

COUNTERING MISTREATMENT OF OLDER ADULTS:  
THE PRACTICE OF INTERSECTORAL TEAMWORK BETWEEN  
A POLICE OFFICER AND A PRACTITIONER  
FROM THE PUBLIC OR NON-PROFIT HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES NETWORK



PRACTICE GUIDE  
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For further reflection



Keep in mind



Pointers



Fact sheets from the Reference Guide to counter mistreatment



Quote from a team member of the Bridging project



Chaire de recherche sur la maltraitance  
envers les personnes âgées  
Research Chair on Mistreatment of Older Adults



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# 1. Introduction

This practice guide stems from the Bridging project, an action-research project that leveraged intersectoral practices to counter mistreatment of older adults. The project entailed three case studies, which were performed in the northeast of Montreal between the years 2012 and 2015.

In 2012-2013, various partners of the Bridging project from different activity sectors in Montreal (public safety; health and social services, from both the public and non-profit network), put forward their views on an intersectoral practice model to counter mistreatment of older adults (see back cover of this guide).

In 2013, these partners identified a breakthrough practice, namely working in intersectoral teams (simply designated as “team” throughout this guide) which consist of a police officer<sup>1</sup> and a practitioner<sup>2</sup>. Considering the benefits of this practice, they expressed the wish to document, model and disseminate it. Three teams were studied for this purpose: one team for transferring the know-how to other teams, one team for implementing its practice and one team for developing its practice. The members of the respective teams under study were from various organizations, but for practical considerations, they are referred to in generic categories in this guide.



***For more information on the Bridging project : Beaulieu, M., Loock, J., Calvé, J & Garon, S. (2015) La pratique en duo intersectoriel policier/intervenant psychosocial pour contrer la maltraitance envers les personnes âgées : études de cas dans trois contextes dans le nord-est de Montréal. Rapport de documentation, analyse et suivi de pratique, Université de Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke, Québec, 134 pages. Available at: [http://maltraitancedesaines.com/images/Arrimage\\_Rapport\\_de\\_recherche](http://maltraitancedesaines.com/images/Arrimage_Rapport_de_recherche).***

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<sup>1</sup> These are prevention officers from the City of Montreal Police Department (SPVM) who participated in the Bridging project, but for the purposes of this guide, the term “police officer” was chosen for its broader meaning, given that a police officer holding another position could also adopt the intersectoral team practice.

<sup>2</sup> The generic term “practitioner” refers to both practitioners in the health and social services public network (social workers, social service workers, occupational therapists, nurses, etc. ) as well as practitioners from the health and social services non-profit network (community worker and neighbourhood worker).

## 1.1 Why Set Up a Team?

A team is created when the limits of the individual intervention from each sector are reached, and when there is a need to combine forces. These observations or needs might be noted by the police officer and the practitioners themselves, but also by their respective organizations, and the coordinating committees or local or regional intersectoral committees. It can be useful to use team practice, in order to:

- Respond to situations of mistreatment encountered by both police officers and practitioners;
- Reach out to isolated older adults;
- Respond to needs expressed by various organizations in the same territory;
- Respond to needs expressed by a police officer or a practitioner. For example:

- A police officer needs a practitioner to direct the mistreated older adult to different resources<sup>3</sup> or to provide guidance through the legal process;
- A practitioner needs a police officer if a criminal act is involved; or for the purpose of providing security when intervening in a dangerous context.

“At first, we were working on our cases separately, but there’s not much point in doing this and we weren’t getting anywhere. [...] The cases were piling up, so I began reaching out and making contacts.”  
-Police officer

“Why was the police officer interested? [He] was open to the idea and was willing to try something different. [The police officer in the team], asked me: ‘What are you doing? How can we work together to help these clients? It bothers me somewhat that I don’t know exactly what you’re doing’. I was also open and I had an idea of what the police were doing, but nothing more. We realized that we could complement each other’s efforts there was a complementarity that could work out well.” -Practitioner

## 1.2 Composition of a Team

The team practice joins the efforts of the sectors of public safety (a police officer) and health and social services (a practitioner of the public or non-profit network), simply designated in the upcoming sections as local health and social services network (LSN), as shown in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Composition of an intersectoral team



<sup>3</sup> The term “resource(s)” refers to organizations.

### 1.3 What is the Purpose of This Practice Guide?

The intersectoral practice of countering mistreatment of older adults, particularly in the context of teamwork between practitioners from organizations with different mandates, is broadly supported though its practical and strategic details are relatively little known. This practice guide includes clear and practical indications on each stage of this teamwork.

### 1.4 For Whom is This Guide Intended?

This guide is intended for any police officer, practitioner, or organization wishing to initiate or support efforts to counter mistreatment of older adults by opting for a team consisting of a police officer and a practitioner.

