

WEAAD 2008 in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

Senior Rights Victoria was opened on Monday June 16th as part of Victoria's contribution to World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which occurs on June 15th. This year's theme for WEEAD was "Building Networks to Address Elder Abuse: Pathways to Human Rights".



Helen Szoke at the Opening

Helen Szoke, the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Conciliator of the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, said in her keynote address "it is important to note that the service's purpose is to prevent elder abuse and specifically mentions the rights, dignity and independence of older Victorians. These aspects require greater attention and focus as we move from the respect that historically may have been afforded to elders, to focussing on the greater responsibility that may reside with a younger population which begins to take on the task of providing care for ageing members of the family"

The opening was chaired by Ms. Vivienne McCutcheon, a former President of Council on the Ageing.

The life expectancy for Australians today is 78 for a male and 83 for a female. Australians are getting older and living longer.



A meeting of the Board of Seniors' Rights Victoria

Senior Rights Victoria was established as part of the Victorian Government's elder abuse prevention strategy and is aimed at providing an accessible service for older people who have suffered abuse, mistreatment or neglect.

Throughout the Western world elder abuse is recognised as "any act occurring within a relationship where there is an implication of trust, which results in harm to an older person." It may be physical, financial, psychological or emotional.

The opening was attended by nearly 200 representatives from various organisations, including government departments, community legal centres, the RSL, housing, health and aged care agencies. Also in attendance were community members, who have been instrumental in raising awareness of the elder abuse issue in the Victorian community and lobbying for the establishment of a legal service.



Guests arrive at the official opening



Staff and volunteers working at the information and advice line

The 1300 information and advice line for Senior Rights Victoria commenced on April 27th and operates between 10am and 5pm weekdays. Callers can have immediate information and referral, including to the service's solicitors. Up until the end of May 177 calls had been received by the line of which the majority related to financial and psychological/emotional abuse. Most of these calls were received from individuals making enquiries on behalf of themselves.

Senior Rights Victoria will be offered on a statewide basis, with offices located in Melbourne, regional Bendigo and the eastern suburbs. Besides the information and advice line, the service will also provide free individual legal assistance, advocacy, community education and professional development activities for service providers and relevant agencies. The service aims to become the recognised leader in Victoria for providing knowledge, education, advocacy and legal assistance on issues of abuse and older people.

Senior Rights Victoria is auspiced by Council On The Ageing and jointly managed by the Public Interest Law Clearing House, Eastern Community Legal Centre and Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre.