

AN EBOOK BY:



INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS OF ABUSE BY CARERS



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In this whitepaper we'll examine some of the complex challenges faced by investigators when allegations of abuse by carers arise and consider the key learning for employers and what you can do to improve safeguarding of your clients and staff from allegations of abuse.

When vulnerable individuals in our society are subjected to abuse by their carers, our response as a community is understandably one of outrage. It seems beyond belief that this could happen. But the sad reality is that some individuals within aged care facilities, disability care contexts, at home or in childcare centres can face abuse from the very people with whom they should feel entirely safe.

It is clear to us that employers and individuals within the care and community space want to know the best ways to identify, prevent and deal swiftly with allegations of abuse by carers.

Accordingly, we closely examine definitional issues, NDIS implications, criminal factors and 'red flag' phenomena such as unexplained injuries in care contexts.

The often sinister and exploitative manifestations of financial abuse will also be placed under the spotlight.

As an organisation, Wise Workplace is passionate about deploying our investigative, training and advisory resources for the purpose of enhancing work and community places.

1. DEFINING ABUSE, COMMON OFFENCES AND LIKELY CULPRITS

Physical abuse can certainly be one of the more visual and confronting forms of abuse by carers. However, other less-obvious forms of abuse can be just as damaging and terrifying for the client involved.

Psychological and emotional abuse by carers can include violent anger, emotional manipulation and control strategies. And when discussing financial abuse by carers, the murky waters of 'gift versus theft' can be extremely difficult to traverse. Sexual

abuse and manipulation also casts a shadow over care environments and the carer/ client relationship.

As we have seen with the ***Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse***, Australian children have historically suffered terrible assaults at the hands of so-called carers.

In terms of the more common offences, these can include common physical assaults such as rough-handling or scalding, misuse of restricted practices,



and excessive and humiliating discipline. Less visible yet still horrendous acts of omission can amount to criminal negligence by a carer, such as threatening or failing to provide fluids or food. Yet despite the subject matter, investigators must take care to remain objective and fair throughout the entire course of an abuse investigation.

Abuse by Carers – Defining a Sad Reality

It is quite clear that employers in aged, disability and other care environments do their best to keep staff and clients safe. Yet one dark phenomenon that can raise its ugly head in care contexts is abuse by carers. For many complex reasons, vulnerable people such as the aged, children, and disability clients, can be abused by the very people who are entrusted with their well-being.

‘Abuse’ is a broad term that has developed multiple sub-definitions in recent decades. We have seen the basic idea of physical abuse making room for more complex forms such as emotional abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse and disability abuse. And as Australia has witnessed via the recent Royal Commission, child sexual abuse has a truly distressing history.

When an allegation of abuse by a carer arises, investigating the abuse objectively becomes a number one priority.

Reportable conduct legislation is now developing across all states and territories; it is essential to understand definitional issues as reportable incidents arise.

Physical acts and omissions

Assault is perhaps the most common of the physical offences experienced in care environments. Rough handling of a client or patient can occur in any number of scenarios such as moving,

changing, bathing, providing medication/injections and feeding.

Omissions such as failing to provide food, warmth, medication or post-fall assistance can also amount to offences of neglect. We often see this neglect as a form of abuse of the disabled or elderly. Feeding and changing neglect can also occur as a form of child abuse in care environments. Establishing what is truly accidental versus what is indisputably abusive is a very difficult task indeed.

The question of intent is certainly difficult, and investigations of abuse must weigh the elements involved in defining reportable conduct. For example, what appears at first glance to be abuse might turn out to be an accident or one-off omission.

Sexual abuse and manipulation

It goes without saying that children are one of the most vulnerable subsets of society, particularly in care situations (whether due to disability or family circumstances). Children are also frequently the

target of sexual abuse or its precursor, grooming.

In almost all occasions of longer-term sexual abuse, the perpetrator undertakes a grooming process, designed to obtain the trust of the intended victim.

These behaviours can include paying undue attention to one specific care client, engaging

in keeping secrets, purchasing gifts or trying to establish independent communication channels.

