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Media Release

Wollongong event tackles Elder Abuse, Ageism and Reform

As sweeping national aged care reforms come into focus, the Wollongong Diocese is taking the lead locally, hosting a free community event, "Ageing with Confidence" to support older people and drive conversation about ageing well.

Robert Fitzgerald AM, Age Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission, delivered the keynote address at the event, held on June 13.

Also at the event, targeted at parishioners and their loved ones, Bishop of Wollongong, Bishop Brian Mascord, addressed the pressing issues that are impacting older people within his Diocese, by announcing a Diocesan-wide education and awareness campaign addressing the often-hidden issue of elder abuse.

It (elder abuse) is too often unseen, underreported, and misunderstood, Bishop Mascord said. As a Church grounded in the dignity of every human life, we cannot remain silent. We are called to bring this issue into the light", he continued.

The event comes as the federal government prepares to roll out a new Aged Care Act and the Support at Home program in November 2025, reforming in-home aged care to help older people live independently at home for longer.

"Now more than ever, older Australians deserve to be at the centre of decisions that affect their lives," said Michael Austin, CEO of CatholicCare Diocese of Wollongong. "With the aged care system undergoing historic change, we must put people at the heart of that reform."

"The reforms signal a shift toward more personalised, preventative support," Michael said. "This aligns strongly with the work CatholicCare has been doing for many years in in our Diocese, delivering community aged care that respects the voice, values and dignity of all."

Commissioner Fitzgerald, a prominent advocate for older people's rights, spoke on the urgent need to address structural ageism, protect against elder abuse, and positive ageing.

"It's not ageing itself that creates barriers, but the societal attitudes and structures that discriminate based on age," said Commissioner Fitzgerald. "We must shift focus from age to the systemic biases that limit opportunities, rights and dignities for older Australians".

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