### 1.5 How to Use This Practice Guide?

This guide is intended for police officers, practitioners or organizations, and one of its purposes is to be as close as possible to their practice. It provides concrete examples for carrying out each stage of teamwork, ranging from the planning of teamwork to conditions required for long-term sustainability. General knowledge on mistreatment, as well as common interventions by which to counter it, are not described, because it is assumed that practitioners or organizations interested in teamwork already hold this knowledge and know-how. Such general information can be found in various documents published in Quebec<sup>4</sup>. This practice guide exclusively focuses on teamwork between a police officer and a practitioner.



*This Practice Guide was written as a complement to a major clinical book<sup>5</sup> from Quebec, the Reference Guide, published in 2013, revised and edited in 2015. In order to avoid redundancy, some sections of the Reference Guide will be referred to throughout the Practice guide.*

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<sup>4</sup> Suggested references:

Beaulieu, M., & Bergeron-Patenaude, J. (2012). *La maltraitance envers les aînés. Changer le regard*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 148 pages.

Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés (MFA) (2010). *Plan d'action gouvernemental pour contrer la maltraitance envers les personnes âgées 2010-2015*, Gouvernement du Québec, 82 pages. Available at: [http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/documents/plan\\_action\\_maltraitance.pdf](http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/documents/plan_action_maltraitance.pdf)

And reference to note 5.

<sup>5</sup> Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS) (2013). *Guide de référence pour contrer la maltraitance envers les personnes âgées*, Gouvernement du Québec, 471 pages. Available at: <http://publications.msss.gouv.qc.ca/acrobat/f/documentation/2013/13-830-10F.pdf>

## 2. Mistreatment of Older Adults

The definition of mistreatment chosen in the Bridging project is the one promoted by the Quebec Governmental Plan of Action to Counter Elder Abuse 2010-2015. This definition was in fact taken from the definition for “elder abuse” set out in the Toronto Declaration on the Global Prevention of Elder Abuse<sup>6</sup>, published by the World Health Organization in 2002: **“Elder Abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person”**. Our definition of mistreatment, then, includes physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, physical or financial mistreatment, as well as human rights violation and neglect.<sup>7</sup>

### ! A few specific situations of mistreatment

- Mistreatment includes both violence and neglect;
- The relationship of trust is not limited to the family sphere. It also includes relatives and service providers;
- Although not always visible, mistreatment affects the physical, mental and social health of the older adult;
- Mistreatment may occur anywhere older adults can be found, for example at home, in an institution, in a business or in a public space;
- Older adults are a heterogeneous group. There are however some similarities in situations of mistreatment: it tends to be difficult for the older adult to recognize the situation of mistreatment or to report it, and the older adult might fear being institutionalized, suffering reprisals, or criminalizing the person who mistreats;
- A person may mistreat intentionally or unintentionally;
- Situations of mistreatment are complex, because they may involve multiple competing problems: several types of mistreatment, cognitive disorders, mental health or physical disorders, isolation, interdependency;
- Some situations of mistreatment may be very dangerous for the older adult and may also jeopardize the safety of the police officer or the practitioner.



*Various types of situations involving mistreatment against older adults: Section 1.*

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Family and Seniors (MFA) (2010). Governmental Action Plan to Counter Elder Abuse 2010-2015, Government of Quebec, page 17. Available at: [http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/documents/plan\\_action\\_maltraitance\\_en.pdf](http://www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/documents/plan_action_maltraitance_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> “Aside from neglect by others, there are also situations of self-neglect. Self-neglect is summed up as the failure to meet one’s own needs or to provide self-care.” (Free translation from the French version). Excerpt from Neesham-Grenon, F. (2012). *L’intervention en travail social dans les situations d’autonégligence chez les personnes âgées*, Mémoire (M.S.S.), Université de Sherbrooke, 203 pages.

### 3. Intersectoral Collaboration in Countering Mistreatment of Older Adults

The intersectoral practice brings together practitioners from various sectors (including health, social services, justice and public safety) in achieving a common goal: to implement complementary actions in order to act jointly in a complex situation and to meet identified needs.<sup>8</sup>

The complexity of situations of mistreatment against older adults, and their attendant impacts on the physical, psychological and social spheres of older adults, often require multiple services, and the actions of various practitioners. No one discipline, organization or sector has sufficient resources, services or expertise to respond to such a multifaceted issue. Leveraging teamwork between various practitioners from one or several sectors, in the course of one or more stages in the continuum of services, is one of the most effective ways to meet the challenges practitioners face without being able to provide an individual solution.<sup>9</sup>

The intersectoral practice for countering mistreatment of older adults brings into play coordinating committees, case discussion committees, and diversified teams, such as those formed by practitioners' in adult protective services and practitioners from the Alzheimer's Society in the United States, etc.

"As long as we each work on our own, we won't get very far. Everybody is going to give up and we will be back to square one. We must continue to think, and reflect on how we could do that, how we could improve our respective structures and work together." – Police officer

The intersectoral practice provides benefits in countering mistreatment of older adults, for organizations, practitioners and seniors, alike. These benefits are detailed in section 7 of this guide, in direct connection with the police officer and practitioner team practice. This practice also poses certain challenges, which are addressed with suggested solutions in section 8.

