



## THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR THE RIGHTS OF OLDER PEOPLE



### **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Subject: THE EXPLOITATION OF OLDER PEOPLE IN RETIREMENT VILLAGES**

**Date: 3 July 2017**

**The Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People Australia (GAROP Australia)** was formed in February 2014 and is an alliance of Australian organisations representing and advocating for older people.

The recent investigation by Fairfax Media and ABC's 4 Corners into retirement village operators reveals a fundamental lack of respect and protection of the rights of older people in Australia. No other group in our society would be treated this way. An elderly man lying on the floor of his apartment for five days without anyone coming to his aid is a disgrace and shouldn't happen in Australia.

Retirement village residents sign complex agreements and can often feel powerless to negotiate, litigate or leave when things go wrong. Similar problems to those revealed in the recent investigation will continue and worsen with the increasing marketization of aged care and retirement villages.

The invisibility of older people is reflected in the lack of clear protections available to them. Rodney Lewis, GAROP Australia spokesperson says, "In the case of retirement villages, care is not normally provided, but there is a duty of care once the company has been notified there is a potential problem. Right now in this country older people do not have inviolable rights. It's time to change this and put in place better protections."

GAROP Australia calls for a United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older People to shift the discussion - just as a similar convention in 2006 did for the rights of people with disabilities. Existing human rights protections do not address specific needs and issues faced by older people. Other vulnerable and disadvantaged people have had their rights and the uniqueness of their situations recognised by the United Nations including the Rights of the Child, Rights of People with Disability, and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Existing international human rights treaties do not articulate what the rights of older persons are, nor do they clarify governments' corresponding obligations. This means there is a major gap in the human rights "armoury" to protect the rights of older persons in areas such as: long-term care, the right of older persons to choose where to live, and to live free of neglect, violence and abuse. As with other human rights conventions, the proposed Convention on the Rights of Older Persons would set standards against which states' laws, policies and actions could be measured, with the aim of holding governments to account for their treatment of older persons.

The Australian Government says it takes seniors rights seriously. GAROP encourages the government to demonstrate that support by backing a UN Convention for the Rights of Older Persons. As Australia is currently seeking election to the United Nations Human Rights Council, expressing support for a convention on the rights of older persons now, would be one obvious and important way of strengthening its bid for membership of that body. Not only would a convention be an important symbolic statement of the rights and dignity of an increasing number of members of our community, but it would also recognise the valuable contribution that older persons make and expand opportunities for them to continue doing so by doing away with ageist assumptions.

**The purposes of GAROP Australia are as follows:**

- Build and strengthen bridges within and across sectors to protect the rights of older Australians;
- Advocate for the implementation of an international convention on the rights of older people;
- Provide a forum for civil society engagement on this issue;
- Strengthen current and future advocacy efforts nationally and regionally;
- Gather and disseminate educational resources on older people and human rights.

**GAROP Australia** is an alliance of the following organisations:

- Australian Seniors Computer Clubs Association (ASCCA)
- The Older Women's Network Australia (OWNA)
- COTA Australia
- Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA)
- National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC)
- Seniors Rights Service
- Australian Research Network on Law and Ageing (ARNLA)
- AAG
- National Seniors
- National LGBTI Health Alliance.

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