer-reviewed and grey literature provided broad insight into the mistreatment of older people in general and examined, where available, literature focused on the mistreatment of older First Nation's people. The review helped identify the gaps in knowledge and refine the key lines of enquiry.

### Qualitative data

Qualitative data was obtained through one-on-one interviews and focus group sessions with key stakeholders in the research regions. Stakeholders included Aboriginal people aged 50 years and older, younger Aboriginal people that cared for older Aboriginal people, State Government staff, ACCOs, support providers and the broader Aboriginal community.

For cultural purposes, the PRG advised against engaging with older Aboriginal people in their official capacity as community Elders. For clarity, Elders have the authority to speak on behalf of the community and if interviewed, their views are understood to represent community views and could place these participants in a challenging position. Older Aboriginal people that were invited to participate may or may not have been Elders but were interviewed as older Aboriginal people and not community Elders. This distinction was also made clear to all older Aboriginal participants.

### Quantitative data

An online survey was developed to capture the thoughts and views of support providers across the research regions. The survey was sent to 900 organisations including ACCOs (such as AMS), other support service providers including community neighbourhood centres, health services, counselling, legal, aged care facilities, local councils etc.

### Timeframe

The project began in December 2020 with establishment of the PRG, the literature review and preparation of the ethics application.

The ethics application was submitted to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies on the 13 July 2021 and approved on 6 October 2021.

Stakeholder engagement was conducted from October 2021 to January 2022.

### Research participants

A number of stakeholders were engaged for the project including:

- Department of Communities staff that have direct involvement in the management of programs associated with older Aboriginal people
- ACCOs located in the research regions that have either direct or indirect engagement with older Aboriginal people including all those that provide support services
- Other support providers
- Aboriginal community members of all ages

### Recruitment

Recruitment was conducted in alignment with ethical requirements and involved numerous activities including direct approach through email or phone contact, network connections, social media and advertising through ACCOs and other local hubs frequented by older Aboriginal people in the research regions.

### COVID-19 Protocols

All government guidelines were strictly followed in addition to adjusting engagement methods to ensure participants felt safe. This resulted in extensive remote engagement through phone and videoconferencing.

### Engagement summary

Engagement was conducted qualitatively through one-on-one interviews and focus group sessions and quantitatively through an online survey. Note that due to COVID-19, one-on-one interviews were conducted in place of on-site focus groups in some of the regions. The following table provides a summary of qualitative engagement.

Figure 1: Summary of qualitative engagement

	Invited	No response	Declined	Participated
<b>Kimberley (all interviews)</b>				
ACCO support providers	6	2	1	3
Other support providers	2	0	0	2
Department of Communities staff	2	1	0	1
Older Aboriginal people (aged 50+)	12	0	0	12
Aboriginal people (aged 18-49)	6	0	0	6
<b>Pilbara (all interviews)</b>				
ACCO support providers	2	1	0	1
Other support providers	3	1	0	2
Department of Communities staff	1	1	0	0
Older Aboriginal people (aged 50+)	12	0	0	12
Aboriginal people (aged 18-49)	2	0	0	2
<b>Goldfields (all interviews)</b>				
ACCO support providers	14	9	0	5
Other support providers	3	2	0	1
Department of Communities staff	4	1	0	3
Older Aboriginal people (aged 50+)	8	3	0	5
Aboriginal people (aged 18-49)	2	2	0	0
<b>Southwest (interviews and one focus group)</b>				
ACCO support providers	2	1	0	1
Other support providers	3	2	0	1
Department of Communities staff	1	0	0	1
Older Aboriginal people (aged 50+)	7	0	0	7
Aboriginal people (aged 18-49) focus group	7	0	0	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>72</b>

### Online survey

The quantitative, online survey was sent to 900 support service providers that operate within the research regions and may provide support to older Aboriginal people. The survey was live for the duration of stakeholder engagement and obtained a total of 92 surveys (10%). See appendix 2 for full survey analysis.

