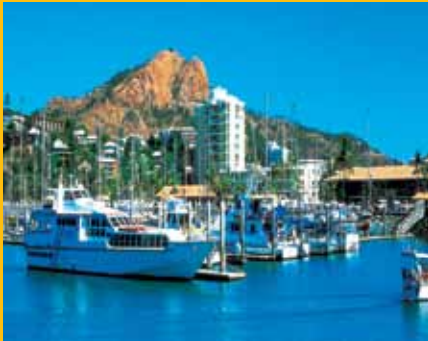


# Townsville Seniors Speak Out



Townsville Community  
LEGAL SERVICE INC

The Townsville Community Legal Service Inc. acknowledges the **122 Townsville seniors** who bravely and honestly spoke out about the issues they face. **Their voices are the outcome of this report.**

TCLS thanks actor **Una Way** and director **Paul Wilson** who brought to life the play *Dance Like a Butterfly* to life. Their talent and commitment to the forums was integral to the success.

TCLS thanks the **Townsville Returned Services Leagues Club** for their care and attention to the requirements to the Forum and the seniors who attended.

TCLS also thanks the facilitators of the discussions who generously gave their time to make the Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forums a success:

**Neville Abbey** *Seniors Legal and Support Service Reference group*

**Ginni Hall** *Seniors Legal and Support Service Reference group*

**Sandy McIntyre** *Carers Queensland*

**Errol Neale** *Townsville Regional Committee of the Ageing*

**Arthur Schultz** *Townsville City Council.*

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# Executive Summary

This report reflects the views of the seniors involved in the [Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forums](#). The Forums were held to empower seniors to speak out about their needs and to harness their knowledge of how the risk factors for elder abuse can be addressed in the community.

The Forums also sought to identify barriers that prevent seniors from planning ahead and to assess seniors' understanding of legal documents that assist to prevent elder abuse.

This is not a scientific report. Rather, it is an amalgam of the views expressed by seniors, research that supports their opinions and the conclusions that can be drawn from these two sources.

## Part 1 - Background

Part 1 provides a background introduction to the initiators of this report, the [Townsville Community Legal Service Inc.](#), its specialist [Seniors Legal and Support Service](#) along with demographic and statistical information about the Townsville community.

## Part 2 - Elder Abuse

Part 2 introduces elder abuse by defining the term, identifying the risk factors and explaining the consequential impact for seniors who experience this type of harm.

It also explores the costs to the individual and community as well as the cost-saving benefits available if preventative measures are employed.

## Part 3 - The Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forum

Part 3 provides information about the development of the Forums. It explains the genesis of the concept, the recruitment of participants, the choice of venue and room layout. There is a description of the program format, the method of gathering information during the facilitated discussions, the subsequent analysis and evaluation method.

## Part 4 - Dance Like a Butterfly

Part 4 provides information about the play "[Dance Like a Butterfly](#)" which was the central platform for the Forums' facilitated discussions.

## Part 5 - Themes and Findings

Part 5 presents the three main themes that were evident from the facilitated discussions – loss of independence, social isolation and transition to aged care.

It also provides information about other areas of concern that seniors raised such as the perceived lack of support for independent retirees and Centrelink recipients.

The seniors' solutions to issues arising out of these themes can also be found within this part.

## Part 6 - Barriers to planning for the later years

Part 6 presents the seniors' views about the barriers that may inhibit them from planning for future years.

It explores seniors' knowledge of legal documents such as Wills, Enduring Powers of Attorney, Advanced Health Directives, Family Agreements and Loan Agreements.

It also provides information about solutions that seniors thought would assist them to consider future arrangements.

## Part 7 - Conclusion

Part 7 draws together the findings of the Forums and seeks to establish a way forward that would allow the implementation of the seniors' solutions as sustainable actions.

It presents a framework that would assist seniors in the local community and more broadly at a national level.

# Background

## Townsville Community Legal Service

Townsville Community Legal Service is a non-profit, community based legal centre. It was established as a volunteer service in 1991 and funded in 1992.

Since then the Service has grown and offers general legal advice, casework and representation and provides a range of specialist services including:

- Welfare Rights advice, casework and representation
- Immigration advice and assistance
- Financial Counselling
- Seniors Legal and Support Service
- Cyclone Legal Help
- Family Law advice

## The Seniors Legal and Support Service

The Seniors Legal and Support Service (SLASS) began as a pilot project funded by the Queensland Government's Department of Communities in 2007.

SLASS was established to provide legal assistance and support to people over the age of 60 at risk of or experiencing elder abuse or financial exploitation.

The pilot was funded in five sites throughout Queensland including, Brisbane, Toowoomba, Hervey Bay, Townsville and Cairns.

In 2010 SLASS became triennially funded.

The SLASS is staffed by three EFT positions – administrative officer, solicitor and social worker.



## In its first three years the Seniors Legal and Support service provided:

- 325 seniors with casework assistance
- 150 seniors with legal advice
- 1224 seniors with legal information

The majority of clients accessing SLASS were within the 70-80 year age range.



## Townsville

Townsville is situated in coastal North Queensland. It lies approximately 1,300 kilometres north of Brisbane, and 350 kilometres south of Cairns.