 **For more information on intersectoral practices to counter mistreatment of older adults: Beaulieu, M. & Diaz Duran, L. (2015) *Projet Arrimage : modèle de travail intersectoriel pour contrer la maltraitance envers les personnes âgées. Les pratiques intersectorielles de lutte contre la maltraitance envers les personnes âgées. Recension interdisciplinaire des écrits*, Sherbrooke, Québec, Université de Sherbrooke, 175 pages. Available at : [http://maltraitancedesaines.com/images/Arrimage\\_Re-cension\\_Intersectorielle.pdf](http://maltraitancedesaines.com/images/Arrimage_Re-cension_Intersectorielle.pdf)**

<sup>8</sup> Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Lanaudière (2013). L'action intersectorielle favorable à la santé et au bien-être : quelques balises conceptuelles et contextuelles, 59 pages. Available at : <http://www.agence.lanaudiere.qc.ca/ASSS/Publications/Action%20intersectorielle%20-%20Fascicule%201%20version%20finale.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Beaulieu, M. & Leclerc, N. (2006). Ethical and psychosocial issues raised by the practice in cases of mistreatment of older adults. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 46(3/4), 161-186.

## 4. Development and Implementation of the Team Practice

There are several ways to develop a team practice. Following are a few examples:

- Forge ties between:
  - A police officer and practitioner sitting on the same Coordinating Committee or Intersectoral Committee;
  - A police officer and a practitioner who, in their respective organizations, are responsible for cases of mistreatment or older adult matters and who wish to implement an intersectoral practice.
- Begin integrating the practice as part of a common project, possibly leading to an informal agreement,<sup>10</sup> a protocol, or even a joint plan of action between organizations.

“On the Coordinating Committee, when we first started the project to counter the social isolation of seniors, we had little information on mistreatment. The main purpose of the project was to provide isolated people with helpful information. We quickly realized that there were many more cases of mistreatment than we thought”. – Police officer



### *Some practical pointers on developing a team within organizations*

- This is not only an individual commitment by a police officer and a practitioner, but also implies their respective organizations' wish to promote intersectoral work;
- When a new team is established, the police officer and practitioner should begin informally by performing a first team activity before consolidating their practice:
  - This is intended mainly to allow them to exchange views on mistreatment and to understand their respective roles and responsibilities, the limits of their respective work, and then their values, objectives and logic of intervention;
  - It can be a prevention/awareness activity, detection or intervention/follow-up of situations (see section 6 of this guide);
  - By experimenting with different working methods, the team may be able to find the most suitable ones;
- Trust should be gradually developed between the police officer and the practitioner;
- Only when those involved in the team practice know and appreciate each other's respective individual and collective work should an agreement be formalized;
- Once the team practice is implemented, in the event that the police officer or the practitioner must be replaced, it is important to properly prepare the integration of the new member by means of: an orientation session by the team member who is leaving, the opportunity to see the team in action, a preparatory meeting with the other member of the team, etc.



***On each LSN territory, there are several Coordinating Committees or Intersectoral Committees for older adults, whether general or specifically dealing with mistreatment of older adults. These committees contribute to the emergence of a team and support its intersectoral practice, as well as introduce or support different approaches adopted by the team. The team benefits from the expertise of the committee members, while the latter also learn from the feedback they receive regarding the team's experience.***

<sup>10</sup> The informal agreement, the protocol or the action plan between organizations can address the roles, responsibilities and expectations of each party, the common goals to be achieved by using the intersectoral practice, the priority of the case to handle, and the means of communication (confidentiality).

The team practice can take on different forms:

- It can be a **regular team**, when a specific police officer and practitioner are designated within their respective organizations in order to form an established team;
- It can be an **occasional team**, when multiple police officers and practitioners can be designated within their respective organizations in order to form an ad hoc team, depending on situational needs.



*The team adapts its practice (regular or occasional basis), the roles and responsibilities of the police officer and the practitioner, as well as the stages of the continuum of services to focus on (see section 6 of this guide) depending on its composition, the demographic characteristics of its territory, the target clientele, the situations encountered, its organizational context and the resources available.*

## 5. Specific Roles and Responsibilities of Each Member of the Team

In the context of countering mistreatment of older adults, the police officer and the practitioner have complementary roles and responsibilities. These are naturally divided, according to the tasks and competencies of each and the practice implemented by the team. However, it is possible to sketch a broad outline of each member's roles and responsibilities.

### 5.1 The Police Officer

The police officer ensures the safety of the older adult and other individuals, and discusses the criminal or legal aspects of mistreatment. The officer carries out prevention and awareness activities, examines mistreatment cases referred by colleagues, and ensures follow-up on cases. This means that the police officer must adopt a helping and supportive approach as opposed to a repressive one. This does not exclude the filing of a complaint, but this measure is rarely the primary purpose of the team practice.

