



Herald Sun
Monday 19/9/2011
Page: 24
Section: Editorials
Region: Melbourne
Circulation: 495,000
Type: Editorial
Size: 126.52 sq.cms.
Published: MTWTFSS-

Brief: TRUSTEES
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Families prey on parents

AUSTRALIA'S ageing population is becoming increasingly vulnerable to theft and fraud, the *Herald Sun* reports today.

The perpetrators, however, are not strangers, but members of their own families.

The elderly have become a prime target for unscrupulous children and grand children who are not prepared to wait until the assets are distributed upon death.

They are resorting to what authorities call financial elder abuse, and it has become an underlying concern across Australia.

State Trustees is probing 60 possible cases in Victoria, but manager Steve Cowell says there are many more that go unreported.

"Most cases are perpetuated by close family members. As a result the crime is a very silent crime, a hidden crime and one that is kept very much in the confines of the family," he says.

It is a sad indictment of the community that many of our defenceless elderly citizens are being targeted by close family members they have loved and above all, trusted.

Financial elder abuse is a shameful and insidious practice, and all the indications are that it is on the rise. In some cases it is unlawful and constitutes serious fraud, theft and misrepresentation.

As such the full force of the courts should be brought down on offenders.

It might also be time to broaden an education campaign for our elderly citizens on the dangers and pitfalls of putting at risk their hard-earned assets.

The tragedy is that many victims are unaware they have been ripped off until it is too late.