

# **Southern Community Care Development Inc (SCCD)**

## **POLICY 3.6 - RESPONDING TO ABUSE**

To be read in conjunction with *Interagency Protocol for Abuse of Older People (2007)*

SCCD WORKS WITH OTHER RELEVANT AGENCIES TO RESPOND TO SUSPECTED & ACTUAL CASES OF ABUSE OF OLDER PEOPLE, PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY & THEIR CARERS IN THEIR HOMES.

### **What is Abuse?**

Abuse occurs within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust between the abused and abuser when the abuser's behaviour causes harm or neglect, including:

- Financial abuse: illegal or improper use of a person's property or finances;
- Psychological abuse: infliction of mental anguish, including actions that lead to fear of violence, to isolation, deprivation, feelings of shame, indignity or powerlessness;
- Physical abuse: infliction of physical pain or injury or physical coercion;
- Sexual assault and abuse: sexually abusive or exploitative behaviour, ranging from violent rape to indecent assault and sexual harassment; and
- Neglect: failure to provide adequate food, shelter, clothing, medical or dental care. This may also involve the refusal to permit other people to provide adequate care.

This policy relates to the environments in which Southern Community Care Development (SCCD) staff deal with clients who are frail older people, people with disability and carers: the SCCD workplace, in the wider community care service sector and clients' domestic situations. It does not relate to situations where clients are experiencing abuse in the commercial world, in health facilities, residential care etc or actions by SCCD personnel outside their work for SCCD.

Community care service users are particularly vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- Need high levels of support and care from a family member;
- Become confused about their property, belongings and/or surroundings;
- Be vulnerable to people who take advantage of them financially or sexually; and/or
- Become physically or verbally violent/ aggressive and/or undergo personality and behaviour changes because of illnesses and conditions that worsen progressively.

Abuse situations are often complicated by family dynamics and past relationships between a frail aged or disabled person and their carer. These may include:

- An adult child or spouse who was previously the victim of child abuse or domestic violence is now abusing the perpetrator;
- An adult child with a mental illness or substance abuse problems who takes on caring duties s/he can't handle.
- An aged person or person with a disability is angry at his or her carer due to a family disagreement unrelated to their current situation; or
- Abuse may also be a result of underlying factors such as carer stress, behavioural problems or deteriorating cognitive function on the part of the older or disabled person or issues associated with financial stress or isolation.

### **SCCD Responses to Suspected Abuse Situations**

#### **General**

In all environments, SCCD staff ensure non-accidental incidents resulting in actual physical injury to frail older people, people with disability and carers are reported to the Police immediately on 000. All suspected child abuse are reported to the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS Helpline: 132 111 or [www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)).

SCCD clients who report suspected or actual abuse to SCCD will be encouraged and supported to report allegations of criminal conduct to the police. If the person who has allegedly been subjected to abuse or neglect has a Guardian or Administrator, or if the person is under the age of 18, that person's Guardian, Administrator, parent or primary caregiver will be made aware of situation as soon as possible by SCCD. All issues relating to abuse will be clearly documented on the *Identification of Risk or Vulnerability* and *Follow Up Details* forms and reported to the relevant supervisor.

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## **The SCCD Workplace**

Each SCCD client has the right to be free from abuse. SCCD staff and management treat any person who comes into contact with the organisation with respect and consideration at all times (see **2.5 Code of Behaviour for Employees & 1.3 Code of Behaviour for the Management Committee**). Any allegations of abuse and neglect made against SCCD staff or management in the SCCD workplace are dealt with as a priority and as expeditiously as possible via organisational complaints and grievance resolution policies and procedures (see **1.3 Code of Behaviour for the Management Committee, 2.5 Code of Behaviour for Employees, 3.4 Client Complaints**). Any allegation of abuse or neglect is immediately reported at management committee level.

## **The Community Care Sector**

SCCD supports and encourages any SCCD client (whether a service user or provide/worker) who suspects or has witnessed evidence of abuse or neglect of a frail older person, person with disability or carer to make a formal complaint to the organisation concerned or the appropriate authorities, including the police (as above). SCCD staff are trained to provide information and refer such clients to relevant counselling and support services per the interagency abuse protocol (below).

## **Service Users' Homes**

SCCD staff who suspect or witness evidence of abuse of a frail older person, person with disability or carer in their home environment by a family member or friend refer, in the first instance after any necessary emergency responses (see General, above), to the *Interagency Protocol for Abuse of Older People (2007)*. Having formal legal status as the NSW Government's Interagency Protocol, the *Interagency Protocol for Abuse of Older People* describes how NSW Government agencies and funded services work with each other in a co-ordinated way to deal with suspected and actual cases of abuse of older people. This protocol refers to cases of abuse in the home, that is, in private rather than residential settings, and not to self-neglect, commercial abuse and criminal acts by strangers.

Under the protocol, all agencies that provide support to older people are expected to have organisational policies and procedures for responding to abuse, as follows:

- Identify abuse;
- Refer suspected, disclosed or established cases of abuse to appropriate services or authorities (see Useful Contacts in section 6 of the *Protocol*); and
- Assist in the provision of support and information as required.

SCCD staff who suspect abuse and do not act according to the section 3 principles and section 4 concepts in the *Interagency Protocol for Abuse of Older People (2007)* and at least seeking advice from a superior are in breach of this SCCD Policy. Referrals to other agencies are made per sections 5 and 6 of the *Protocol*.

The *St George and Sutherland Interagency Protocol (1999)* acts as a guide only on abuse issues relating to people with a disability and their carers that are not covered by the *Interagency Protocol for Abuse of Older People*, which replaced it in 2008. The Protocol assigns specific investigation, assessment and action roles, including case management, to local agents of the following government departments:

- NSW Police, via local outlets;
- NSW Health, via the Aged Care Assessment Team (ACAT) and Community Health Services at Southcare, the Mental Health Service; and
- NSW Department of Community Services.

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### **Other Situations**

The following are not within the parameters of SCCD or community care, but SCCD staff may provide this basic information to SCCD client to assist responses:

- Acts of violence involving physical injury, irrespective of the age of the victim, should be reported to the police.
- When the person being abused is under 18 years, Child Protection legislation & related policies should be implemented.
- In situations of abuse in aged care facilities (nursing homes), guidance should be sought from the Australian Department of Health & Ageing.
- In situations of abuse within hospitals or supported accommodation (group homes), guidance should be sought from the NSW Departments of Health and Ageing, Disability & Home Care, respectively.
- Supports for victims of domestic violence (within marriage, de facto and other personal relationships) are listed in local phone books and Sutherland Shire Council's Community Directory.

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**Key documents:** *Interagency Protocol for Abuse of Older People (2007), St George and Sutherland Interagency Protocol (1999), Identification of Risk or Vulnerability form, Follow Up Details form*

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