## Limitations

There are a number of limitations within this research:

- Impact of COVID-19 – most engagements were conducted remotely and on-site focus groups were not able to be conducted in Aboriginal communities. However, while face-to-face engagement was preferred, and is often thought more effective, it was found that remote engagement with Aboriginal people discussing a sensitive issue resulted in longer and deeper discussions where participants were very comfortable engaging over the phone. It was also noted by a number of Aboriginal participants that they wouldn't have taken part in the research if we had conducted their engagement face-to-face.

While listed as a limitation it is actually thought that this shift in engagement enhanced data collection, rather than provide a limitation.

- The contact list for the online survey was comprehensive and covered a large number of ACCOs and other support service providers in the regions, however, it is not known if the list was complete and may have resulted in some support services not having the opportunity to participate.

## Appendix 2: Online survey data analysis

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The online survey was developed to capture the thoughts and views of support providers across all of Western Australia to enable a broad understanding. The survey was sent to 900 organisations including ACCOs (such as AMS) and other support service providers including community neighbourhood centres, health services, counselling, legal, aged care facilities, local councils etc. A total of 92 responses were received (10%).

### General information about participating providers

This section explores the extent to which participating providers engage with and support Aboriginal people. A total of 83% provide assistance to older Aboriginal people.

Figure 2: Proportion of organisations that provide assistance to older Aboriginal people



Source: Does your organisation provide assistance to older Aboriginal people (those aged 50 years or older)?

Of those organisations, 22% are managed by an ACCO with the remaining 78% being a non-Indigenous service provider (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Proportion of support services managed by an ACCO



Source: Is the organisation managed / run by an Aboriginal Corporation?

All WA regions were represented within the survey with 24% of service providers being located in the Kimberley, 15% the Wheatbelt, 13% for both Perth metropolitan area and the Pilbara, 10% the Goldfields, 8% Mid-West, 7% Great Southern and 5% each for South West and the Gascoyne.

Service providers that provide support to Aboriginal people indicated that around 45% of their clients are Aboriginal people, of those about half are aged 50 years or older.

### Support services provided

All participating service providers were asked to select the services they provide directly to older Aboriginal people, compared to those they refer. Of the referrals, they were asked to indicate whether those referrals were to an ACCO support provider or a non-Indigenous support provider. Figure 4 summarises responses.

Figure 4: Support provision compared to referrals

Service	Provided	Referral to an ACCO	Referral to a non-Indigenous provider
Financial counselling	13%	64%	23%
Community visitors' scheme	19%	62%	19%
Financial abuse (humbugging)	21%	61%	18%
Abuse / neglect / mistreatment	15%	57%	28%
Respite	18%	57%	25%
Gardening and home maintenance	26%	57%	17%
Home care (care of client in their home)	24%	53%	23%
Domestic assistance (food shopping, house cleaning)	26%	52%	22%
Mental health support	36%	47%	17%
Transport support	40%	47%	13%
Meals on wheels/providing food	25%	45%	30%

Source: Please indicate whether you provide or refer older Aboriginal people for the following services.

It is interesting that the majority of service providers refer older Aboriginal people to an ACCO with only 15% providing support for abuse, neglect and mistreatment and 21% providing support for financial abuse. It would be interesting to understand why they are referred to an ACCO and whether the client is given an option to continue to engage with the non-Indigenous service provider. This could be a barrier to support if an Aboriginal person is 'denied' support and referred to an ACCO which may cause cultural conflict.

Service providers were then asked if there were services older Aboriginal people ask for but are not provided or need, but do not ask for. Figure 5 summarises responses.



