



# 'Senior Sitter' ad sparks call for better vetting of aged care workers to reduce elder abuse

ABC Gold Coast By Charmaine Kane  
Updated Wed 25 Jul 2018, 12:33pm



PHOTO: A Gold Coast solicitor is calling for a screening system for people who work in the aged care sector to provide better protection for the elderly. (Supplied: Rosie O'Beime)

**A Gold Coast solicitor is calling for Australia to introduce a coordinated system for screening people who work in the aged care sector, similar to the Working With Children Checks (WWCC) performed nation-wide that vets people wanting to work with children and young people.**

Christine Smyth, who specialises in laws affecting the elderly, said a recent advertisement in a Gold Coast newsletter highlighted a gap in protection for older Australians.

The advertiser, described as a retired registered nurse, offered to mind seniors in clients' homes on a freelance basis for \$12 per hour, plus a one-off payment of \$8 for petrol.

Ms Smyth said she was sceptical about the advertisement.

"It should raise a great deal of questions about what care is available for vulnerable elderly people," she said.

"How do we monitor freelancers — people who would individually come into our homes and offer their services?"

Ms Smyth also questioned the safety of elderly people who could be placed into the care of unvetted individuals.

"You don't have the luxury of having someone else always in the home when the aged carer ... is there," she said.

"It is placing the responsibility on the people who are using those individualised services to check and to check thoroughly."

## Not a fail-proof system

Ms Smyth said she believed the blue card screening system that Queensland uses for its WWCC is a valuable tool and a similar system could be adapted to screen aged care workers.

She said a vetting process would help guard against elder abuse, but agreed it would not be fail-proof.

"No blue card is ever going to stop elder abuse," she said.

"It does not stop child abuse but it does put a hurdle in the way.

"It puts a barrier, it provides some degree of comfort that the person who holds the blue card has gone through a checking mechanism."

## Multi-purpose card to protect the vulnerable

The chief executive of Council of the Aging (COTA) Australia, Ian Yates, said the organisation had not heard a lot about freelance aged care workers in the sector.

Mr Yates said it is not illegal for individuals to offer to mind people in private homes for a fee but he warned against the practice, and could see merit in a card that could testify to a worker's credentials.

"We are strong supporters of the development of a vulnerable person's card so that anyone working with people who might be older or frailer, children or people with a disability ... that they all have a common card," Mr Yates said.

He said COTA welcomed an additional 20,000 home care packages and the single quality framework that the Federal Government had established for the sector.

"It's a step in the direction of extending the quality standards that have traditionally applied in residential home care into the home care space, but there are risks and they have to be looked to and prevented," Mr Yates said.

A spokesperson for the Aged Care Minister, Ken Wyatt, said the safety of older Australians is paramount but the Review of National Aged Care Quality Practices did not recommend a blue card screening system for the sector.

The spokesperson said workers in home and residential services funded by the Federal Government are required to undergo police and background checks.

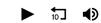
Topics: aged-care, community-and-society, health-care-facilities, older-people, work, law-crime-and-justice, activism-and-lobbying, government-and-politics, surfers-paradise-4217, currumbin-4223, canberra-2600, perth-6000, darwin-0800, adelaide-5000, hobart-7000, brisbane-4000, melbourne-3000, sydney-2000, mermaid-beach-4218

First posted Wed 25 Jul 2018, 6:45am

Contact Charmaine Kane

RELATED STORY: The silent epidemic of elder abuse in our suburbs

RELATED STORY: Robbed, abused, intimidated: The shocking tales of elder abuse victims



AUDIO: How do you protect yourself from financial elder abuse? (Life Matters)



PHOTO: An advertisement for a "Senior Sitter" was published in the classifieds of a free Gold Coast newsletter in May. (Supplied: Especially for Over Fifties)



PHOTO: Solicitor Christine Smyth is calling for a blue card system for the aged care sector to help guard against elder abuse. (Supplied: Christine Smyth)



PHOTO: Chief executive of COTA Ian Yates says COTA is supportive of a multipurpose card to protect Australia's vulnerable people. (Supplied: Ian Yates)