

Tuesday, 29 March, 2011

Non-English speaking Australians at higher risk of financial elder abuse

New research reveals non-English speaking Australians are at higher risk of financial elder abuse due to their dependency on others for translation, transactions and services relating to the management of their finances.

Diversity and financial elder abuse in Victoria is the fourth report of the Protecting Elders Assets Study (PEAS) on financial elder abuse undertaken by Monash University and commissioned by State Trustees.

Data was drawn from 76 survey respondents aged 65 – 100 who were surveyed on their current and planned financial management strategies. Sixty two respondents were from non-English speaking backgrounds, including Greek, Italian and Vietnamese cultures.

“The study found that non-English speaking participants, in particular the Italian and Vietnamese groups, relied heavily on their English-speaking children to manage their day-to-day financial affairs. These tasks include renting property, paying bills and engaging with institutions such as banks, real estate agents and government departments on behalf of their parents,” State Trustees’ Managing Director Tony Fitzgerald, said.

“As was observed in previous studies with English-speaking participants, participants in this study were aware of instances of financial elder abuse, however believed it would be unlikely to happen to them. Sadly this commonly held belief among older Australians directly conflicts with past findings which suggest family members, in particular children, are the most common perpetrators of financial elder abuse,” Mr Fitzgerald said.

The study also found that non-English speaking respondents were less likely to have prepared personal financial and legal documents, such as an Enduring Power of Attorney (Financial); a document that gives an individual or organisation the power to make financial and legal decisions on another person’s behalf should they become incapacitated.

“Many older people from non-English speaking backgrounds avoid preparing an EPA because they trust their family will know what to do in the event they lose capacity. However, they often fail to fully appreciate the complexity of such a responsibility and the heavy burden it places on their loved ones,” Mr Fitzgerald said.

Mr Fitzgerald encourages older Australians to thoroughly explore their financial and legal options before making any firm decisions about the future management of their financial affairs.

“In many cases older people are simply unaware about what services and products are available to them. If they choose to, individuals can outsource the future management of their financial affairs to a professional, helping to circumvent potential family conflict and financial mismanagement,” Mr Fitzgerald said.

Monash University's Associate Professor Jo Wainer said that the differences between language and cultural groups identified in the study demonstrates that planning for the financial safety of all older Victorians requires responsiveness to variations in cultural values about money and ageing.

"What in some cultures is a reflection of tradition and established practice is deemed to be financial elder abuse in others," Associate Professor Wainer said.

"Similarly, strategies appropriate for a dominant culture that relies on an individual rights approach, such as Australia, will not appeal to people from cultures with a collectivist tradition that prioritises the family unit above the individual.

"In Australia, there are approximately 22 million people, speaking almost 400 languages, identifying with more than 270 ancestries and observing a wide variety of cultural and religious traditions. As a society it is our responsibility to provide culturally and ethnically sensitive financial products and services which protect the rights of all older Australians, regardless of background," Associate Professor Wainer said.

View the report here http://www.statetrustees.com.au/uploads/content/170-Diversity_and_financial_elder_abusel_web.pdf

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About State Trustees

A Victorian State owned business, State Trustees' core services include providing administrative services for persons with a disability, Will preparation, acting under Enduring Powers of Attorney (Financial), acting as executor or administrator for estates and the provision of general Trustee and related services for the Victorian community. For more information visit www.statetrustees.com.au

Interview Opportunities:

- *Monash University's Associate Professor, Jo Wainer* talking on the report's findings.
- *State Trustees' Managing Director, Tony Fitzgerald* talking on the importance of seeking professional advice and having the appropriate documents prepared, such as Enduring Powers of Attorney (EPAs) and Wills.

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