### 5.2 The Practitioner from the Health and Social Services Public Network

The practitioner of the health and social services public network intervenes in and follows up on situations involving older adults, whether or not they receive services from this network. The practitioner ensures that an assessment of needs and perhaps even an overall assessment of the older adult is carried out, by the practitioner or a colleague, and directly reaches out to other professionals in the LSN to request that they intervene or ensure follow-up with older adults.

### 5.3 The Practitioner from the Health and Social Services Non-Profit Network

The practitioner of the health and social services non-profit network is more on the front line, and identifies older adults who are not receiving services from the public network, and who are isolated and potentially being mistreated. The practitioner occasionally assists older adults and ensures follow-ups, if need be or, with the older adult's consent, contacts the LSN professionals of the territory in order to inform them of the situation, and initiates a psychosocial follow-up or other relevant approach.

"[The non-profit practitioner on the team] fills the gaps that others are not able to fill. This means doing all the odd jobs that the [social worker] doesn't have the time to do and that I can't do. This was not really my job or the social worker's. The non-profit sector didn't have this kind of practitioner before. Now that there is one, the non-profit practitioner plays the role of liaison officer." – Police officer

**!** Each member of the team must document the situation, including the living conditions of the older adult, evidence of mistreatment, new elements related to the situation- if the person is already known to the services- interventions carried out, as well as the other resources committed in the continuum of services. This documentation is prepared according to standards established by the organization of each team member.

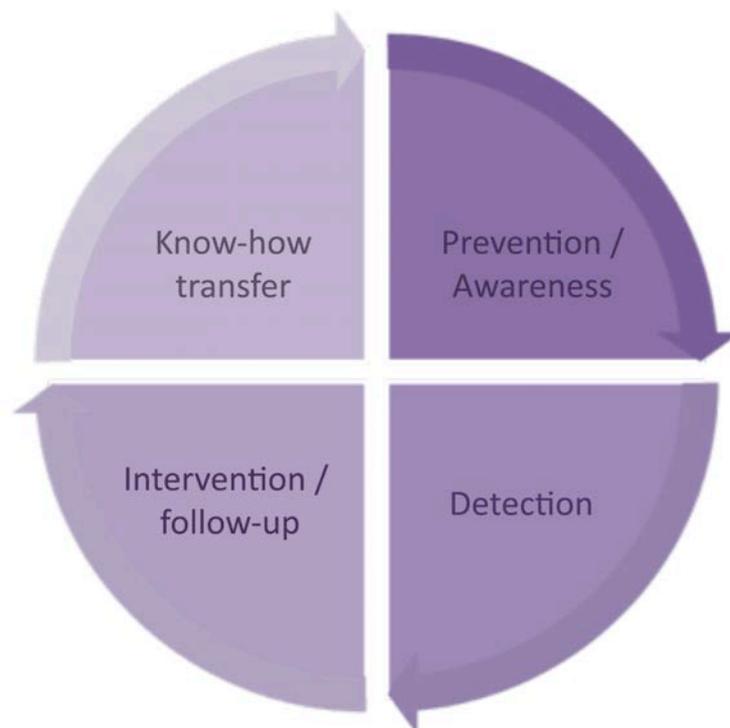
## 6. Stages of Team Practice in a Continuum of Services

The team may play a role in various stages of the continuum of services (prevention/awareness, detection, intervention/follow-up of situations and know-how transfer), which are interrelated, as shown in Figure 2. Depending on the needs of each situation, the team is not required to participate in each step. In addition, in the same situation, the teamwork does not always require the simultaneous presence of the police officer and the practitioner.

“There have been open cases resulting from initial [information sessions provided by the team], but also many cases of ad hoc interventions, many cases where [the police officer] and I never worked together afterwards. The problems were simply resolved on the officer’s end or on my end; but even so our discussions were ongoing.” - Practitioner

For example, in the Bridging project, two of the studied teams have a regular practice, which allows them to participate in each stage of the continuum of services, whereas the other team has an occasional practice, which leads mostly to detection and intervention in specific situations.

**Figure 2: Stages of the continuum of services in a team practice**



Further information on the various stages of the continuum of services to counter mistreatment of older adults is available throughout the Reference Guide to Counter Elder Abuse (in French only).

## 6.1 Preventing and Raising Awareness of Situations of Mistreatment

The practice of prevention aims at reducing the incidence of mistreatment. The most frequently used strategy of prevention is awareness, which is promoted through the dissemination of mistreatment-related information to older adults, the general population, and various practitioners and workers. This information includes the signs that help detect mistreatment as well as the existing resources in this regard. Awareness can also be raised with the use of general advice on prevention and on adopting healthy lifestyle habits.

Following are some possible activities:

### Activities to reach out to the **general older adult population**:

- Information booths or information sessions: during local festivals, World Elder Abuse Awareness Day on June 15, or in shopping centres or grocery stores.

### Activities to reach out to **older adult groups or older adults in collective living arrangements** (retirement homes, low-income housing or other):

- Information sessions on mistreatment;
- Videos or plays;
- “Senior-Aware” awareness sessions co-hosted by a volunteer and a police officer.

