

SENIORS — ASSAULTS

540. Hon HELEN BULLOCK to the Attorney General:

I refer to recently released Australian Bureau of Statistics figures that indicate that assaults against seniors have risen 48.5 per cent between 2007 and 2011.

- (1) Has the Attorney General or his predecessor examined the sentences imposed in these cases over the period?
- (2) If yes to (1), what conclusions were reached and what actions does the Attorney General intend to take in response to those conclusions?
- (3) If no to (1), why not?

Hon MICHAEL MISCHIN replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of this question.

- (1)–(3) The over-65-years-of-age category is the second-lowest age category of persons likely to experience assault. Comparison with other states on this measure is a little limited, with only Victoria and New South Wales among the comparable jurisdictions being reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Even so, the rates of assault of persons aged 65-plus for both New South Wales and Victoria are higher than for WA. The figures need to be considered in the context of a gradually ageing population. ABS estimates indicate that in WA, as at June 2009, persons aged 65-plus numbered 265 891 and comprised 11.8 per cent of the population. That number increased to 275 053 by June 2010 with the proportion increased to 12 per cent. By June 2011 the number had increased to 285 221 and comprised 12.1 per cent of the population. This means that, all other influences being equal, it is anticipated that the number of persons aged 65-plus who will be victims of assaults is likely to continue to increase. Nevertheless, the number will remain relatively very low.

To protect vulnerable groups such as the elderly, one important legislative response has been to include in the WA Criminal Code the capacity for courts to hand down more severe sentences to the perpetrators of offences under part V of the act when they are committed under circumstances of aggravation. One such circumstance of aggravation applies when the victim is aged 60 years or more.