Figure 5: Services older Aboriginal people need or request

Service	Identified as a need but not asked for	Services older Aboriginal people ask for
Financial counselling	82%	18%
<b>Financial abuse (humbugging)</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Abuse / neglect / mistreatment</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>21%</b>
Respite	74%	26%
Community visitors' scheme	74%	26%
Gardening and home maintenance	72%	28%
Mental health support	70%	30%
Home care (care of client in their home)	70%	30%
Domestic assistance (food shopping, house cleaning)	68%	32%
Meals on wheels / providing food	45%	55%
Transport support	34%	66%

Source: Please indicate whether older Aboriginal people ask for the following services or need them but have not asked for the service.

The majority of service providers participating in the survey, around 80%, identify that older Aboriginal people need financial counselling, support with financial abuse and support for abuse, neglect or mistreatment but do not ask for that support. Older Aboriginal people most frequently ask for support with food and transport.

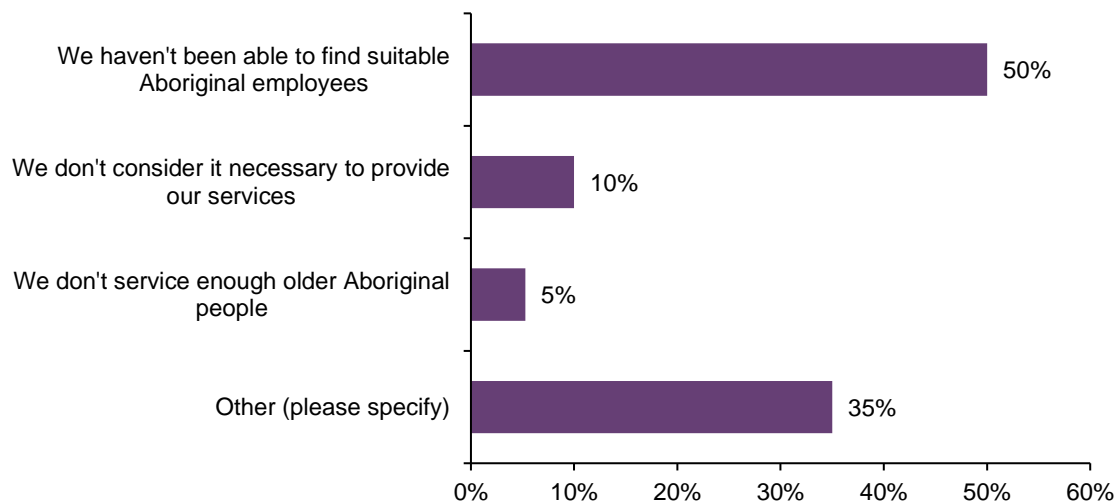
In addition to the support services listed above, providers were asked what other support they provided to older Aboriginal clients. A total of 63% provide additional support services which listed in order of frequency included:

- NDIS support
- Digital literacy
- Advocacy
- Housing
- Linguistic / translation

## Staff and cultural competency

Service providers that supported older Aboriginal people were asked if they had Aboriginal staff members. It was found that 60% do and 40% do not. Providers that do not have Aboriginal staff were asked why.

Figure 6: Reasons for not having any Aboriginal staff



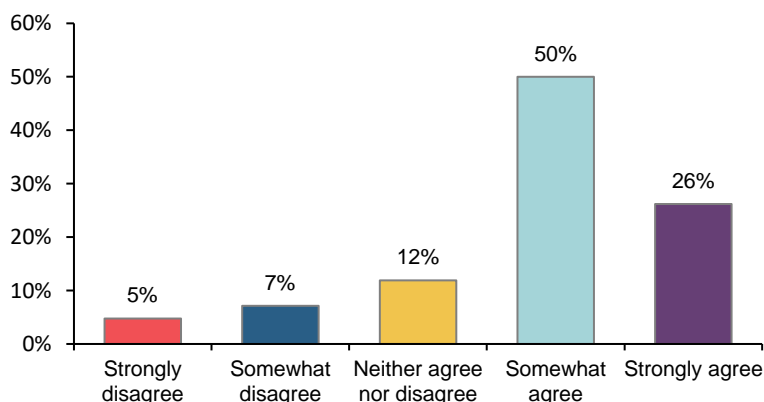
Source: Why don't you have any Aboriginal staff?

