

INCLUSIVE SERVICES

PRINCIPLE

Inclusive services recognise older women as a distinct and diverse group with specific rights, needs, and experiences. Inclusion must be intentional, systemic, and embedded across all aspects of service planning, delivery, evaluation, and organisational culture.



CONSIDERATIONS

Older women often encounter services that are not designed with them in mind. Barriers may include inaccessible communication, untrained staff, ageist attitudes, and policies that fail to acknowledge sexual assault in later life.

Indicators of inclusive services include:

- **Staff education** on historic gender inequality, trauma, sexual rights, ageism, dementia, and contemporary inequalities affecting older women.
- **Older women engaged** in planning, evaluation, and continuous improvement processes.
- **Workplaces that value older women** as employees, volunteers, leaders, and contributors.
- **Representation of older women** in imagery, language, promotional materials, and service documents.
- **Age-disaggregated data collection** built into assessments, intake forms, incident reporting systems, and evaluation tools.
- **Events and activities** that explicitly include older women (e.g., IWD, 16 Days of Activism, community celebrations).
- **A Statement of Inclusion** that clearly outlines the service's commitment to older women's rights and safety.
- Processes to **identify and address risks** to older women's sexual safety in all settings.
- **Strong advocacy for older women**, both internally and externally, including challenging stereotypes and promoting rights.

Inclusion is not achieved through a single action—it requires sustained organisational commitment.

IMPLICATIONS

When services are not inclusive:

- Older women assume sexual assault services are **“not for them.”**
- **Disclosures are missed** because staff do not ask the right questions or recognise trauma indicators.
- **Policies and systems fail** to account for the realities of ageing, disability, or long-term disadvantage.
- **Older women feel unwelcome**, invisible, or unsafe.
- **Organisations underestimate** the prevalence of sexual assault among older women.

When services are inclusive:

- **Older women feel respected**, safe, and believed.
- **Staff have the confidence and capability** to recognise and respond to sexual assault.
- **Organisational culture becomes more equitable**, trauma-informed, and rights-based.
- Partnerships with older women's organisations **strengthen prevention and response frameworks**.
- Diverse groups of older women—including LGBTQ+ women, CALD women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, rural women, and women with disability—**gain better access to safety and justice**.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

- Use the Inclusion of Older Women Audit and Planning Tool to assess current practice.
- Co-design improvements with older women from diverse backgrounds.
- Mandate staff training on sexual assault of older women.
- Review language and imagery to ensure visibility and respect.
- Assess policies for age inclusivity and sexual safety.
- Ensure accessibility across communications, spaces, digital tools, and supports.
- Embed a culture of respect, agency, and belonging at every service touchpoint.