Once the grooming has taken place, and the abuse has commenced, the child or adult care client may act out, which is demonstrated by either an overtly hostile relationship with the carer (such as avoiding them or engaging in public conflict with them) or an unnaturally close relationship, which may be based on an attempt by the client to appease or satisfy the abuser.

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The above red flags, identified by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, must be understood by workplace investigators in order to ensure that the most vulnerable potential victims are best protected.

Non-physical abuse by carers

Due to changing values in both public and private settings, the term ‘abuse’ now has a wider and more complex scope. Psychological, financial, and emotional abuse at the hands of carers is now a real hazard across multiple industrial contexts. Some paid and unpaid carers of the aged, older children and the disabled have been known to trick, steal and/or cajole financial benefit from their charges. This can of course provoke angry and emotional responses from all parties involved, not least of which can be outrage from loved ones. One difficulty that investigators face is gathering material from a shaken and, in some cases, infirm victim. It is essential that specialist investigative expertise be employed in such cases.

High evidentiary standards

In the criminal realm, the evidentiary standard is quite high in cases of alleged criminal assault and/or neglect by carers. Up-to-date legal advice on these and related issues is essential if a reportable incident is suspected.

For many employers who are made aware of alleged abuse by a carer, it can be hard not to react

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swiftly against this individual. However, all parties are entitled to be heard in a fair and unbiased way. For example, an unexplained injury might not signify abuse by a carer, but an undiagnosed medical condition.

The ‘culprit’ might be assumed to be a carer who sees the elderly, disabled or young client each and every day. Yet transitory people in carer environments such as cleaners, aides and kitchen staff must also be carefully vetted whenever allegations of abuse surface during a workplace investigation. Investigators must resist the temptation to draw inferences or assumptions throughout the investigation.

Understanding the way abusers work and the nature and pressures on carers are critical for investigators. Knowing how to define and classify behaviour is a crucial component of determinations over abuse allegations.



2. NDIS COMPLAINTS SYSTEM

The vision of the NDIS has always been strong and simple – to enable Australians with a disability to curate what we all aspire to: an ‘ordinary life’.

Complaints connected to the newly-fledged system were of course inevitable. The NDIS



complaints system enables participants to voice concerns both with their individual situation and the broader scheme. Yet how effectively the NDIS complaints scheme works for individual situations is still somewhat uncertain. Certainly, those with a disability can lodge an NDIS complaint about a provider of care, but the most that can currently happen is the removal of the provider from the scheme list. In NSW, reportable incidents affecting a person with a disability in a residential facility

are required to be investigated and reported to the Ombudsman for oversight. The legislation does not cover in-home services and does not come with a national or even state-based ‘suitability to work with disability services’ checking system, like the sister child protection legislation now effective in NSW, the ACT and Victoria.

There are national reporting schemes in place for aged care service providers, but these have limited scope and there’s no effective mechanism for preventing a carer found to have been abusive from finding further employment as a carer.

Ultimately while the system is improving, protection will come from prevention through good governance and policy, and effective investigation of incidents when they come to light.

Does the NDIS Complaints System Have Enough Reach?

For those vulnerable people across Australia living with disability, the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has been heralded as a much-needed security net. And for those caring for disabled individuals, the NDIS provides a framework for sustainable care arrangements.

In many ways, the introduction of the NDIS is the ultimate ‘good news’ story. Essential services and funds for disabled individuals can now be accessed. Particularly, the types of care that exhausted families have provided around the clock can now be augmented by paid carers under the scheme.

Yet such a vast and complex scheme necessarily requires safeguards against unfortunate phenomena that can arise in care environments, such as child abuse, elder abuse or other forms of abuse by carers.

A responsive and effective complaints system is an essential adjunct to the NDIS, which will eventually sustain some 460,000 disabled Australians under the age of 65. As at February, 61,000 Australians have been brought into the scheme.

How the NDIS complaints system operates

The NDIS complaints system is intended to help participants in the scheme provide feedback, or make complaints about their own experiences or the system in general.

There is some concern, however, that the complaints system is a somewhat toothless watchdog. Individuals suffering with a disability can lodge a formal complaint about a care provider, for example, but the care provider can at most be removed from the list of scheme-approved providers. There is no mechanism under the system for more significant sanctions.