Finding and securing suitable Aboriginal employees was the most frequently selected option. Of those that selected 'other' the most frequent reason was that the service provider was a sole trader.

## Culturally appropriate services

Service providers were asked whether they were able to deliver culturally appropriate services to older Aboriginal people. It was found that 76% of respondents believe their services are culturally appropriate while 12% are not.

Figure 7: Organisations' perception of culturally appropriateness of services



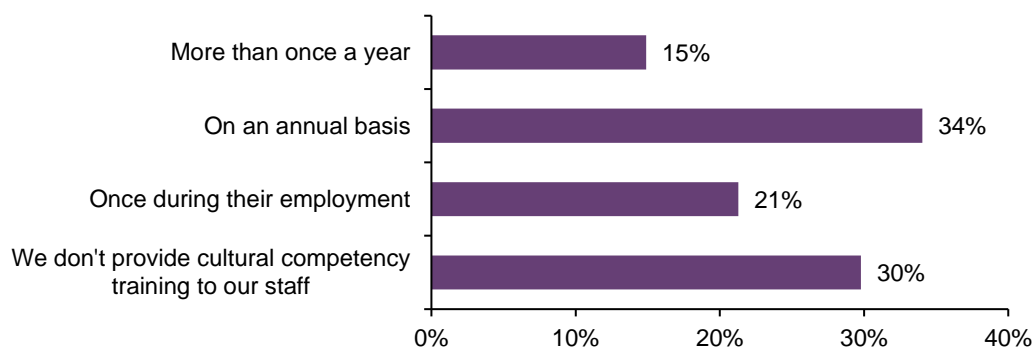
Source: We are able to deliver culturally appropriate services for older Aboriginal people.

Those that believe they do not offer culturally appropriate services identified that they lacked the knowledge to effectively engage with older Aboriginal people and had identified the need to establish a trusting relationship before their support was accepted.

### Cultural competency training

Providers that support older Aboriginal people were asked about cultural competency training. It was found that 49% provide cultural competency training on an annual basis or more than once a year while 21% provide training only once during employment. Of concern was that 30% do not provide any cultural competency training to their staff.

Figure 8: Frequency of cultural competency training provided to staff



Source: How often do you provide cultural competency training to your non-Aboriginal staff?

Organisations that provide cultural competency training provided training through an external Aboriginal organisation (48%) in-house (36%) or through an online course (16%).

Organisations that do not provide cultural competency training were asked why and the most frequent reasons were:

- Low need overall
- Have Aboriginal staff members and don't believe it necessary
- Identified as a need but have not actioned any training
- Have the expectation that staff will engage in their own training externally

### Awareness of organisations support services

Participating support agencies were asked how older Aboriginal people would know about and access their services. Participants were able to select multiple options. The table below shows how many of the service providers selected the method (total) and the proportion that selected that method as a way of connecting with older Aboriginal people and/or of how older Aboriginal people connected with the service. Figure 9 summarises responses.

Figure 9: Awareness of support service

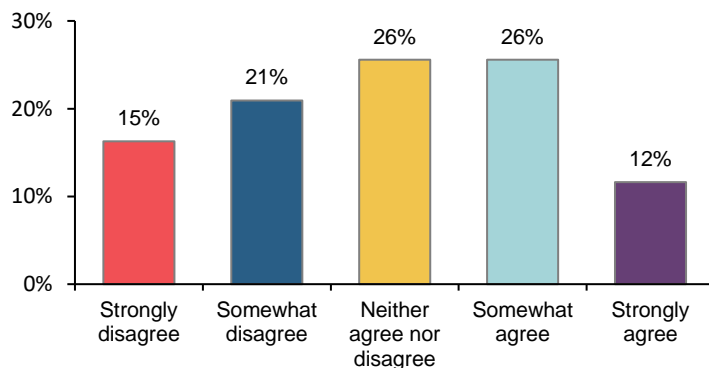
Method	Total	How the service connects with older Aboriginal people	How older Aboriginal people connect with the service
Referral from another agency	100%	75%	75%
Walk-ins	100%	50%	50%
Phone call	100%	50%	50%
Outreach (going into community)	100%	60%	40%
Service provider's presence in the community	100%	60%	40%
Posters	75%	40%	40%
Social media	60%	50%	25%