### Activities to reach **older adults living alone**:

- Door-to-door awareness raising;
- Community lunches.

### Activities to raise awareness and promote good practice **among practitioners and workers**:

- Activities within organizations such as community centres, financial institutions, businesses, hairdressing salons, pharmacies, etc.
- Information booths or information sessions.

“We started with documents on mistreatment which came from all different sources, the Elder Abuse Help Line, etc. We went out and started to give out this information, just to see if the clientele was receptive to it [...] we simply starting talking to people (at an information booth in a mall). It was clear that they were interested, people were asking questions.”  
- Practitioner



## 6.2 Detecting Situations of Mistreatment

The detection practice aims at identifying older adults who are potentially being mistreated as well as observing and validating evidence of mistreatment.

**! Evidence of mistreatment can be observed and validated by the police officer and/or the practitioner.**

The team takes advantage of certain opportunities to identify situations of mistreatment:

- Mistreatment prevention activities can be an opportunity for older adults or their relatives to confide in team members or in other resources about situations of mistreatment;
- Police officers or practitioners communicate with an older adult, in the course of their duties, for example at the older adult's home;
- Situations of mistreatment may be referred to the team by:
  - A colleague from the same organization;
  - A member of the Coordinating Committee or Intersectoral Committee;
  - A practitioner from another organization;
  - A community member or local services' (Elder Abuse Help Line, building inspector from the city or municipality, financial institution, pharmacy, food store, hair salon, etc.).

“Every time we do one [presentation], we always get phone calls, sometimes a week later, two weeks later, or even a month later, people call us to report situations of mistreatment.”  
– Police officer

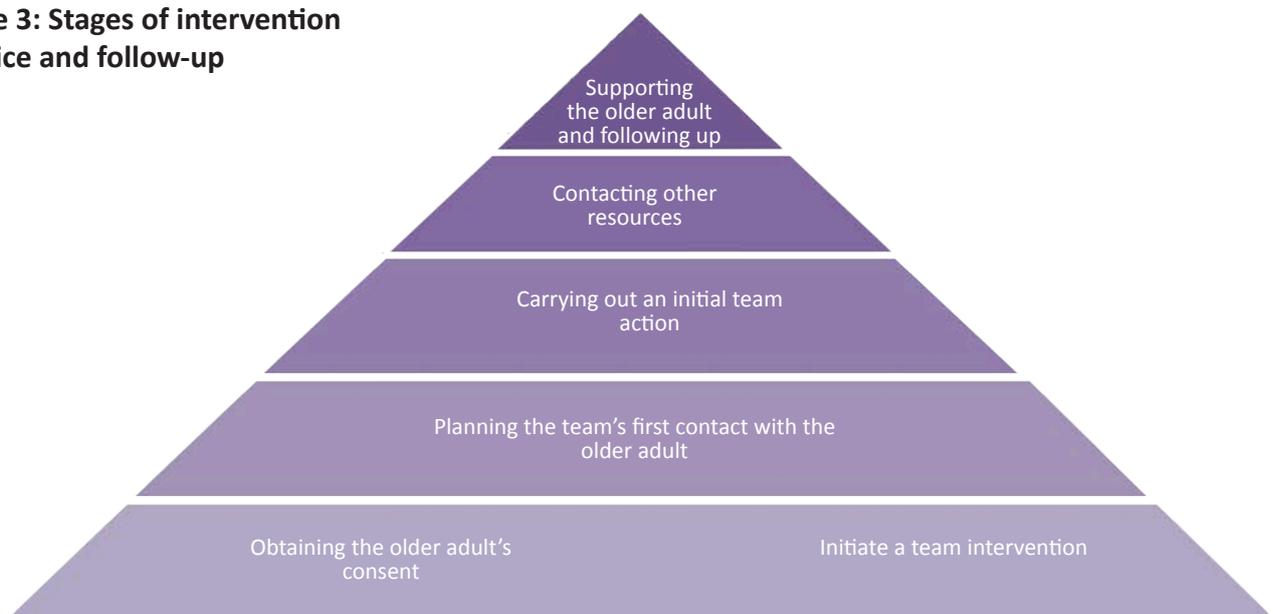


**Indications of and detection tools for mistreatment of older adults: Section 3.**

## 6.3 Responding to and Following up on Situations of Mistreatment

The practice of intervention and follow-up leads the team to follow different phases, as illustrated by Figure 3 above.

**Figure 3: Stages of intervention practice and follow-up**



### 6.3.1 Initiate the Team Intervention

When a situation of mistreatment is identified, the police officer or the practitioner assesses the need to call in the other member of the team. Some situations require a team intervention, while others do not.

Reasons why the police officer or practitioner might contact the other member of the team:

- Because he or she has developed the reflex of working as a team or feels the need for occasional collaboration;
- To get advice;
- To share or gather general or situation-specific information;
- To help guide a future intervention;
- To follow up on a situation;
- For reasons of efficiency or to achieve optimal results in connection with a practice intended to counter mistreatment.

