Event on the occasion of the 11th World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

**Fighting elder abuse in health and long-term care**

*Hosted by:* European Commission

Conference Center Albert Borschette, Rue Froissart 36, 1040 (Etterbeek), Brussels

**Date:** 16 June 2016

**Timeline:** 10.00 – 16.30

The event is hosted by the European Commission, with the support of the Council of Europe, AGE Platform Europe and ENNHRI

**Background paper**

Events organized in 2014 and 2015 by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, AGE Platform Europe and ENNHRI have addressed the linkages between the human rights framework and elder abuse in Europe, highlighting aspects of respect for dignity, lack of support for victims and financial exploitation. Participants in these events have underlined that in order to efficiently tackle elder abuse, the policy response needs to be holistic, and include a wide range of stakeholders (health and social care providers, older people organisations, public bodies, human rights’ organisations, etc.) and to address the persistent inequalities faced by older people in accessing and receiving adequate and quality care.

The events highlighted the fact that elder abuse is particularly prevalent in the health and long-term care sector at both the macro and micro level. Abusive practices, such as delayed, refused, inadequate or undignified treatment relate to ageist attitudes, unequal access to services and the undervalue of elder care by society, which leads to less resources and poor quality of care. Older people may furthermore suffer from inappropriate (poly)medication which impacts on their health, quality of life and right to live independently. Many older persons lack access to, or are refused, preventive healthcare and affordable rehabilitation services that take into account their specific needs. Such examples of malpractice can be prevented, including by addressing stereotypical attitudes towards older people and by recognizing their rights.

In light of these challenges, this year’s event aims to develop our understanding of the specific challenges of structural ageism and discrimination in access to health and social care, and show how this has an impact on the prevalence of elder abuse in health and long-term care settings. The conference will present relevant international and European developments aiming to combat elder abuse in the area of health and long-term care, including research, legislation, policy and grassroots initiatives. It will
also highlight the importance of institutional and stakeholders cooperation in delivering an effective response to the fight against elder abuse, as an integral part of health and long-term care policies.

Ultimately the event aims to raise awareness of how inequalities, stereotypes and the lack of a rights-based approach in the provision of health and long-term care increase the risk of maltreatment and neglect of older persons.

This conference will be of interest to all stakeholders in the health and long-term care sectors: policy makers at all levels and EU institutions, civil society actors, such as patients’, caregivers’ and older people’s organisations, health professionals, researchers, human rights bodies, local and regional authorities, etc.

**Note:** This event will be preceded by a policy conference from the PACE project on palliative care, organized on the 15th June at the premises of the Council of Europe office in Brussels. The PACE project aims at testing the effectiveness of palliative care interventions in different countries, and ultimately at improving quality palliative care in long-term care facilities. More information on the PACE Project and the event: [http://www.eupace.eu/](http://www.eupace.eu/).

**Legal and policy context**

The EU has developed a range of actions to address health inequalities and age discrimination in access to goods and services. The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) has acknowledged that older persons, in particular older migrants, older Roma and older women, count among the groups which suffer the most disadvantages in accessing care.\(^1\) The proposed horizontal equal treatment directive could address some of the existing inequalities, but further work is needed. Other relevant EU initiatives include the work of the European Medicines Agency, the European Innovation Partnership for Healthy and active ageing and the Joint Action on frailty.

According to the EU Disability Strategy, the Commission should address equal access to healthcare, including quality health and rehabilitation services for all people with disabilities. However, although the EU aims to support policies that reduce the risk of developing disabilities during working life, it has paid limited attention to preventing and tackling disability in old age to date. In the frame of the revision of the EU disability strategy, this seminar will address the specific barriers faced by older people with functional limitations and how they can be better integrated in EU equality, health, ageing, gender and disability policies.

Moreover, the Council of Europe recommendation on the rights of older persons\(^2\) states in article 19 that ‘Member States should implement sufficient measures aimed at raising awareness among medical staff, care workers, informal carers or other persons who provide services to older persons to detect violence or abuse in all settings, to advise them on which measures to take if they suspect that abuse has taken place and in particular to encourage them to report abuses to competent authorities.’ It also acknowledged in article 29 that “Member States should take appropriate measures, including preventive measures, to promote, maintain and improve the health and well-being of older persons”. In addition,

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\(^2\) [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2162283&](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2162283&)

the European Court of Human Rights has also addressed some cases of elder abuse in health and long-term care settings.

Article 25 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities\(^3\) (UNCRPD), which focuses on health, is one of the few UNCRPD articles that mentions specifically older persons. This provision highlights the role of prevention, the development of ethical standards, access to quality care and provision of health insurance, and addresses the issue of discriminatory denial of healthcare.

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) considers the establishment of care services as an essential element of tackling elder abuse and underlines the responsibility of health care professionals to monitor, report and handle cases of elder abuse.

In addition, the World Health Organisation launched in 2015 a report on ‘Ageing and health’\(^4\), which emphasizes that ‘Elder abuse has severe physical consequences, including pain, injury and even death; psychological effects, such as stress and depression; and it increases the risk of nursing home placement and hospitalization’. A poor condition of health, including specific conditions like dementia, is a strong risk factor for elder abuse. The same reports states that ‘one review [of 49 studies] found that psychological abuse of older adults with dementia ranged from 28% to 62%, and physical abuse affected 3.5% to 23% of older adults with dementia’, among community-dwelling older persons.

The conference will build on these and other legal and policy developments at international, European, national and local level.


\(^4\) [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/186463/1/9789240694811_eng.pdf?ua=1](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/186463/1/9789240694811_eng.pdf?ua=1)