It was found that support organisations utilise a number of different strategies to engage with older Aboriginal people with all selecting referrals, walk-ins, phone, outreach and presence in the community.

Support offered compared to identified needs

Providers were asked whether they were able to provide older Aboriginal people with all the support they needed. The result is very interesting with each option having a high frequency of selection.

Figure 10: Organisations perception that they are able to provide older Aboriginal people with the support they need



Source: We are able to provide older Aboriginal people with all the support they need.

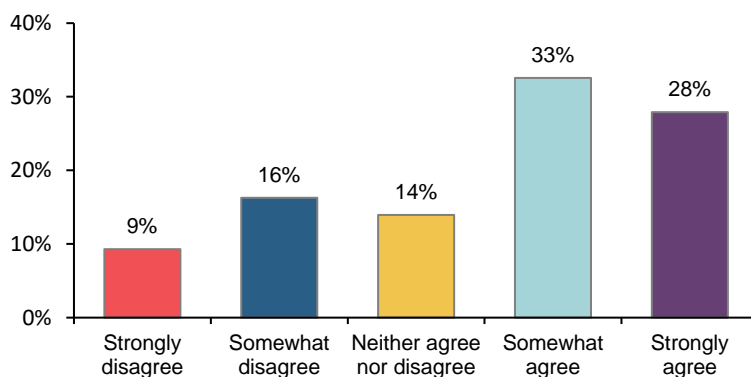
The results show that more than half (62%) of providers are not able to provide older Aboriginal people with the support they need while 38% believe they can. Respondents that selected neither agree nor disagree or less, were asked what support they don't or can't provide. The most frequent responses were:

- Needs exceed services offered
- Lack of qualifications or resources
- Demand exceeds supply, resourcing, funding
- There is a need for ongoing support and current programs do not provide ongoing support

### Access to service

The majority of organisations indicated that it was easy for older Aboriginal people to access their service (61%) while 25% hold the view that access may be difficult.

Figure 11: Organisations perception of ease of access to services provided



Source: It's easy for older Aboriginal people within our region to get in touch with us for support.

Service providers identified a number of challenges older Aboriginal people may have in accessing their services. Those most frequently identified included:

- Lack of communication (no phone or credit)
- Too proud to ask for assistance
- Fear of shame in asking for assistance
- Lack of awareness of support provided
- Communication with language barriers

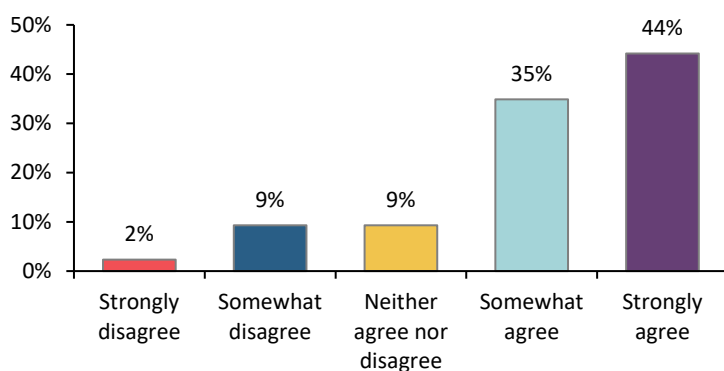
Providers also offered a number of suggestions to make it easier for older Aboriginal people to know about and access their services which included:

- Community information sessions
- Direct engagement through a lot more outreach
- Better coordination of services
- Single point of contact for connection to different support services to foster relationship building and trust

### Awareness of and support provide to older Aboriginal people that are affected by abuse, neglect and/or mistreatment

Support providers were asked is they were aware of any abuse, neglect or mistreatment of older Aboriginal people. It was found that 80% of participating service providers were aware while only 11% denied any awareness of abuse, neglect or mistreatment.

Figure 12: Organisations' awareness of mistreatment



Source: We are aware of the various types of abuse, neglect and mistreatment that happens to older Aboriginal people.

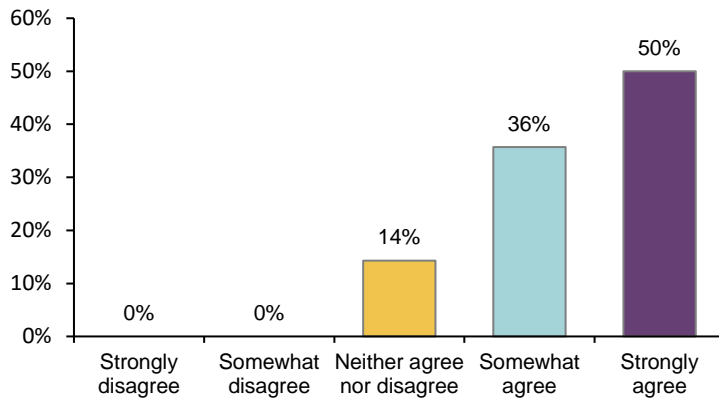
The types of mistreatment identified by organisations in order of frequency included:

- Financial abuse
- Neglect
- Institutional neglect or overcrowding
- Physical abuse
- Medical neglect
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Caring for younger children but lacking ability and resources
- Verbal abuse

Service providers offered a number of specific types of support to address the abuse, neglect or mistreatment they identified. The most common forms of support were referral, financial counselling, advocacy or the offer of a safe place to discuss the issues.

While organisations identified incidences of abuse, neglect and mistreatment and responded with a number of support options, they also identified a desire to improve support to older Aboriginal people. Figure 13 summarises responses.

Figure 13: Proportion of organisations wanting to improve service provision to older Aboriginal people



Source: We would like to improve our services to older Aboriginal people.

The organisations identified a number of factors they needed to achieve an improvement in servicing older Aboriginal people, these included:

- Additional funding for staff (especially Aboriginal staff to be competitive with the mining sector)
- Additional funding for program delivery (especially in regional and remote areas)
- Improved networking and links to other support organisations
- Additional training (cultural competency)

Survey participants were given the opportunity to share any comments relating specifically to the needs or providing services for older Aboriginal people in their region.

- Collaboration – we would like to develop a plan with the Health Service Providers so that we can work together to provide more support to the older Aboriginal people in our region
- Resourcing - we cannot run the specific program for older Aboriginal people due to lack of resources
- Language barriers – funds needed for interpretation services
- Need for housing - the lack of social housing impacts families generally. Overcrowding has lots of negative effects, some of which impact on older Aboriginal people