**!** *When the police officer or the practitioner deems that a team intervention is necessary, he or she must obtain the consent of the older adult before contacting the other member of the team.*

### 6.3.2 Obtaining the Consent of the Older Adult for a Team Intervention

Unless the first contact with the older adult was initiated by the team, and before any team intervention, the police officer or the practitioner ensures that the older adult gives free and informed consent so that:

- The team members can share information regarding the older adult;
- The police officer and the practitioner can work together;
- The team can, if necessary, contact one or more resources in order to ask them to intervene or follow up on the situation.

The idea of introducing the other team member should be suggested gradually, by explaining to the older adult how the skills of the other team member will help meet his or her need.

“Look, there’s someone I know (a police officer), I work with him, he’s trustworthy.” – Practitioner speaking to an older adult

**!** *The consent of the older adult may be obtained by the police officer or the practitioner, depending on who first comes into contact with the older adult.*

This consent is mandatory, except if the situation requires that the team apply emergency measures such as emergency hospitalization, relocation, or a psychiatric evaluation<sup>11</sup> of the older adult.

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<sup>11</sup> In this case, the team must apply act P-38, the Act respecting the protection of persons whose mental state presents a danger to themselves or to others (formely known as the Mental Patients Protection Act P-41): Unofficial English version, available at: <https://www.canlii.org/en/qc/laws/stat/rsq-c-p-41/latest/rsq-c-p-41.html>



### *A few pointers on how to obtain the consent of the older adult*

If the older adult does not consent straightaway to the team intervention, this should not necessarily mean the end of the approach. In this context, the police officer or the practitioner:

- Listens to the older adult's point of view underlying the refusal;
- Diversifies ways of obtaining consent from the older adult, for example:
  - Using a consent form;
  - To the extent possible, involving a close relative of the older adult in the intervention;
- Undertakes the next step of the intervention alone, depending on the team member's field of expertise. The older adult might later accept the involvement of the other team member.



*Section 8.1 of this practice guide explores how to respect confidentiality when the older adult does not consent to the intersectoral intervention.*

### **6.3.3 Planning the Team's Initial Contact with the Older Adult**

The team plans its first contact with the older adult and, in order to be well-prepared, evaluates whether it will be expected to:

- Intervene in a potentially dangerous situation for the older adult, for the police officer or the practitioner;
- Intervene in a situation involving a high level of emergency;
- Enforce a court order or medical prescription.

"There are some discussions to prepare on how to deal with a situation, and which method should be applied. It can be helpful to have a [police officer] come over in uniform; it can be reassuring; but on the other hand, it can also set off a powder keg. There is a need for prior discussions in order to know who we are dealing with and where this person lives." - Practitioner

### **6.3.4 The Team's First Action**

This phase includes three types of actions: developing a relationship of trust with the older adult, assessing the situation, and putting an end to an action or encouraging the older adult to report the situation.

#### ***Developing a relationship of trust with the older adult***

A successful intervention can be achieved by developing a relationship of trust with the older adult. This entails showing openness, flexibility, and active listening, and then fostering a climate that encourages reporting and changing the situation of mistreatment. The relationship of trust with the older adult and the team can be developed with the police officer or the practitioner or both.

## Assessing the situation

Starting from the initial contact with the older adult, and up until the end of the intervention process, the team assesses the situation of mistreatment as well as the older adult's capacities and needs.

Regarding the **situation of mistreatment**, the team assesses the relational dynamics between the older adult and the person who mistreats, as well as the level of danger and urgency of the situation.

Regarding the capacities of the **older adult**, the team assesses the older adult's verbal coherence and the way he/she perceives time and space. The team also assesses the ability of the older adult to manage his or her belongings or to take care of himself/herself. It is important to keep in mind that the impairment can be total or partial, permanent or temporary. The team verifies whether the older adult is under protection. If this is the case, he or she must contact the proxy, curator or tutor (or any person legally designated as the guardian) - as long as this person is not the one who mistreats - or the Office of the Public Curator.<sup>12</sup>

In terms of the **older adult's needs**, the team evaluates his/her living conditions (housing, food, personal hygiene and support network) and the services or resources required. If needed, the team refers the older adult to the health and social services public network, so that a formal psychosocial evaluation can be performed.

## Bringing an end to the act or encouraging reporting

In order to end the situation of mistreatment, it is important for the older adult and, when possible, the person who mistreats to acknowledge the current situation.

Depending on the type of mistreatment, the team can support the older adult in modifying a preauthorized payment plan (also called power of attorney), changing the door locks of the older adult's home, changing his/her phone number, etc. The team can also meet with, inform and reach an agreement with him/her in order to put an end to the situation.

