

# Canadian Report to the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)

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In 2003, a joint federal/ provincial/ territorial government Working Group commissioned an environmental scan of abuse and neglect in later life in Canada, fulfilling, in part, the country's role in the "**World View on Elder Abuse and Neglect.**"

Highlights of the Report include:

- A high level of commitment at the community level, but that all jurisdictions were seriously under-resourced to address the issue appropriately.
- The significant value of the work being done in communities, and the need for provincial and local governments to recognize the impact on older people's and families' lives, as well as community wellbeing.
- The need at all levels of government to begin allocating appropriate resources for this work, including operational funding for non-profit and volunteer organizations.
- A growing recognition that abuse in later life derives from multiple risk factors at the individual and systems level, both of which need addressing concurrently, and that the responses to the social problem must respect the diversity within Canadian communities.
- Recognition of the need for approaches that appropriately address the continuum of capability among abused older adults.
- An identified need for a multi-sectoral approach that will necessitate appropriate policy development across aging, health, housing, income security, law, and women's issues, among others, with ministries responsible for health and aging taking leadership roles.
- The need for a national strategy plan in this area.
- The need to recognize the hidden social cost of inaction.

In reviewing the progress made, it is clearly evident that Canada has had many achievements to be proud of in the area. In the past year, in particular, Canada celebrated several significant legal and education developments, including the passing of new Adult Protection legislation in the Yukon; the first provincial senior abuse media awareness campaign (Alberta); development and expansion of legal awareness websites and an elder law section of the Canadian Bar Association; two major provincial conferences dedicated to abuse issues in later life in Quebec and Ontario; and growth in two provincial networks. In March,

2004 Ontario will be holding its third abuse conference and in May, 2004 Newfoundland-Labrador will be holding its first conference in this area.

Abuse and neglect of older adults who reside in institutions (such as nursing homes) has largely been under-recognized in Canada, tending to fall “outside of the abuse radar”. However, throughout 2003, family advocates and health care advocates in at least three Canadian provinces continued to raise the visibility of abuse and neglect in institutions and push for appropriate services, level of staffing and staff training, and improved government oversight. This issue will become even more pressing as some Canadian jurisdictions shift their care resources for “vulnerable seniors” from licensed nursing homes to unlicensed, self-regulated assisted living.

In 2003, key Canadian organizations also began leading the way in recognizing and framing “elder abuse” within a broader view of societal and global ageism. They emphasize the need to identify and repudiate the manner in which older adults are politically scapegoated and characterized as a "drain" on society and government resources: older adults continue to have their current and lifelong contribution to families, communities, and societies systemically devalued. Public education which frames abuse issues within broader “aging and respect” issues may hold the key in many communities.