As at 30 June 2009, Townsville had a population of 181,743. Of this population 9.3% were aged 65 years and over.<sup>1</sup>

The national population of people over the age of 65, as at May 2010 was 13.5%.<sup>2</sup>



# Elder Abuse

Australian research estimates that between 3-7% of seniors will experience abuse each year. <sup>3</sup> With the proportion of the population aged 65+ set to increase from 13% of the population to 23-25% by 2056, elder abuse is a significant social issue. <sup>4</sup>

## Definition

Elder abuse is defined as “Any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust, which results in harm to an older person. Abuse can include physical, sexual, financial, psychological and social abuse and/or neglect.” <sup>5</sup>

## The Risk Factors

The main risk factors of elder abuse are:

- Isolation
- Dementia
- Family conflict
- Physical illness
- Lack of services
- Dependency of the victim due to physical or mental incapacity
- Psychopathology of the perpetrator (including substance abuse). <sup>6</sup>

A number of other factors have been cited as contributing to elder abuse including community attitudes towards the ageing population, carer stress, financial dependency on seniors, shared living arrangements, a lack of community awareness about elder abuse and lack of support for carers. <sup>7</sup>

## The Impact on the Individual

Elder abuse has significant consequences for seniors. Seniors who are abused:

- Have an increased risk of developing depression <sup>8</sup>
- Have an increased risk of developing dementia <sup>9</sup>
- Are more than three times more likely to die within three years than those who have not been abused <sup>10</sup>
- Are more likely to enter residential care prematurely. <sup>11</sup>







## The Cost of Elder Abuse

The cost of elder abuse is largely unknown. There are direct costs to the individual and indirect costs to the broader community – the cost to the taxpayer and government.

The Elder Abuse Prevention Unit in Queensland (EAPU) has estimated that almost \$100 million is taken from Queensland seniors each year as a result of financial exploitation.

The EAPU has also estimated a total cost to the Queensland community of up to \$5.8 billion each year.

This included the cost to seniors and government services.<sup>12</sup>

## Saving Costs through Prevention and Intervention

To reduce the cost to the community and impact on the individual we need to move away from treating elder abuse with a narrow person-centred approach and a move toward developing a holistic community response.

Elder abuse needs a response that addresses inequalities, develops community intolerance of abuse, provides community education, creates support services and as a last resort, provides legal intervention.<sup>13</sup>

Preventing elder abuse saves costs across the board. The Institute for Sustainable Futures investigated the economic value of prevention and intervention activities of community legal centres (CLCs).

The Institute found that in cases where CLCs assisted victims of financial exploitation, elder abuse and domestic violence, the broader outcomes included cost savings across all levels of Government and to the community.

They also found preventative activities such as theatre style community education were a proactive approach that filled an important service gap.

These activities provided a medium to assist a social group that face significant legal challenges and isolation from society.<sup>14</sup> The activities also helped prevent potential legal disputes.<sup>15</sup>

Elder abuse is estimated to cost the Queensland community up to **\$5.8 billion** each year.



# Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forum

Each year around World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (marked on 15 June), TCLS conducts a **“Step Out Speak Out”** campaign to raise awareness of elder abuse and to promote protective strategies to combat it.

As part of the 2010 campaign, two Forums for seniors were held at Townsville RSL to give seniors the opportunity to speak out about the issues affecting them.

## The Concept

In 2002 the World Health Organisation and the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) released **“Missing Voices: Views Of Older Persons On Elder Abuse”**.

The report collated and analysed information received from focus groups held with seniors and health professionals in eight countries. It identified ageist attitudes and disempowerment as a major cause of elder abuse and a contributor to its hidden nature.

A significant recommendation from this report was that seniors should be empowered to exercise their own rights and advocate their own interests.<sup>16</sup> This recommendation was the genesis of the Forums.

The Forums were designed to provide an avenue for Townsville seniors to come together and speak about their concerns and interests and to have their voices heard.

## Participants

SLASS invited seniors to attend one of two Forums held at the Townsville RSL. The first Forum was held in the morning and the second Forum was held in afternoon.

The SLASS drew seniors from local seniors’ groups through community networks and advertising.

## Venue/Entry/Seating

The Townsville RSL Club was chosen as a senior friendly venue. Each Forum was ticketed to ensure that catering was adequate, although entrance was complimentary. Seating was planned to ensure that the seniors could view the performance and interact easily with each other during facilitated discussions.

Accordingly, seniors were seated in a horseshoe shape in groups of nine at round tables facing the stage. An empty chair was placed at the top of the horseshoe to allow the facilitator to join the discussion during the breaks. If the seniors knew each other they were seated together.







## Format

The format of each Forum was based around excerpts from the play ***“Dance Like a Butterfly”*** by Aviva Ravel. The SLASS chose to use theatrical performance to create a platform for discussion and gathering information.

## Discussion Sessions

Two 30 minute facilitated discussion sessions were held during the course of each Forum. These sessions were arranged at points in the play that highlighted hot topics for seniors.

Discussion was initiated by open questions that reflected the issues highlighted by the play. The facilitators (staff and volunteers from TCLS) were instructed to focus on collecting the views, comments and opinions of the seniors, without leading the conversation.

Discussion questions focused on the issues raised by ***“Dance Like a Butterfly”*** and centred on three of the major risk factors associated with elder abuse:

1. Social Isolation
2. Loss of Independence
3. Transition to Aged Care

Discussion also traversed the barriers that prevent seniors from planning ahead for their later years. Additionally, discussion sought to assess seniors’ knowledge of measures that may assist to prevent abuse or exploitation. Specific questions were asked of the seniors about these issues.

Morning or Afternoon tea was served to the seniors at their tables to allow the conversations to continue during a break.

## Data Analysis

Hand written notes of the discussions from each table were transcribed. Themes evident from discussion notes were collated.

The themes are the basis for the recommendations in this report.

## Evaluation

Feedback forms were used to capture any further comments, identify the best way to provide information to seniors in the community and to gauge the success of the Forum.



## Dance Like a Butterfly

The play *“Dance Like a Butterfly”* by Canadian playwright Aviva Ravel<sup>17</sup> was performed at the Forums by an accomplished local actor Una Way, and directed by Paul Wilson.

*“Dance Like a Butterfly”* is a cleverly crafted script, which highlights the sudden decisions that a person may need to make as they age. This poignant yet humorous monologue tells the story of Tillie Rheinblatt, an 85 year old migrant woman, who finds herself in a rehabilitation ward following a series of falls.

Tillie’s niece has informed her that she now requires 24 hour a day care and must make a decision about her future residential care placement. Tillie takes the audience through the emotional decision making process associated with the transition to residential care.

Tillie openly chats about the grief of letting go of her home, her possessions, her freedom and her independence.

The play was chosen because it explores a number of issues and fears associated with ageing that place a vulnerable senior at risk of abuse.

The issues raised include social isolation, the role of family and friends in deciding aged care or financial matters, the fears of leaving one’s home to enter nursing home care and the grief associated with adjusting to what is often considered the final step in life.

*“Not so long ago I was just like you. I could walk and run and dance like a butterfly.*

*Now, I sit like a stone. Did I ask for it? No.*

*It just happened, like an earthquake happens. You have no control.*

*It’s like when you play poker, you have no control over the cards you get – unless you cheat.”*

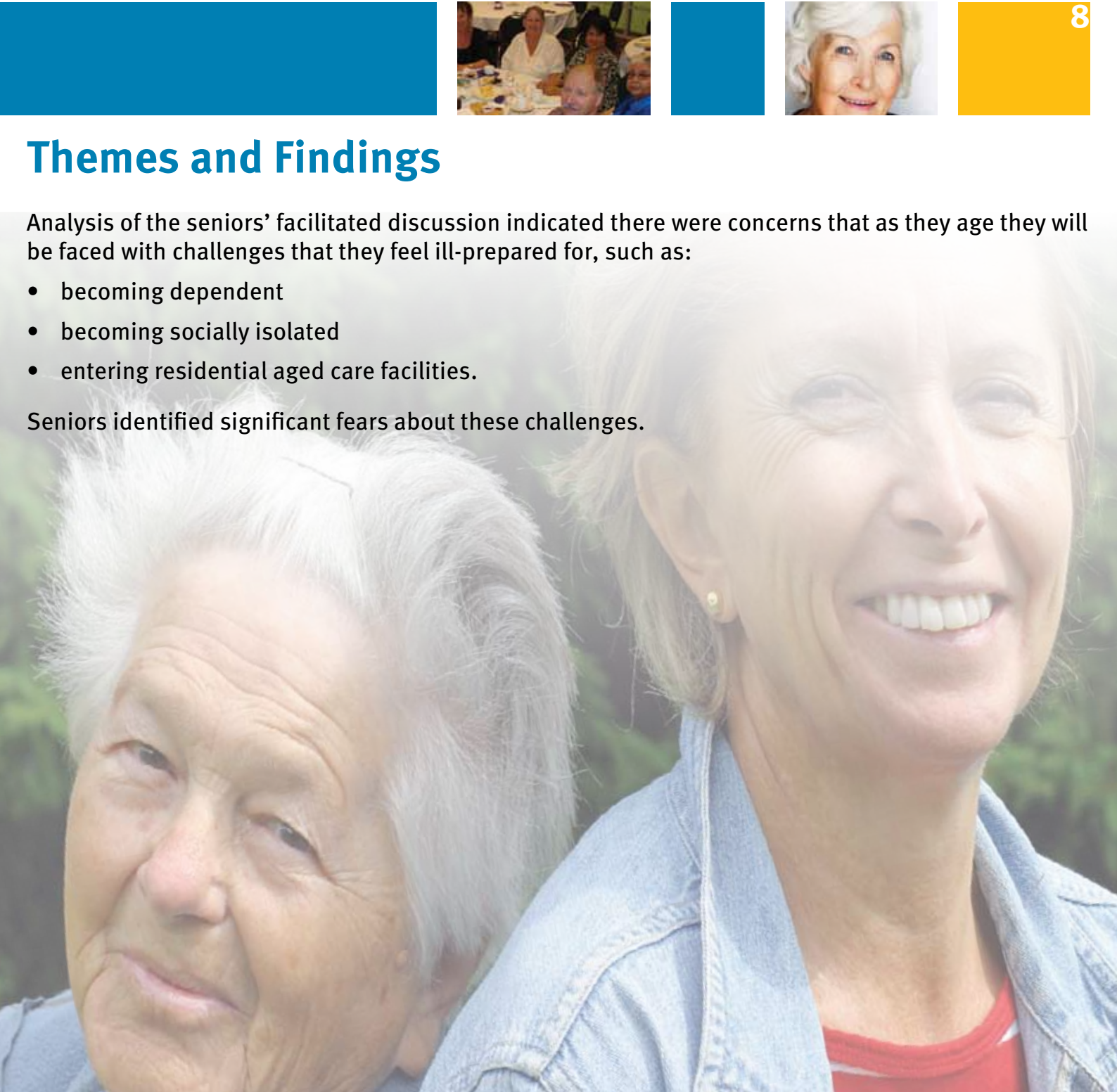
An excerpt from *“Dance Like a Butterfly”* by Aviva Ravel

## Themes and Findings

Analysis of the seniors' facilitated discussion indicated there were concerns that as they age they will be faced with challenges that they feel ill-prepared for, such as:

- becoming dependent
- becoming socially isolated
- entering residential aged care facilities.

Seniors identified significant fears about these challenges.





## Loss of Independence: issues

“Once you become **dependent** you feel like **you have lost the lot**”

- Participant, Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forum

Many seniors were concerned that they will become dependent on others in the future.

There was consensus that seniors do not want to be a burden, a bother or nuisance to others and that it is difficult for them to ask others for help because of how they may be perceived.

The fears of dependence related to loss of health, physical function, mobility, capacity (not being able to make decisions for themselves), drivers licence, grooming ability, personal care and a general sense of loss of control over their life.

While some of the fears discussed were common to all, others appeared more gender specific e.g. more men discussed concerns about losing their licence while more women discussed concerns regarding the loss of ability to groom and dress themselves. One female participant stated that she did not want to be dressed in “funny clothes and shoes”.

The fear of becoming dependent on others is a fear that is often expressed by seniors along with the fear of developing dementia or losing one’s memory. A survey undertaken by Bupa Care Services found that four out of five Australians have this fear.

The Alzheimers Association predicts that the numbers of people living with dementia will more than triple from 212,000 currently to 730,000 by 2050.

Developing an illness such as Dementia or Alzheimer’s is not the sole cause of loss of independence in later years. Other factors such as ill health, lack of transport and changing technology contribute to lost independence.