- Access to Services Australia - it is difficult for family to apply for a carers pension or allowance because there is inadequate access to social security in the community
- Lack of appropriate social activities - there is nothing for people to do except play cards, use cannabis or have babies
- Poverty - poverty is a significant issue for older people in remote communities
- Funding security - organisations that are currently successful at delivering services should be provided with ongoing funding instead of spending money on additional, short-term programs that are rarely effective due to a lack of resourcing and short timeframe
- Remoteness - the biggest instances of neglect and abuse occur in the unstructured, unsupported remote communities with no police or medical assistance readily available and perhaps those places are not viable
- Share research findings - it would be great to get your study results to identify if we are on the right track, we are looking at metro and Geraldton providing nursing Physio, home services and allied health to educate the local workforce to help support local residents in regional and remote areas
- Lack of services - if you live in a town like Pingelly where there are limited or no local delivered services it is essential that somehow culturally appropriate service information is shared so we can assist and inform people living in isolation due to lack of public transport or the tyranny of distance who can help and how they can help e.g. do they offer phone or video online support
- Building strong relationships with family and community about the services that are available is important, making sure we have clear, easy accessible services. Also making sure we have a culturally appropriate approach when assisting families is something to be considered as it's important we also build trust and open relationships. Our older people live in remote communities where they are often only able to rely on family and the community. Having easier access to services, building rapport, showing reliable compassionate support I feel is the best foundation to start building better relationships and stronger communities
- (Great)grandparents need to be acknowledged in their roles and be given reprieve and financial support. As far as I can see they don't get any or if they do it is taken by other family members Why not give them money towards rent etc. for each child they look after so they have some money left to spend? NDIS needs to provide respite options. There is so much to say, I realise I am only just seeing a little part of it



## Appendix 3: Engagement tools

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### Interview questions: Department of Communities

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1. What is your understanding of the types of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people?
2. In your view, how prevalent is mistreatment across the state?
3. What options are available to these older people to get help?
4. In your view, what stops older Aboriginal people from getting help when they are being mistreated?
5. To what extent are services being delivered in a culturally appropriate way?
6. What needs to be done differently to ensure older Aboriginal are not being mistreated?
7. Any other comments?

### Interview questions: Support agencies (Accos)

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1. Tell me how older people are treated in communities
2. How often does this happen?
3. What service do you provide?
4. How do you promote your service in the community?
5. To what extent do you receive referrals from non-Aboriginal organisations?
6. How do older people access your support?
7. We are aware that a lot of people don't or can't get help, why do you think that is?
8. How do you manage with shame?
9. How do you manage or mitigate possible payback?
10. What is working well in terms of supporting these clients?
11. What needs improvement?
12. What suggestions do you have to help support clients?

## Interview questions: Support agencies (non-indigenous)

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1. What proportion of your clients would be older Aboriginal people?
2. What support services do you provide to older Aboriginal people?
3. How do you identify those in need of your support?
4. How do they access the support you provide?
5. To what level do you feel prepared in terms of understanding Aboriginal culture?
6. What is working well in terms of servicing these clients?
7. What needs improvement?
8. What recommendations do you have for improving service delivery?

## Interview questions: Aboriginal people aged 50 years and older

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Preamble: We are talking about older people in community, those aged 50 years and older, and how some of them might be treated badly by their family, friends or other members of the community.

1. What can you tell me about that?
2. Does it happen often?
3. What kinds of things happen?
  - a) Money / pension day - do people sometimes take your money or use your keycard to buy things for themselves and leave you with no money or food?
  - b) Neglect / not looking after you - not taking to the doctor when needed, not showering, not having enough healthy tucker, not filling scripts, not letting home help services into home. Do family get money to look after you and they don't look after you right?
  - c) Abuse - anything that is causing harm
4. Who can they talk to about this?
5. Where can they get help?
6. What stops some people from asking for or getting help?
7. What needs to happen to stop older people being treated badly?
8. Any other comments?

## Focus group questions: Aboriginal community members and carers of older people

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Preamble: We are talking about older people in community, those aged 50 years and older, and how some of them might be treated badly by their family, friends or other members of the community.

1. What can you tell me about that?
  - a) Types of mistreatment
  - b) Prevalence / how often does it happen / to how many older people
  - c) Unique challenges associated with geography / access to support
  - d) Awareness of being mistreated / calling people out, making people aware that it is happening and also having a name for it and the notion that it's wrong
2. How can they get help?
  - a) Who helps?
  - b) Access to support services (barriers / enablers)
3. What can you do to stop or reduce the abuse and mistreatment?
4. What support services are available to older people in the community?
  - a) Unpack - presence in community / culturally appropriate / ease of access / elements of shame
5. How easy is it to access support services?
  - a) Did the support address the situation?
  - b) If the process is complex to what extent do people give up?
6. What support services should be available?
7. What else can be done to help older people be safe?