This may be appropriate in circumstances where the care provider has simply provided poor treatment or has an unpleasant manner or clash of personalities with the recipient of care, but falls far short of the mark in circumstances where, for example, there is abuse or unexplained injury.

On such occasions, the scheme participant may have to look to other procedures to try and address any serious grievances.

What other mechanisms for complaint are available?

In NSW, if a person living with a disability in a residential facility suffers a reportable incident at the hands of a care service provider, that incident must be investigated and reported to the appropriate Ombudsman, in accordance with the Ombudsman Act 1974.

A reportable incident includes the commission of sexual offences or misconduct (including those

committed in the presence of the person suffering the disability), assault, fraud or financial abuse, and ill-treatment or neglect by a carer. Unexplained injuries also fall within the same category of reportable incidents.

However, this only covers those clients who are living in residential care – and misses the many participants of the NDIS who rely only on in-home services.

Similarly, there is no legislation which provides any requirement for a ‘suitability to work with disability services’ check, unlike the child protection legislation now effective in NSW, the ACT and Victoria.

Those utilising aged care services are able to rely on national reporting schemes, but regrettably even a carer who has been conclusively found to be abusive or otherwise guilty of misconduct is not restricted from being able to obtain employment with another care service provider in the future.

Effectiveness of the system still uncertain

Given the potential risks of abuse within the system of allocating a carer to a disabled Australian, it is essential that the NDIS is paired with an effective and efficient complaint and resolution scheme.

Ultimately, the current NDIS complaint service has significant room for growth before it can be considered to be effectively safeguarding the rights of disabled Australians. True improvement will play out most importantly by imposing greater penalties and consequences on carers who are found to have transgressed against their clients in any serious fashion.

As the NDIS matures as a scheme, it is to be hoped that many teething issues with the complaint management system will be ironed out naturally.

However effective investigation of incidents relating to abuse as soon as they are reported or otherwise come to light will remain the most important safeguard of the rights of disabled Australians, along with general prevention of potential abuse or misconduct by carers through a strong governance and policy regime.

3. CRIMINAL CONDUCT – LIKELY CONVICTION IN CHILDREN’S SERVICES, AGED AND DISABILITY SECTOR

Many relationships within the children’s services, aged care, and disability sectors can develop unique complexities that arise as a result of dealing with dependence. Stress and isolation are just two issues that can affect both people with this vulnerability, and their carers. Yet it hardly follows that criminal conduct on the part of a carer can be excused due to the stressful nature of the job. Assault, fraud and theft can and do arise.

Not only is abuse grossly under-reported by vulnerable people due to the relative power imbalance of the carer/client relationship, fear of reprisal, not being believed and the very real possibility of the service being removed, but their reports are not treated as being equal to those of their non-dependent counterparts.

Significant challenges are faced by the young, elderly and disabled when trying to communicate their story, and in being believed.

When faced with a complaint from a client of abuse or abhorrent conduct by an employee or carer, employers are often forced to confront the unbelievable. The first reaction can be disbelief, and this is swiftly followed by the search for some

rational acceptable explanation for the report, injury or loss.

When matters are reported to the police, the justice system is constrained by the requirement of a high standard of proof and convincing verbal evidence to be provided to support the physical evidence, if there is any.

While this approach can be very effective at conviction where serious criminal offences have left unquestionable physical evidence, the myriad of offences where very little or no conclusive physical evidence is left leaves the criminal justice system rather lacking.

For the safeguarding of the vulnerable and the safety of carers, a skilled independent investigation of complaints by the service provider is paramount.

Criminal Conduct and the Likelihood of Conviction in Care

It is a great tragedy that the most vulnerable people in society – children, the elderly and the disabled – often fall victim to the most heinous types of abuse in care settings.

In some cases, the abuse can be obvious, such as when there is physical assault that results in visible injuries. At other times, the abuse is much subtler and more difficult to detect, as is the case where there is grooming for intended sexual abuse, financial abuse or general neglect.

Regardless of the type of criminal conduct perpetrated against the disabled, the elderly or children, an even greater tragedy is that it can be extremely difficult to record convictions against the abusers.