Research into the financial management of assets by seniors, indicated that:

- 72% of older Australians received help with their paperwork
- 55% received help with paying bills
- 42% received help with accessing their money and banking
- 37% received help with their pensions and superannuation
- 31% received help with their property management
- 16% received help with accessing financial advice
- 11% received help with their investments. <sup>20</sup>

These findings did not include other forms of assistance such as transport, home/yard maintenance and personal care. Dependence on others for assistance with some or all tasks is a reality for the majority of seniors in their later life. Seniors were aware that dependence on others, especially for financial management of assets could place them at risk of abuse.







## Loss of independence: solutions

Seniors identified that these fears may be alleviated by:

- Running home-support seminars to provide information about the availability of in home care and how to access it
- Increasing the availability of in-home services and appropriate transport
- Individuals creating care plans with family through family meetings or discussions
- Having self-determination – “maintaining a sense of independence to the end.”

- Retirement
- Losing a licence
- The death of a partner
- A sudden change in health
- Moving to a different community. <sup>23</sup>

Seniors were specifically asked why they thought people became socially isolated and what could be done to assist them to participate more fully in social and community activities.

Seniors’ responses supported the findings of research. Seniors themselves attributed the causes of isolation to the following:

## Social Isolation: issues

“Isolation is very **real**”

- participant, Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forum

“Social isolation can be described as having two components; a low level of interaction with others combined with the experience of loneliness.” <sup>21</sup>

The impact of social isolation is significant and can be associated with an increase in depression, poor health and wellbeing, morbidity and mortality. People experiencing social isolation are less likely to access health and support services. Approximately 8% of seniors experience social isolation. <sup>22</sup>

Age itself does not cause isolation; rather it tends to be triggered by key life events that generally occur in the later years such as:

- Fear of crime
- Neighbourhoods
- Lack of transport
- The death of a partner
- The cost of participating
- Lack of public amenities
- Changing structures of family
- Changes in community attitudes
- Layout and entry of shopping centres



## Ageist attitude

Seniors identified that they are often marginalised and treated differently. They said:

- “You feel like people are pushing you. They think because you are old they have to make the decisions for you, as they think they know what is right for you”
- “People think you are hard of hearing”
- “Young ones don’t understand what it is like. They need to adapt to the needs of older people”
- “There is a lack of recognition for older peoples skills and knowledge”
- “They claim that older people don’t really know”
- “The media forget elderly people. If you are not young and beautiful you are not on TV or in magazines”
- “People don’t listen to you”
- “Young people don’t respect older people”
- “Young people think that they can bully older people and discriminate against them.”

Ageist attitudes towards seniors arise out of the myths that surround ageing, the ageing process and being old.<sup>24</sup>

Ageist attitudes have a negative consequence on the wellbeing of seniors.

The Australian Human Rights Commission recommended action to address the current negative stereotypes of seniors in the community if their wellbeing, participation and contribution to the economy are to be improved.<sup>25</sup>

## Lack of Public Amenities

Seniors raised concerns about the inability to easily access public amenities, including toilets. They suggested that this would prevent a person from participating due to likely embarrassment if they were unable to control their bladder or bowels.

Seniors identified that lack of access to toilets is an issue in many places they frequented including government agencies, public malls, business districts and shopping centres.

It is estimated that around 37% of seniors over the age of 60 experience symptoms of incontinence.<sup>26</sup>

The Department of Health and Ageing suggests that people who experience incontinence or other toileting issues can place major life restrictions on themselves to avoid embarrassment.

These restrictions can include limiting fluid intake, limiting social outings only to places where they know the location of toilets, avoiding places (such as theatres) where it is difficult to get to a toilet, restricting social and intimate interactions or ceasing going out all together and becoming isolated.<sup>27</sup>

A review of the National Public Toilet Map for Townsville revealed the Map is incomplete and incorrect. For example, major shopping centres did not even have their toilets listed.

“Lack of toilets can stop an older person from going out because they are **too scared** that they won’t be able to control themselves”



## Costs of participation

Many seniors discussed the expense of social participation and made statements such as:

- “I love the theatre, particularly the Civic, but I can’t afford the \$40 (pensioner price) ticket”
- “As a former serviceman it costs me double to join the RSL as a social member.”

The costs of a social life and being entertained were noted as the lowest budget priority and were often relinquished for life’s necessities.

## Disability Access

Accessibility of public places including shopping centres was cited as a reason for not being able to participate and attend to daily living activities. The seniors identified a number of issues:

- Disability car parks are difficult to access
- The centres are often too large leading to a sense of disorientation
- That shopping centre entries are not designed for people with disabilities
- There is insufficient seating within shopping centres to be able to have a rest
- Parking in general is quite a distance to the entrance, especially for those who are required to carry medical equipment such as an oxygen tank.

“Shopping centres are a **wilderness**”

- participant, Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forum



## Other Obstacles

Seniors also named footpaths, street lighting and roaming dogs as factors that inhibit participation and activity.

## Fear of Crime

Seniors identified the fear of being a victim of crime prevented some seniors from participating in the community.

Seniors made numerous comments that related to the level of fear, its causes and the isolating impact that it can have on seniors.