Online survey questions: Accos/ non-indigenous support services / other key stakeholders

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1. Does your organisation provide assistance to older Aboriginal people (those aged 50 years or older)? (If no - close survey) Y/N
2. Is the organisation managed / run by an Aboriginal Corporation? Y/N
3. What proportion of your clients are Aboriginal people (as a percentage)?
4. Please indicate whether you **provide** or **refer** older Aboriginal people for the following services.

	We provide these services to older Aboriginal people	We refer them to an Aboriginal organisation for this service
Home care (care for the person in their home)		
Domestic assistance (food shopping, house cleaning)		
Gardening and home maintenance		
Transport		
Financial counselling		
Managing humbugging (financial abuse)		
Meals on wheels / providing food		
Community visitors scheme		
Mental health support		
Respite		
Abuse / neglect / mistreatment		

5. Please indicate whether older Aboriginal people **ask** for the following services.

	Older Aboriginal people need these services but do not ask for them	Older Aboriginal people ask for these services
Home care (care for the person in their home)		
Domestic assistance (food shopping, house cleaning)		
Gardening and home maintenance		
Transport (to shops, to medical appointments)		
Financial counselling		
Managing humbugging (financial abuse)		
Meals on wheels / providing food		
Community visitors scheme		
Mental health support		
Respite		
Abuse / neglect / mistreatment		

6. Do you provide any other support services to older Aboriginal people?

If yes, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you have Aboriginal staff available to work with older Aboriginal clients? Y/N

8. (If no to Q7) Why don't you have any Aboriginal staff? Select the most relevant response?

- We don't service enough older Aboriginal people
- We don't consider it necessary to provide our services
- We haven't been able to find suitable Aboriginal employees
- Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

9. How often do you provide cultural competency training to your non-Aboriginal staff?

- We don't provide cultural competency training to our staff
- Once during their employment
- On an annual basis
- More than once a year

10. How was cultural competency training provided?

- Online course
- By an external Aboriginal organisation
- In-house training
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. (If not provided) Why don't you provide any cultural competency training?

\_\_\_\_\_

12. How do older Aboriginal people know about the services you provide and access the support? (select all that apply)

	How we connect with older Aboriginal people	How older Aboriginal people connect with us
Walk ins		
Phone call		
Referral from another agency		
Outreach (we go into the community)		
Our presence in the community		
Posters		
Social media		
Other (please specify)		

**Instruction: Please respond to the following statements.**

13. We are able to provide older Aboriginal people with all the support they need. (Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree)

14. (If select any other than strongly agree Q13) What support don't or can't you provide?

\_\_\_\_\_

15. It's easy for older Aboriginal people within our region to get in touch with us for support. (Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree)

16. (If select any other than strongly agree Q15) Why isn't it easy?

\_\_\_\_\_

17. (If select any other than strongly agree Q15) What would make it easier?

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18. We are able to deliver culturally appropriate services for older Aboriginal people. (Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree)

19. (If select any other than strongly agree Q18) Why not?

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20. We are aware of the various types of abuse, neglect and mistreatment that happens to older Aboriginal people. (Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree)

21. What kind of abuse, neglect or mistreatment is experienced by older Aboriginal people in your region?

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22. What specific support do you provide to older Aboriginal people experiencing this type of abuse, neglect or mistreatment?

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**Instruction: Please respond to the statement.**

23. We would like to improve our services to older Aboriginal people. (Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Somewhat agree / Strongly agree)

24. What do you need to achieve an improvement in servicing older Aboriginal people?

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25. Other comments relating specifically to the needs or providing services for older Aboriginal people in your region.

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26. In what region does your organisation provide services? (Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Mid-West, Goldfields, Wheatbelt, Perth, South Wet, Great Southern or outside WA)

