Office of the Public Advocate: the prevention of Elder Abuse

The aim of the April Northern Collaborative Network Forum was to:

- Provide an overview of the role of the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA)
- Provide information on the Advanced Care Directives Act 2013
- Discuss the ‘Closing the Gap’ report recommendations and the Vulnerable Adults Project
- Facilitate an opportunity to workshop how the northern region could support the recommendations from the report.

52 service providers (including 4 community members) attended the session. Elly Nitschke (Senior Advocate, OPA) explained that the Office of the Public Advocate had legislative responsibilities to:

1. Act as a guardian of last resort for people who were deemed to no longer have decision making capacity
2. Undertake investigations where required
3. Educate community members
4. Provide advocacy
5. Contribute to legislative reform
6. Act as a Dispute Resolution Service from July 1st 2014
7. Implement the Advanced Care Directives Act

Elly stated that 50% of people under the OPA guardianship were 70 years or older.

The Advanced Care Directives Act 2013 replaces the following document:

- Enduring Power of Guardianship
- Medical Power of Attorney
- Anticipatory Direction

The Act is a rights based consumer empowerment tool which puts State intervention (including OPA) as a ‘last resort’. The Act will come into effect as from July 1st 2014.

For further information on Advanced Care Directives contact Elly directly at opasa@opa.sa.gov.au or phone: 8342 8200

The Vulnerable Adults Project was funded by OFTA to:

1. Develop a rights based framework for the prevention of abuse
2. Promote a coordinated, multiagency approach to protection of vulnerable adults
3. Provide a consistent, coordinated, joined up response across all relevant agencies to prevent and address the issues of abuse of older people
4. Identify strategies to promote education and awareness
5. Promote early intervention and strategies to prevent abuse
6. Facilitate the establishment of localised community networks

The project highlighted a range of gaps within the current legislative and service environments and identified a range of recommendations to address these gaps. Recommendations included:

- The adoption of a rights based approach, supported by a Charter of Rights and Freedom of Older Persons
- Guiding principles
- The development of an Adult protection unit and a 1800 reporting number
- The adoption of a voluntary reporting approach but a mandatory response appropriate to the level of concern
- The establishment of Community Networks to promote education and awareness of abuse, and a framework for reporting.

The ‘Closing the Gaps’ report was launched in 2011 but little progress around legislative reform has been achieved since this time.

Forum attendees were asked to discuss what they thought could be done at an individual, agency and/or regional level to support the ‘Closing the Gap’ recommendations. A range of suggestions were presented including:

1. Community awareness activities, including community forms
2. Staff training and awareness raising
3. Supporting agencies to develop internal protocols around reporting and addressing abuse (including policy and procedures)
4. The development of an interagency taskforce that would:
   - Facilitate interagency networks by bringing together appropriate agencies
   - Collect regional data
   - Share resources and best practice
   - Advocate for legislative change
   - Explore issues and develop regional strategies e.g. confidentiality, definition of ‘abuse’, the language utilised etc.

The opportunity to further explore the development of a regional network or taskforce will be offered to regional stakeholders in May 2014.

Stakeholders are encouraged to read the report ‘Closing the Gaps: Enhancing South Australia’s Response to the Abuse of Vulnerable Older People’.
World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Doris Gioffre, Team Leader Abuse Prevention Program, ARAS spoke about World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) and how agencies can support WEAAD through undertaking awareness raising activities. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is on June 15th and agencies are encouraged to undertake activities in the week leading up to WEAAD. Doris distributed ‘Starter Kits’ to assist agencies to identify activities and to register these activities with ARAS.

Agencies will be acknowledged at the WEAAD Conference on **Monday June 16th 2014**.

For further information on WEAAD and/or the conference go to the ARAS website at [http://www.sa.agedrights.asn.au/](http://www.sa.agedrights.asn.au/)

This year the State-wide HACC Collaborative Projects are supporting ARAS to actively promote WEAAD and to encourage all regional agencies to be involved in an awareness raising activity. The NCP Community Ambassadors will be ‘out and about’ in the week prior to June 15th speaking to community members and providing them with information on ARAS and Elder Abuse prevention. Northern agencies are encouraged to engage their consumers, carers and volunteers in WEAAD activities.

**Key outcome of the Forum**

**Action:** The NCP will seek expressions of interest from regional stakeholders around the development of a Prevention Abuse Taskforce. (as proposed above)