### Fear of Crime

- “I’m too scared to go out after dark”
- “I’m too scared to even go for a walk”
- “I don’t feel safe in large shopping centres or the mall”
- “You go through a routine of locking yourself in at night”
- “I don’t even go down the backyard because it is too difficult to lock up”

### Police and the Justice System

- “The Police don’t come when you need them”
- “The Police have said that they are unable to physically handle people”
- “Police don’t act when they should”
- “The justice system is too soft. A fish is worth more in fines (\$10,000) than a human being drink diving”

### Community

- “A lot of people are suspicious of others”
- “It’s too hard to go out at night-time - frightened, poor eye sight”
- “Feel vulnerable with the way some of the young ones act”

### Media

- “We only hear about older people being bashed”
- “All the focus is on crime”



Seniors are less likely to be the victim of crime than those of a younger age group, yet they are more likely to report fear of being a victim of crime.<sup>28</sup> Seniors appear to fear crime at a higher rate than their younger counterparts. A number of factors create a sense of vulnerability, including:

- Isolation – living alone and having no-one to assist during a crime, provide support while reporting an event or not knowing the neighbours well enough to ask for help
- Decline in physical health, strength, agility, sight, hearing and the subsequent perception of diminished ability to protect oneself
- The likely consequences of being a victim can be seen as more serious for older people due to an increased risk of serious injury and the reduced economic, physical and social resources to recover
- Perception of incivilities – disorderly environments (abandoned vehicles, broken glass, graffiti, untidy yards) or signs of social unrest (disruptive neighbours, rowdy youths or homeless people) can lead to a belief that a neighbourhood is out of control
- Media sensationalism - headlines such as “Thugs assault elderly walker”, “Elderly man slain in own home”, “Youth crime haunts region” can reinforce a notion that older people are not safe in the community
- Political law and order campaigns can lead to an unintended effect of increasing anxiety
- Lack of confidence in the police and a perception that offenders are not being adequately punished.<sup>29</sup>

Whether seniors fear crime more than other groups within the community is unresolved. Seniors at the Forums indicated that there is fear of crime amongst seniors and that this is affecting participation within the community.<sup>30</sup>

Justified or not, fear of crime leads to social isolation.

## Changing Lifestyle and Family Structures

Seniors identified that changes to the family unit can lead to isolation. The changes identified included:

- The competing interests within blended families
- The mobility of families
- The loss of extended family
- Social breakdown in the family itself.

There was a view that younger people felt they knew everything but in fact had very little understanding of seniors’ lives.

There was a general feeling amongst the seniors that seniors feel very alone when family or friends do not visit them. While these generational issues are “old chestnuts”, they continue to contribute to social isolation.

**“There is no family unity, so there is no longer dignity and respect”**

- participant, Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forum

## Lack of Transport

Lack of transport was considered a major reason that seniors become isolated. Seniors listed a number of difficulties with current transport options:

- Living too far away from bus routes
- Limited or no weekend service after 6pm
- Physically being unable to get onto the bus
- Limited information available about public transport
- Community venues being inaccessible because of lack of transport.

Some seniors were aware of community transport schemes and others had not heard of them.

Seniors identified that while community based transport options provided an excellent service, for many it was unaffordable.

**“Public transport is not OK – you can’t even get to the bus stop”**

- participant, Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forum





## Health

A number of health reasons were cited as causing isolation, including being hearing and vision impaired, feeling unwell, breathing difficulties, pain and losing mobility.

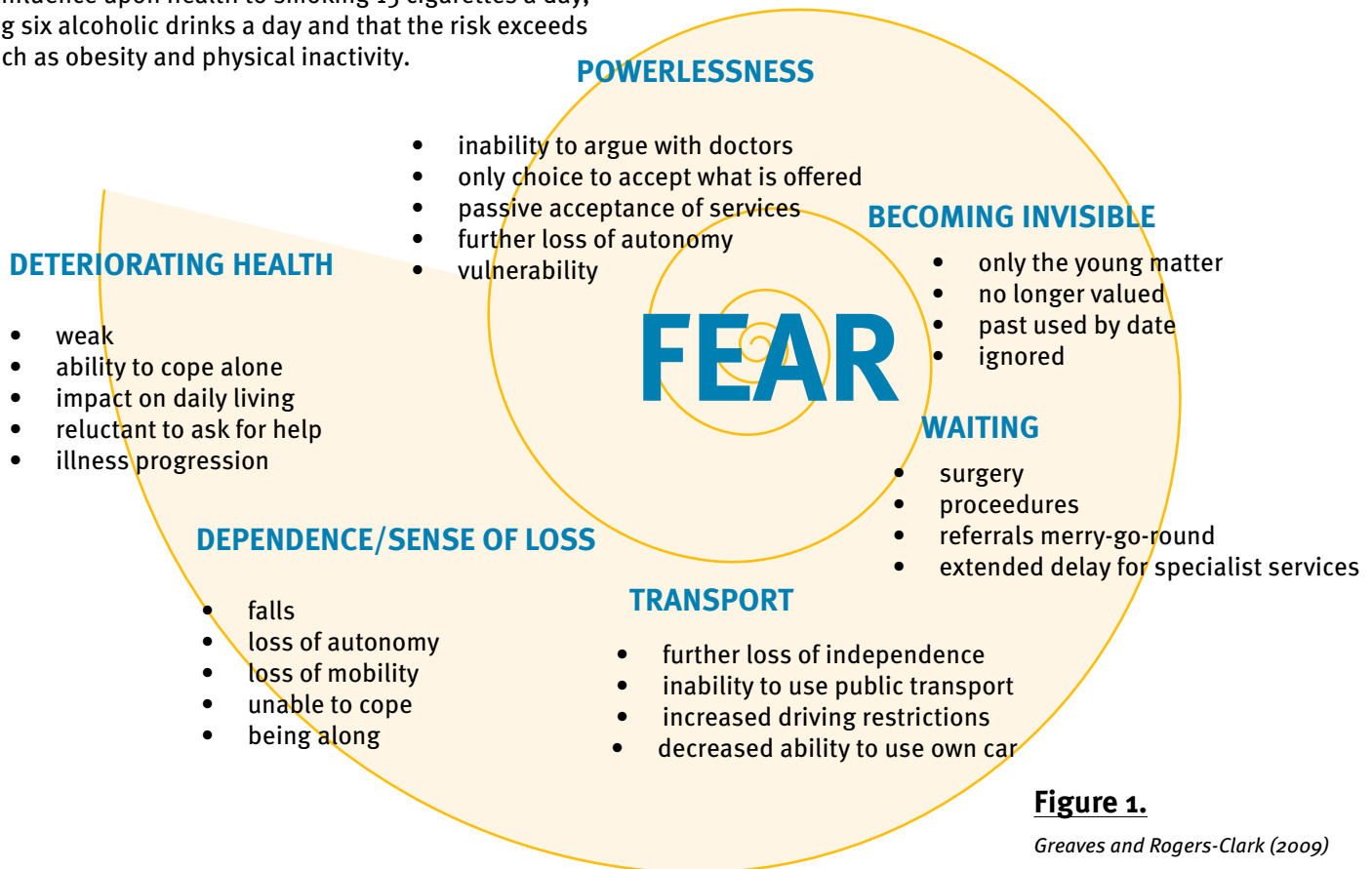
Poor health has been found to be the most significant predictor of social isolation in seniors.<sup>31</sup> There is also evidence that social isolation itself is linked with negative health outcomes and lower quality of life.<sup>32</sup>