Obstacles to conviction

One obstacle which arises in the care sector is that there is an apparent reluctance to report abuse or other criminal actions such as fraud or theft.

In part, this may be due to the power imbalance between carer and client, a fear that the reporter may not be believed or taken seriously or, perhaps worse, because for one reason or another, the client may not actually realise that what has happened to them constitutes criminal conduct.

Another potential reason for non-disclosure of criminal conduct may be because the client is legitimately concerned that they will lose access to a care worker who is providing them with much needed assistance and support, regardless of the criminal conduct they are also committing.

Many cases of elder abuse, disability abuse or child abuse are heavily reliant on the victim's version of events and, if this is not provided, there is a significant dearth of information upon which a conviction can be secured.

A further hurdle is that forms of abuse or criminal conduct committed in the care setting are so abhorrent that employers or co-workers of those who are accused seldom wish to believe the allegations, especially when they involve sexual grooming or child abuse.

This may subconsciously cause employers or investigators to develop a bias against the complainant and, in the case of investigators, may mean that the inquiry is not conducted as thoroughly

as possible. This in turn may mean that there is insufficient evidence to provide to a court in order to secure a conviction.

A lack of physical evidence

Perhaps most crucially, many types of criminal conduct in the disability and care context are difficult to secure convictions for because there is often very little physical evidence which can be presented before a court.

It is incredibly difficult to obtain proof of somebody **grooming** a child, elderly or disabled person for intended **sexual** or other abuse.

Similarly, even injuries such as might be sustained through **physical abuse** can often be apparently legitimately explained in the care context because of the vulnerable nature of the victims – children often hurt themselves in play or by being careless, while the elderly can be infirm and become easily injured in the ordinary course of events.

Safeguarding investigation services

The most powerful weapon against criminal conduct in care settings is to ensure that any investigation is undertaken objectively, skilfully and with consideration for what requirements the courts may need to secure a conviction.



4. GROOMING AND SEXUAL MANIPULATION: IDENTIFYING THE WARNING SIGNS

Recognising the hallmarks of grooming can radically increase the opportunity for service providers to eliminate sexual and financial abuse in care situations

The inclusion of grooming as a set of behaviours in the NSW Reportable Conduct legislation is no accident.

Common behaviours of grooming include showing special attention to one client over others, buying gifts and establishing often secret private communication networks. Tapping into our most

basic human need to be loved, adults and children alike are vulnerable to this tactic.

The aim of the abuser is to establish a perception of a special relationship that facilitates the request of favours that would otherwise be denied. These favours may be sexual or financial.

Clear policy guidelines, recurrent education of carers about professional boundaries and the important role of bystander observation are all critical in preventing grooming in care situations.



Often only possible in high trust relationships, grooming and abuse can flourish when alternate support and social systems are degraded through loneliness or isolation.

The investigation of breaches of professional boundaries or grooming behaviour requires an intimate knowledge of this behaviour and careful consideration of the communication systems in place.

The Key Warning Signs of Grooming and Sexual Manipulation

As the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has painfully revealed, our most trusted institutions have at times mishandled some of the worst cases of child abuse imaginable.

It is becoming clear to us as a nation that the trust given by children and other vulnerable people to individuals in positions of power is boundless. And it is this trust that can become hijacked via the insidious tactics of grooming and sexual manipulation.

Standing outside of the abhorrent situation, we might ask – how on earth could this happen? Wouldn't a sexual predator be immediately visible to an employer in a child-focused setting? However, grooming and sexual manipulation work in such a subtle way that even other adults close to the situation can be lulled into a false sense of security.

The NSW legislation on Reportable Conduct has commendably included grooming as a distinct behaviour that must be reported in child care contexts. It is therefore essential that all child-related employers become aware of the warning signs of child grooming and sexual manipulation in the workplace.

“Grooming and sexual manipulation work in such a subtle way that even other adults close to the situation can be lulled into a false sense of security.”

Warning Sign 1: The special relationship

Grooming behaviour can manifest as the slow development of a special relationship between a worker and a particular child or children in care. This might involve the giving of privileges, compliments or treats that might be held back from other children.