"Taking the legal path is not always the solution. The goal is to ensure that the person is well, and to end the situation of mistreatment."  
– Police officer

In some situations, it is appropriate to encourage the older adult to file a complaint, for example to the:

- Police service/justice system;
- The Quebec Commission of Human Rights and Youth Rights;
- Local or regional service quality and complaints commissioner;
- Users' committee of the health and social services public network;
- Office of the Public Curator;
- Financial Markets Authority;
- Consumer Protection Bureau;
- Housing Authority.



**The In Hand tool<sup>13</sup> suggests three avenues for intervention in the context of mistreatment of older adults, namely suspending follow-ups, providing support, or applying protection measures: Sections 4**

<sup>12</sup>Public Curator: the adult protection service from the jurisdiction where mistreatment occurs.

<sup>13</sup>Beaulieu, M. (2010). In Hand. An Ethical Decision-Making Framework. National Initiative for the Care of the Elderly. Toronto. 20 p.

## *Other possible approaches*

Finally, given the great diversity of situations of mistreatment, several ad hoc approaches can be beneficial:

- Informing the older adult about available resources;
- Defending the older adult's rights by informing and supporting him or her;
- Providing a "safety net" for the older adult: implementing measures to ensure his/her safety and well-being;
- Breaking the older adult out of his or her isolation;
- Lowering the risks of mistreatment in order to reduce related repercussions.

### *6.3.5 Contacting Other Resources If Needed*

In some situations, the team refers the case or calls on resource persons, in order to:

- Obtain information about a situation;
- Benefit from greater expertise in mistreatment or on another specific topic;
- Maintain the relationship of trust with the older adult in the context of a delicate intervention;
- Perform a complete intervention or follow-up on a situation.



#### *A few potential resources*

Following is a brief list of resources available to support the team in countering mistreatment of older adults. These resources can be contacted at any time, either by the police officer and the practitioner:

- **Health and social services public network:** a home support team, or resources associated with nursing homes, day centres, hospitals, medical clinics, pharmacies, the Elder Abuse Help Line;
- **Health and social services non-profit network:** community centres for older adults, services agencies for older adults (employees and volunteers), third sector that provides domestic help (housekeeping and meals), older adults' associations, organizations representing older adults, Coordinating Committees or Intersectoral Committees;
- **Social network of the older adult:** individuals who can implement measures to ensure his/her safety and well-being;
- **Public security sector:** police services (other than the police officer on the team), fire departments, municipal courts;
- **Legal sector:** legal aid offices, legal clinics, directors of criminal and penal prosecutions, notaries;
- **Specialized resources:** assistance to victims of crime or sexual assaults, Commission of Human Rights and Youth Rights, Public Curator, Consumer Protection Bureau, financial institutions, private residence for older adults, etc.



*It can be sometimes helpful for the team to call on several resources simultaneously in order to save time and maximize the chances of a successful intervention on short notice.*



**When contacting other resources, the team may be required to coordinate these individuals or organizations. This role is played by the police officer or by the practitioner, depending on their knowledge of the existing resources and their mandates. Coordinating organizations and practitioners: Sections 6 and 7.**

### 6.3.6 Supporting the Older Adult and Following Up on the Situation

Depending on the situation, the team supports the older person in seeking assistance from various organizations:

- LSN;
- Legal system;
- Housing Authority;
- Financial institutions;
- Authorities that offer protection measures: establishment of a curatorship, tutorship or protective supervision of persons (guardianship).

“Cases where a son or a daughter is the suspect can be tough for parents, because in their hearts, they will always be parents. Pushing them to file a complaint can be really difficult. We don’t want to force them into it, but we will support them.” – Police officer



**Legal and juridical measures: Section 7.**

**Potential solutions according to various resources and types of mistreatment: Section 9.**

Whether on a regular or occasional basis, the team follows up on the situation by:

- Evaluating how the situation is evolving, whether it is improving or deteriorating;
- Assessing the number and the nature of new events;
- Establishing measures to be taken and interventions to be continued;
- Giving feedback, be it positive or negative, on the steps taken by each resource involved in the situation of mistreatment.



**In some situations, only the police officer or the practitioner on the team provides follow-up, but in this event he or she maintains lines of communication open with the other member of the team, as well as with the other mobilized resources.**



#### **A few pointers on the team’s interventions and follow-ups in the context of mistreatment**

- Listen to the older adult’s needs, to his/her wishes and limits. Support and respect his/her pace, choices and values:
  - Avoid looking for solutions before having heard what the older adult has to say;
  - Avoid putting pressure on the older adult to file a complaint or to participate in the steps of a legal process;
  - However, some situations are critical and require the use of protection measures;
- Reassure the older adult about his or her experience and reactions;
- Reflect on the impact of one’s intervention on the older adult;
- Adopt an appropriate attitude and vocabulary with the older adult, but also with the person who mistreats, if meeting him/her is necessary;
- Maintain good communication within the team and with other resources throughout the intervention process: clarify one’s perception of the situation and point of view on the intervention.

## ! *Self-determination or protection-oriented interventions ?*

In Quebec, when it comes to older adults, it is generally accepted that the principles of autonomy and self-determination of the older adult take precedence over the principles of protection and safety.