A recent comparison between poor social relationships and known risk factors for mortality found that social isolation has a similar influence upon health to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, consuming six alcoholic drinks a day and that the risk exceeds factors such as obesity and physical inactivity.

It concluded that people with adequate social relationships are 50% more likely to live longer than those with poor or inadequate social relationships.<sup>33</sup>

There is a spiralling relationship between social isolation, ill health and difficulty negotiating the health care system, which causes fear and powerlessness for seniors.<sup>34</sup>

Figure 1 *A Spiral of Deterioration: Socially isolated, Old and Getting Sicker*, below illustrates this relationship.



**Figure 1.**

*Greaves and Rogers-Clark (2009)*



## Emotional/psychological barriers

Seniors' comments indicated that there are numerous emotional and psychological barriers that prevent participation. These included:

- Depression
- Living alone
- Fear of rejection
- No-one to go out with
- Grief after the death of a partner
- Not wanting to “put other people out”
- Feeling lonely after the entry of a partner into nursing home.

“It’s hard at any age to be rejected”

- participant, Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forum

## Neighbourhood

Seniors observed that neighbourhoods and communities had changed significantly over time and that there was “no sense of community anymore” adding to the isolation felt by older people. They attributed the reduced interaction in the neighbourhood to:

- Neighbours no longer socialise together
- Most neighbours work and spend long hours at work
- Young neighbours have a lack of understanding of the elderly
- New people moving into the area are not interested in getting to know their neighbours
- Neighbours no longer care about each other.

## Social Activities/Groups

Seniors identified that there is inadequate information available in the community about social activities and groups. They also noted that the multiplicity of rules and regulations for committees running social groups. This “red tape” created concern amongst committee members regarding personal liability.

Seniors identified that elitism within social groups can impact upon participation or prevent new members from joining.

Many of the seniors indicated that they wanted to be involved in mixed age group activities. Seniors highlighted that younger people are reluctant to join in if a club was associated with seniors or had the word “senior” in it.

## Technology

The seniors observed that information that would assist with participation in the community is often promoted through the internet now.

The seniors stated that some “elderly do not want to keep up with modern technology.”

Particular mention was made about automated telephone services used by government departments. The service was described as “Robots on phones” that “push you from one place to another”. There was concern that communication in this manner is impersonal and confusing.



## Retirement Villages

Seniors raised concerns about retirement villages. There was a view that retirement villages are promoted as social living environments but the reality was quite different.

The lack of intergenerational contact and the size and location of retirement villages were seen as factors that hinder residents from being able to participate in the wider community.

## Social Isolation: Solutions

The fears surrounding social isolation and the solutions clearly identify that seniors want to remain connected and that many barriers related to ageing, neighbourhoods, finances, transport and current ageist attitudes prevent participation.

Seniors clearly identified wanting to interact with all age groups and not wanting to be herded to “seniors activities.”

Seniors made many suggestions about preventing social isolation. Seniors suggested preventing isolation early through educating people in their fifties and sixties about the importance of staying socially active.

Seniors suggested enhancing inter-generational interaction and improving understanding and respect for seniors through:

- Mixing groups so that younger people and seniors socially interact
- School-based education programs on respectful relationships, including respect for seniors
- Increasing participation of residents in the community through attendance at events or activities
- Developing a community program such as “adopt a senior” to encourage children to connect with older people

- Encouraging schools to increase intergenerational opportunities through: organising excursions to residential care facilities where students can talk with or read to the residents; inviting seniors to attend generational chats or be involved in classroom activities
- Improving the provision of information to seniors about activities through advertising in the free paper and on radio.

Seniors suggested reducing the cost of participating through:

- Increasing the rate of age pension
- Funding social groups for seniors
- Reducing the cost of registering a car for seniors
- Reducing the price of public transport for seniors
- Reducing the price of seniors tickets for theatre events
- Increase funding for community-based transport services
- Providing seniors card holders with free entry and transport to public events.







Seniors suggested improving transport and pathways through:

- Providing bus services after 6pm
- Maintaining footpaths to disability standards
- Improving disability parking by colour coding parking spaces to match disability stickers
- Providing specific bus services into Retirement Villages and Aged Care Facilities
- Linking pathways and roads to ensure accessibility for people in wheelchairs, motor scooters or mobility aids
- Providing buses for seniors to take them to community events such as the Fireworks on the Strand.

Seniors suggested preventing crime and increasing safety through:

- Improving street lighting
- Enhancing community policing
- Reducing media sensationalism in the reporting of events
- Improving police understanding of how to respond to seniors.

Seniors themselves taking responsibility to reduce isolation of their peers through:

- Volunteering
- Encouraging friends to attend groups with them
- Being part of a volunteer group that telephones people who live alone
- Being part of a volunteering group which visits isolated people, develops rapport and trust with the person and eventually assists the senior to become involved in mainstream activities.



## Transition to Residential Aged Care: Issues

Seniors are fearful about the transition into residential aged care and have a negative perception of the aged care system and facilities. Their concerns related to the following:

- Losing their dignity
- The lack of privacy
- Losing their freedom
- Not being listened to
- Living in a “depressing” environment
- Entering “God’s Waiting Room” and accepting the finality of life
- Leaving behind their home, possessions and other symbols of independence
- Living with the restrictions, rules and regulations present in residential facilities
- The lack of companionship and concerns that, once placed in a home, they will become forgotten.