The child can develop a strong sense of trust and even enjoyment from this relationship, particularly if fun and friendship appear to be the key drivers. Such children might previously have been at the less-confident or lonely end of development, with the perpetrator appearing to have commendably ‘drawn out’ the child.

Warning Sign 2: Returning favours

Once a seemingly trust-based relationship is in place, the perpetrator of child abuse will often connect their special gifts and words with requests for touching and/or emotional favours from the child in return. At first this might not seem like an unpleasant or abusive situation in the mind of an innocent child – after all, they have identified this adult as a friend to be trusted. Observers might in fact see a child drawn to a particular carer quite intensely. It can be heartbreaking to think that this could be the middle stages of a targeted grooming strategy.

Warning Sign 3: The conflicted or ‘acting out’ child

When behaviours gradually move into sexual talk, touching or more overt acts, the perpetrator of child abuse can take a more sexually manipulative stance against the child. The child might resist the abuser, but can be manipulated into continuance of the inappropriate relationship through emotional blackmail. One of the earlier favours granted to the child such as gifts, treats or special games might be

threatened or recalled. The child can then become anxious and in some cases will actively seek to appease the sexual abuser. Observers of the situation might see contradictory signs between the once-friendly employee and child. Behaviourally, the child could lash out at others or experience a regression in development.

Make knowledge your strength

Thankfully there is now substantial research occurring around grooming behaviours and sexual manipulation in care settings. Further, Australian legislatures are slowly but determinedly developing laws to protect children and to enable the effective reporting of inappropriate conduct in the workplace.

Child sexual abuse tends to arise not from some caricature of an evil villain but in fact via a subtle conflation of grooming, manipulation, child vulnerability and institutional ‘blind spots’. Codes of conduct and training on professional boundaries are just some of the methods that can assist employers in combating the scourge of child sexual abuse by carers.

We actively investigate and advise upon issues within child-focused workplaces. In addition, we have handled grooming complaints between remote

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student teacher networks, top sporting organisers and athletes, elderly residents in a mixed care facility, bus drivers and passengers, disabled individuals and in-home carers. Every case requires skill, sensitivity and an unbiased examination of the evidence.

Join us in our enduring quest to make workplaces safe for all concerned – not just owners and workers, but for those precious Australian children who inherently trust the adults around them.



5. INVESTIGATING UNEXPLAINED INJURY IN CARE FACILITIES

It goes without saying that injuries occur in all workplaces, not just the community sector. Yet there are certain injuries that can arise in care environments that understandably cause warning bells to ring for employers and loved ones alike.

Bruising to the head and upper body can be a clear sign that all is not well. Unexpected bed sores, scalds or unusual abrasions can also indicate that the 'care' in the 'care facility' might need immediate attention.

Yet like the collection of any evidence, workplace investigators must be extremely careful not to jump to conclusions when an unexplained injury arises.

If we see a vulnerable individual with an injury, it is essential that facts be collated with a clear head. With the right investigation tools, careful and informed analysis of expert medical and other objective evidence, valuable decisions can be made.

Unexplained Injuries in Care – 3 Tips for Investigators

It goes without saying that injuries occur in all workplaces, not just the community sector. Yet there are certain unexplained injuries within aged, disability and child care environments that should receive particular attention.



We set out our top 3 tips for investigators when confronted with an unexplained injury allegation in aged, child or disability care contexts.

1. Fully understand the care environment

Those charged with investigating claims of abuse by carers have a challenging task. Both circumstances and injuries can be ill-defined, with sometimes little to go on in terms of firm evidence. This is due primarily to the nature of child care and other care environments – vulnerable people often have difficulty explaining that workplace violence has occurred.

Patients can be in a frail or vulnerable state for example, with high dependency on assistance with personal care. Bathing, dressing and feeding in sometimes tight spaces with over-worked staff can lead to a number of unintended injuries for both carers and patients alike. The complexities are substantial. However, the need to fully understand when an injury is a reportable incident under new legislation is vital.

Clients and family members might point to an unexplained injury and assume that child abuse, elder abuse, or disability abuse has occurred. Yet investigating abuse by carers requires close attention to that particular care arrangement.

2. Investigate fairly through emotional terrain

Good investigators know to treat everyone equally during workplace investigations. We maintain a professional demeanour and ensure that all

relevant people are heard. Yet communication by investigators in the aged, child and disability care sectors requires a unique approach to objectivity.

Clients or family members in these environments can express shock, outrage and complete certainty when it comes to the investigation of an unexplained injury. And investigators themselves might be emotionally swayed when faced with allegations of child abuse, elder abuse or disability abuse.

However, an unexplained injury is exactly that – unexplained. Taking into account the communication needs of the client, the tangle of information supplied by families, plus available documentation at the workplace, it is critical to refrain from drawing any inferences throughout the investigation.

3. Communicate appropriately when needs are unique

We need to take into account the particular communication needs of those vulnerable individuals claiming elder abuse, child abuse or disability abuse by a carer. For example, specific communication technologies, scribing assistance, emotional support and/ or advocacy services might form an integral part of investigations into unexplained injuries.

It is essential to understand the nature of the assistance and make objective determinations around interviewing methods. Questions might

include: is the scribe or support person related to the injured client? Does the client appear both willing and able to engage with the interviewer? Is there any visible fear, withdrawal or discomfort?

As a corollary, it is vital to avoid any dismissive or patronising communication techniques when interviewing the person in aged, child or disability contexts. We should never assume that they cannot or won't communicate – particularly if someone else in the room tells us this! As well as having to sport an unexplained injury, it would be disappointing indeed if the injured party leaves an interview feeling ignored, pressured or misunderstood.

The unexplained injury – taking care

Workplace investigators must be extremely careful not to jump to any conclusions when an unexplained injury arises in care contexts. Keep in mind our three top tips on understanding, fairness and communication. This will help you to create and

manage the best possible workplace investigation. After all, Australians are known for looking after each other well, and a good investigation can ensure that unexplained injuries in the care sector are dealt with fairly.

- 1. Fully understand the care environment**
- 2. Investigate fairly through emotional terrain**
- 3. Communicate appropriately when needs are unique**



6. FINANCIAL ABUSE: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

For both professional and volunteer carers, there is no doubt that the task of caring can be rather thankless.

As a result, the temptation to use power inappropriately for financial gain can be all too real. Minors can also be taken advantage of financially.

Financial abuse of those in a care situation can take on a number of forms. A Power of Attorney might be deployed in a manner that sees unexplained money disappear from a patient's bank account. Aged, disabled and/or child clients can also be cajoled or tricked into signing documents that place their finances in peril. Sometimes a carer will suggest they 'look after' the patient's sizeable home and then send them to live in poverty.

At a more basic level, we sometimes simply see valuables and cash removed from rooms, or heavy-handed tactics being used on pension day to allow ATM access. Emotional weapons are often deployed.

Financial Abuse: What Does It Look Like?

The term abuse by carers generally conjures up visions of unexplained injuries, sexual abuse or physical assault against vulnerable people such as children and the elderly.

However, financial abuse can be just as devastating, and is sadly prevalent in the context of aged care facilities, disability care services and even in-home care situations. In more limited circumstances, minors can also be abused in the financial context.

So what is financial abuse?

This is a particularly difficult area to define because financial abuse does not leave visible or confronting evidence such as physical injuries.

Moreover, particularly in the context of aged care or child care, where clients may suffer from conditions causing confusion or simply not have an adequate understanding of financial matters, it may be unclear whether they genuinely intend to provide a financial or material gift to a loved and respected carer, or whether something more sinister, such as theft, extortion or undue influence, is in play.

By its very nature, the provision of care services is heavily reliant on a relationship of deep trust between the carer and the client, and is one in which the client may understandably feel a substantial level of gratitude and indebtedness towards their carer.

In some situations, a carer may suggest helping their grateful client by simplifying their financial affairs or taking care of their budget. Of course, a carer with legitimate intentions can provide invaluable assistance to a vulnerable client by helping to navigate confusing financial waters. However, a carer who intends to make a profit off their client can use such reliance to their advantage, including by skimming off funds.

