

Saturday, 5 January, 2008

NEW EDUCATION AND LEGAL SERVICE TO SAFEGUARD SENIORS

A new community education and legal service will be set up to safeguard the rights, dignity and independence of older Victorians, the Minister for Senior Victorians, Lisa Neville, announced today.

Ms Neville said the new service was one of the key elements of the Brumby Government's initiative to respond to and prevent the abuse of older Victorians.

"With our ageing population, the Government recognises the need to ensure older people are treated with respect and empowered to care for themselves and plan for their own futures," Ms Neville said.

"The new service will combine a statewide information and community education program with legal assistance in metropolitan, rural and regional Victoria for older people who experience abuse. It reflects a public consultation process that received more than 40 submissions from the sector."

The new Seniors Advocacy, Information and Legal Centre will be delivered by a joint venture led by Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria, in partnership with Loddon Campaspe Community Legal Centre, Eastern Community Legal Centre and the Public Interest Law Clearing House.

The Seniors Advocacy, Information and Legal Centre is expected to be operational in April this year.

Centrally coordinated by COTA, the new service will provide:

- information, telephone assistance and referral support to older people experiencing abuse;
- community and professional education;
- advocacy and support to older people and their families;
- community and professional education regarding older persons' legal issues; and
- support to expand the capacity of existing community legal centres to address the legal needs of older people.

The Acting Premier and Attorney-General, Rob Hulls, said the Brumby Government was committed to respecting the dignity and independence of older people.

"The Government is providing \$2.64 million over three years to support this service. As well as helping raise community awareness about the importance of respect for seniors, we also need to provide greater access to legal protection for older people," Mr Hulls said.

"This new service will play a vital role in providing for the legal information needs of older Victorians, and helping to overcome barriers to access to justice for victims of elder abuse."

Mr Hulls also said the Public Interest Law Clearing House would extend the reach of the service by coordinating pro bono legal clinics in a range of locations across Victoria.

COTA Victoria Executive Director Sue Hendy said the peak body would bring its extensive networking and advocacy skills to coordinating the new education and legal service.

"Each of the partners in the joint venture brings particular strengths, resources and expertise that are needed to make this service effective," Ms Hendy said.

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