Seniors attributed their concerns to observing past experiences of a family member in residential care, observing the quality of life of residents and media reports about abuse or mistreatment of residents by staff members and rumours.

Particular mention was made about the building works and redevelopment of residential care facilities. It was perceived that there was a lack of respect or concern for the comfort of residents during a redevelopment process. Residents are not compensated nor are their fees reduced in recognition of the upheaval and discomfort associated with the process.

There was also a concern about the lack of choices for people entering residential care.

The size of waiting lists was seen as being very problematic as people have to take whatever place becomes available. Application for entry was very complex.

There was a perception that all forms of government have not fully considered the needs of seniors and that this is reflected by the lack of facilities available, the type of facilities built and the complexity of entry criteria.

**“If you take me out of my home I will die”**

- participant, Townsville Seniors Speak Out Forum



# Transition to Residential Aged Care: Solutions

Seniors felt that residential care facilities could be improved by:

- Improving the choice of activities available
- Individual Care Plans that include diversional therapy
- Staff training that focuses specifically on respect for residents
- Promoting residential care facilities as a place to live rather than a place to die
- Allowing residents to choose which social activities they wish to be involved in rather than forcing participation in activities that a person may find demeaning
- Inspectors being able to attend without notice and have right of entry to all areas of a facility
- Improving staff to resident ratios so that more than the basic needs of residents can be met.

## Centrelink

Seniors stated accessing Centrelink to make enquiries was difficult. Lengthy waiting times to speak to a customer service officer when making a telephone or face-to-face enquiry and the locality of the Seniors Office in Townsville were raised as contributors to this.

Seniors raised concern that the sale of their home could impact upon their pension rates.

Many seniors were concerned about their ability to meet the rising cost of daily living.

## Other Issues

### Independent Retirees

There was a view amongst seniors who were independent retirees that they tend to be forgotten. They observed that they do not receive concessions to assist them with rates, electricity or other expenses.

They stated that they feel “penalised for being careful with their money and saving for retirement.” They considered that the lack of assistance for independent retirees creates a lack of incentive for people to save.

*“So what do you think? If I give up my apartment,  
I’m finished, it’s all over.*

*No more kitchen, no more curtains, no more linen,  
no more cutlery.*

*All your life you accumulate, in the end they tell you  
to get rid of everything.”*

An excerpt from “Dance Like a Butterfly” by Aviva Ravel





## Barriers to planning for the later years

The **Seniors Legal and Support Service** (SLASS) has observed that some seniors presenting at the service were resistant to consider plans for their future years that may assist to prevent elder abuse. The SLASS was interested in hearing the views of participants as to why this attitude might exist and how it may be overcome.





## Planning for the later years

Seniors were specifically asked why they put off planning for their later years when most people plan for other developmental areas of life such as purchasing their first car or home, marriage, children and retirement. The responses indicated that:

- There are significant emotional/psychological barriers to planning including denial of ageing, lack of confidence in oneself, fear of legal documents, fear of change and fear of loss.
- Seniors thought that the aged care system was too complex and they would not be able to negotiate it without assistance. They felt that there is a lack of information available about options for community assistance and residential care, the costs involved, funeral planning and the legal documents one requires.
- Housing was raised as an issue that seniors would like to know more about including where to find low level accessible accommodation to purchase at a reasonable price, how to make a choice between renovating one's home or moving, when is the best time to make this choice.

## Legal Documents

Information was gathered about seniors' knowledge of legal documents that might assist to prevent elder abuse and exploitation. Seniors were specifically asked about Wills, Enduring Powers of Attorney, Advanced Health Directives, Family Agreements and Loan Agreements. Analysis of the discussion suggests that seniors were all well aware of the function of a Will.

There appeared to be mixed levels of understanding about the function of Powers of Attorney (General and Enduring), Advanced Health Directives and how these documents can be

created, varied and revoked. There was concern that Powers of Attorney can easily be misused. There appeared to be limited knowledge about Family Agreements and Loan Agreements and their ability to protect a person from elder abuse. Seniors also viewed legal documents as expensive to create and that the actual (or perceived) cost was a deterrent from having these types of documents drawn up.

Solutions suggested by seniors to increase knowledge amongst seniors about the importance of planning for later life included:

- Encourage media to run stories on the importance of these types of documents
- Develop an easy to read guide that contains all the information required to plan ahead
- Encourage Health Professionals to provide this type of information to clients or patients
- Develop a “whole of community” campaign to promote the benefits of these documents and move the public perception from seeing this as a seniors issue
- Create a workbook for seniors to help with decision making and recording of any arrangements or decisions made
- Harmonise these types of documents across all states so that they are consistent nationally
- Continuous advertising through workshops, newspaper articles, Centrelink's seniors magazine articles and radio interviews.

“They are the **final decisions** I will ever make”





## Conclusions

Seniors are well aware of the issues that they will face as they age and have significant ideas about changes that could occur to enhance dignity, respect and care for older people in the community. Although unspoken, the seniors seemed to inherently understand that human rights are about dignity and respect.

There were concerns amongst the seniors that as they age, changes in health could leave them dependent, isolated, alone and requiring care. These concerns or fears appear to be related to their observations of how the community treats seniors.

Add to this their view that there are insufficient services, support, age-friendly environment, transport and information to allow them to remain living independently for as long as possible.

The combination of theatre and discussion appeared to create a safe avenue whereby seniors were able to normalise their emotive reactions to ageing and identify that their peers also had similar concerns.

Seniors perceived that their needs are overlooked, their voices are unheard and they are treated as invisible. It was evident that seniors feel disempowered and discriminated against, because of their age.

Seniors provided practical and achievable solutions that would combat the ageist attitudes they describe, as well as enhance their ability to live and participate independently. Yet, it is impossible for the seniors' solutions to become sustainable actions without considerable reorientation of societal views, policy, legislation and resources.

