

Media release

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Relationships Australia Launches Elder Relationship Service

Relationships Australia is launching a new counselling and mediation service to support families who need help negotiating the often complex issues related to aging.

“It’s a common story as we age that family conflict emerges around significant health issues, where older parents will live or how estates will be divided,” Alison Brook, National Executive Officer, Relationships Australia said. “Elder Relationship Services will help families to have those often difficult conversations and resolve differences in ways that improve relationships.”

“We also want to support families to plan for future medical, health, financial or living arrangements and make decisions that protect the interests, rights and safety of all family members,” Ms Brook said.

The Elder Relationship Service was launched in January and will run as a pilot for twelve months in Canberra ACT, Wagga Wagga NSW, Kew VIC, Adelaide SA, Launceston TAS and Moreton Bay QLD. People can attend the new service on their own, with their partner or extended family.

“The service was developed in response to changing demographic, health and social issues which have resulted in an ageing Australian population and increasingly complex family structures,” Ms Brook said.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics predicts that the number of people aged 65 and over will double, from 3.2 million people (14 percent of the population), to 6.8 million (20 percent) by 2040. Similarly, the number of people aged 85 years and over is projected to almost triple by 2040, to reach 1.2 million in 2040. By then, people aged 85 years or over will make up four per cent of Australia’s population, compared to only two per cent in 2012. The ageing population trend is a result of sustained low fertility, combined with increasing life expectancy in Australia.^{Ref:1}

The Elder Relationship Service will be managed by Relationships Australia and staffed by trained counsellors and mediators with specific skills in elder services. Relationships Australia services are subsidised by the Federal Government and clients pay a fee based on family income. Services are confidential within the limits of the law. At the end of the twelve months the Elder Relationship Service trial will be evaluated.

Examples of situations where the Elder Relationship Service can help include:

Doreen and Kate: Doreen is an 85 year old woman with advanced dementia living with her 53 year old daughter Kate. They are both becoming extremely isolated and there is evidence of physical abuse by Kate towards her mother. Kate’s older sister contacted the Elder Relationship Service for support to encourage Kate to allow Doreen’s health to be assessed, for other care options to be considered and for Doreen’s physical safety to be reviewed. A family meeting was organised along with mediation, counselling and referrals to health and aged care services.

.../ 2

Pam and George: Pam and George have been married for over 50 years, though the marriage was never a happy one. As George is ageing, Pam is finding him even more difficult to live with and more demanding. Pam has decided she doesn't want to spend her final years with George and wants a divorce. The three children of the marriage are very unhappy about Pam's decision and concerned for the emotional and financial welfare of both their parents. The Elder Relationship Service was able to provide family counselling for all five members of the family along with counselling specifically for Pam and George. Support and referrals were also provided to legal and financial services to enable Pam to assess her options.

Sean and Margarite: Sean contacted The Elder Relationship Service as he was excluded from his parent's will after they died. The parents had felt that Sean had been overseas for the previous 20 years and had not provided care or support to them as they aged. Their daughter Margarite had kept in contact regularly and supported her parents through their health, housing and financial issues. The Elder Relationship Service provided a mediation service to Sean and Margarite to review the estate distribution and avoid legal action.

About Relationships Australia:

Relationships Australia provides counselling for individuals couples and families; parenting and relationship education; support for families going through separation; specialist services for young people leaving out of home care, refugee families and Aboriginal communities; workplace counselling and training; employee assistance programs for companies; and training for family support professionals. Relationships Australia is part of a national network of over 150 centres.

To find out more about Relationships Australia services call 1300 364 277.

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Ref: Australian Bureau of Statistics [link](#)

Australian Bureau of Statistics, Population Projections, Australia 2012 (base) to 2101

To access Relationships Australia Elder Relationship Services call:

Canberra ACT	02 6122 7100	Adelaide SA	08 8223 4566
Wagga Wagga NSW	02 6923 9100	Launceston TAS	1300 364 277
Kew VIC	03 9261 8700	Moreton Bay QLD	07 3423 6962

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