Common forms of financial abuse

Financial abuse can take a very literal form, such as where a carer is outright stealing funds by taking money from a client's purse or forcefully requiring them to hand over bank withdrawals.

Some carers may elect to rely on tactics such as beguiling their clients or otherwise pressuring them into feeling guilty, so that they make generous gifts or donations to "compensate" their service providers. Indeed, financial abuse is sometimes referred to as "accelerated inheritance" – where carers try to ensure that money they consider they are entitled to finds its way into their pockets.

In a similar vein, under the guise of helping to manage financial affairs, some carers may coerce their clients to leave money to them in their wills, for example by arranging appointments with solicitors and putting pressure on clients to make gifts in their favour.

There may also be more complicated means of financial abuse, including where a client is induced to sign a Power of Attorney in the carer's favour, permitting them to have complete conduct of the client's financial affairs.

The need for objective investigations

Even though the temptation of using power inappropriately when faced with a vulnerable, and perhaps difficult, care client may seem understandable, misuse of a client's funds in any way is a legitimate form of abuse and is reportable conduct.

Investigating abuse in care contexts does not only involve physical assaults and unexplained injuries. Thorough and objective investigations into suspected financial abuse are essential in order to help protect vulnerable people from being preyed on by carers whom they should be able to trust.



Conclusion

KEY LESSONS FOR EMPLOYERS

- 1.** Abuse in care is a complex phenomenon
- 2.** The nature of the crime prohibits complaints from targets
- 3.** There is often little direct evidence of wrongdoing
- 4.** Deep understanding of the behaviour is required to draw inferences for the evidence available
- 5.** Perpetrators are very adept at hiding their wrongdoing
- 6.** Targets are hand picked by perpetrators to reduce the likelihood of complaints being made or believed

KEY WAYS TO OVERCOME THE CURTAIN OF SECRECY

- ▶ Risk framework and risk management approach to safeguarding
- ▶ Whistleblower hotline for anonymous complaints
- ▶ Transparent and well developed complaints processes
- ▶ Rigorous application of reference checks and police and working with children checks prior to recruitment
- ▶ Thorough induction training
- ▶ Robust policy's articulating acceptable conduct
- ▶ Policies that specify expected professional boundaries
- ▶ Prohibition of certain conduct between carers, clients and families
- ▶ Active oversight of carers
- ▶ Oversight and accountability to senior management/Board

WISE Workplace Abuse in Care Services

Whistleblower Hotline Service

WISE operates a confidential hotline service to receive and triage complaints 24/7. Choose your level of service from **Grapevine** or **Grapevine +**. Contact **1300 865 264** or visit www.whistleblowerhotline.com.au for more information.

Service Reviews

Understand your safeguarding obligations, policy reviews, governance and risk frameworks. WISE can conduct a review of your policy and risk framework and make recommendations for improvements. Contact **1300 580 685** or one of our offices for information and costing on service reviews.

Independent Investigations

Qualified, experienced and licenced investigators are available across the country to conduct independent investigations in line with relevant policy and procedures for your organisation. Giving your managers the tools to make the right decisions over risk and safety.

Supported Investigations

WISE Workplace has been capacity building in this field for 15 years. Our expert team can assist in house program directors, team leaders and investigators follow the correct process and resolve complex issues during the course of an investigation. We review investigation plans, interview plans, recommend avenues of inquiry to name a few.

Investigations Training

- ▶ Overview of reportable conduct obligations - **1 day**
- ▶ Initial investigation of abuse complaints for the managers - **1 day**
- ▶ Investigate Abuse in Care – **4 day program**
- ▶ Investigative Interviewing – **3 day workshop**
- ▶ Graduate Certificate IV in Government Investigations

Our programs run as a range of public courses or can be tailored for your organisations needs. Contact us to discuss what your looking for.

Investigations Toolkit

WISE has a range of tools and instructional material to help support organisations respond correctly to allegations of abuse.

CALL
1300 580 685
FOR MORE
INFO

NEED A SPECIALIST ENGAGE AN EXPERT

WISE has offices located across Australia and provides a range of services to assist and support organisations reach and sustain their obligations to children and vulnerable people in their care.

Contact one of our offices for a free consultation about your organisation and your needs.

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