It also requires a collaborative commitment between all tiers of government, non-government agencies, and the wider community.

For example, the seniors recommend intergenerational chats in schools as a way to improve respect and understanding between the older and younger generations.

Local Government has the ability through their library curriculum to coordinate this. The Federal Government have developed a National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools that includes enhancing respect.

Yet, if the State Government chose not to implement this into their Education Queensland curriculum this recommendation would be unachievable.

Progress is already underway with each layer of Government planning for the changing age demographic.

The Townsville City Council have consulted widely with seniors in the community and are developing a Seniors Action Plan.

The Queensland Government have consulted with seniors throughout the State and have developed a Positively Ageless Seniors Strategy to take the Queensland Community through to 2020.

The Federal Government have initiated a number of reviews such as the Older Persons and the Law report to explore the needs of seniors into the future.







A national framework would be useful to draw together the work already accomplished by the different tiers of government. This would ensure cooperation and commitment to change. The framework would need to:

- Collaboratively involve all levels of government and community
- Address inequality
- Seek to change public attitudes through promoting and protecting the rights of seniors
- Develop urban environments that enhance participation
- Provide services that increase independence and choice
- Intervene early where there is mistreatment toward seniors
- Deal with and redress the most significant form of mistreatment of seniors, elder abuse
- Restore dignity and care following harm
- Be underpinned by the values of the United Nations principles for older people – Independence, Participation, Self-fulfillment, Dignity and Care

A national framework thereby would increase the wellbeing of all seniors and address the risk factors associated with elder abuse and could prevent its incidence.

**“Design for the young and you exclude the old;  
design for the old and you include the young”**

- The late Bernard Isaacs, founding Director of the Birmingham Centre for Applied Gerontology'

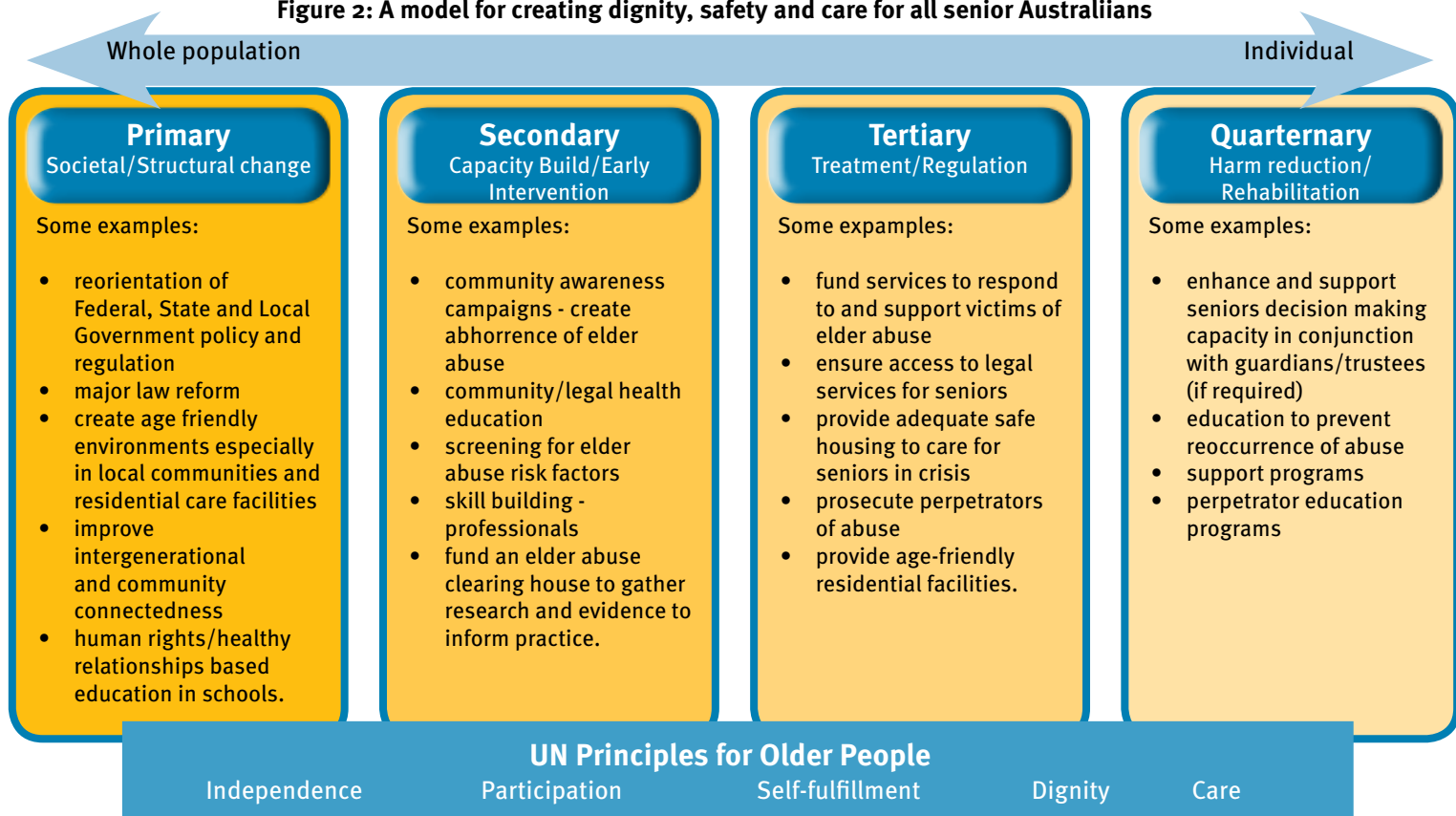


An example framework, heavily influenced by the Population Health model and seniors' feedback has been developed and is displayed in figure 2 below.

Seniors themselves have the wisdom and knowledge to contribute to this change and need to be given opportunities, such as the Forums, to participate in creating inclusive, age friendly places.

Solutions in this report stand on their own merits. Those with the power to create change must now do their part.

**Figure 2: A model for creating dignity, safety and care for all senior Australians**





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