Furthermore, when older adults are not able to achieve self-determination, and are unaware of the extent of dangers to themselves or to others, it may be necessary to carry out protection-oriented interventions.

### 6.4 Transferring the Know-How

The more experienced the team, the more effectively it can transfer its know-how to various resources.

In terms of know-how, the team is expected to transfer **its knowledge and expertise** regarding:

- Mistreatment of older adults;
- Various practices for countering mistreatment;
- Intersectoral practice, whether in a team or with other resources.

Throughout its practice, the team is expected to transfer its know-how. This **allows the team to**:

- Reduce its workload;
- Ensure the continuation of the intersectoral team practice;
- Enhance the organization of services for older adults in general, or for those who are experiencing mistreatment in particular.

**To whom** does the team transfer its know-how?

- To the colleagues of the police officer and the practitioner: within their respective organizations or the Coordinating Committees or Intersectoral Committees that the team belongs to or maintains ties with;
- To the other resources with which the team meets during its practice, who seek its expertise or who are likely to be involved in countering mistreatment of older adults.

**How** does the team transfer its know-how?

- Individually or as an intersectoral team;
- By communicating with police officers, practitioners or resources, whether one at a time or in groups;
- Through formal or informal awareness-raising strategies involving information, training, advice or coaching, while promoting the autonomy of the resources involved;
- According to a pre-established plan or on an informal or ad hoc basis.

## 7. Benefits of the Team Practice

### 7.1 Countering Mistreatment

Teamwork provides an opportunity to enhance and facilitate various practices used in countering mistreatment of older adults and hence to better respond to situations of mistreatment, as opposed to the police officer and the practitioner each working on their own, thanks to:

- The combination and the complementarity of the duties, approaches and the know-how of the police officer and the practitioner: including their knowledge on various issues and resources to be mobilized, their personal and professional experience, their interests, their knowledge of foreign languages, etc.;
- Task sharing within the team, which allows the police officer and the practitioner to carry out interventions in an efficient and timely manner, without overstepping their original mandates;
- The greater creativity of the police officer and the practitioner in their initiatives;
- Their ability to overcome confidentiality-related challenges in information exchanges, when the police officer and the practitioner are working together with an older adult.

“Our realities and experiences are completely different. So we have two different approaches, two different ways of working. It clearly gives me an opportunity, a perspective that I didn’t have before.” - Practitioner

#### 7.1.1 Presence of a Police Officer

- The police officer is familiar with the Criminal Code of Canada, the Civil Code of Quebec and municipal by-laws and can apply Bill P-38;
- The officer can check the history of calls to the police from a given address;
- The officer has access to specialized resources that differ from those of the practitioner which helps guide the intervention<sup>14</sup> ;
- The deterrent of the police officer’s presence can calm down the perpetrator. Sometimes, a simple meeting is all it takes to end the situation of mistreatment;
- The police officer’s presence ensures the practitioner’s safety when he/she must act in a potentially dangerous situation.

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<sup>14</sup> Some police departments, for example in Montreal, have access to services such as UPS-Justice, which is a “multidisciplinary team from the CSSS Jeanne-Mance that can promptly intervene at any time in cases involving a person in an altered mental state and a potentially dangerous situation for this person or his/her environment” (free translation from the French version): CSSS Jeanne-Mance. (n.d.) Urgence psychosociale-justice (UPS-J), 2 pages. Available at: [https://www.csssjeannemance.ca/fileadmin/csss\\_jmance/Menu/ZoneProfessionnelle/Pharmaciens/UPSJ.pdf](https://www.csssjeannemance.ca/fileadmin/csss_jmance/Menu/ZoneProfessionnelle/Pharmaciens/UPSJ.pdf)

### 7.1.2 Presence of a Practitioner

- The practitioner vigilantly monitors the situation and provides psychosocial follow-up when police officers cannot intervene without overstepping their mandates, for example in the event of a lack of evidence or the absence of a formal complaint;
- The practitioner can help perform an initial evaluation of the person's mental state with a view to initiating legal procedures, for example when a psychiatric assessment has been ordered, thus facilitating police work;
- The practitioner supports the older adult by referring him/her to the proper resources, which the police officer cannot do, owing to a lack of time and sometimes a lack of knowledge of the resources available in the community.

### 7.2 For Organizations

Since teamwork also involves the respective organizations of the police officer and the practitioner, these organizations also benefit from the team practice:

- The organizations involved in countering mistreatment of older adults enjoy greater visibility;
- Access to and communication between the respective organizations of the police officer and the practitioner are enhanced;
- Contact with a police officer or a practitioner helps the colleagues of both team members to demystify the roles of the other team members and to improve their perception of his/her work;
- For the police officer and the practitioner as well as their respective colleagues, the team practice helps promote the development of know-how in their own sector of expertise, as well as in the other sector involved.

### 7.3 For Mistreated Older Adults

The mistreated older adult also benefits from the strengths of the team practice:

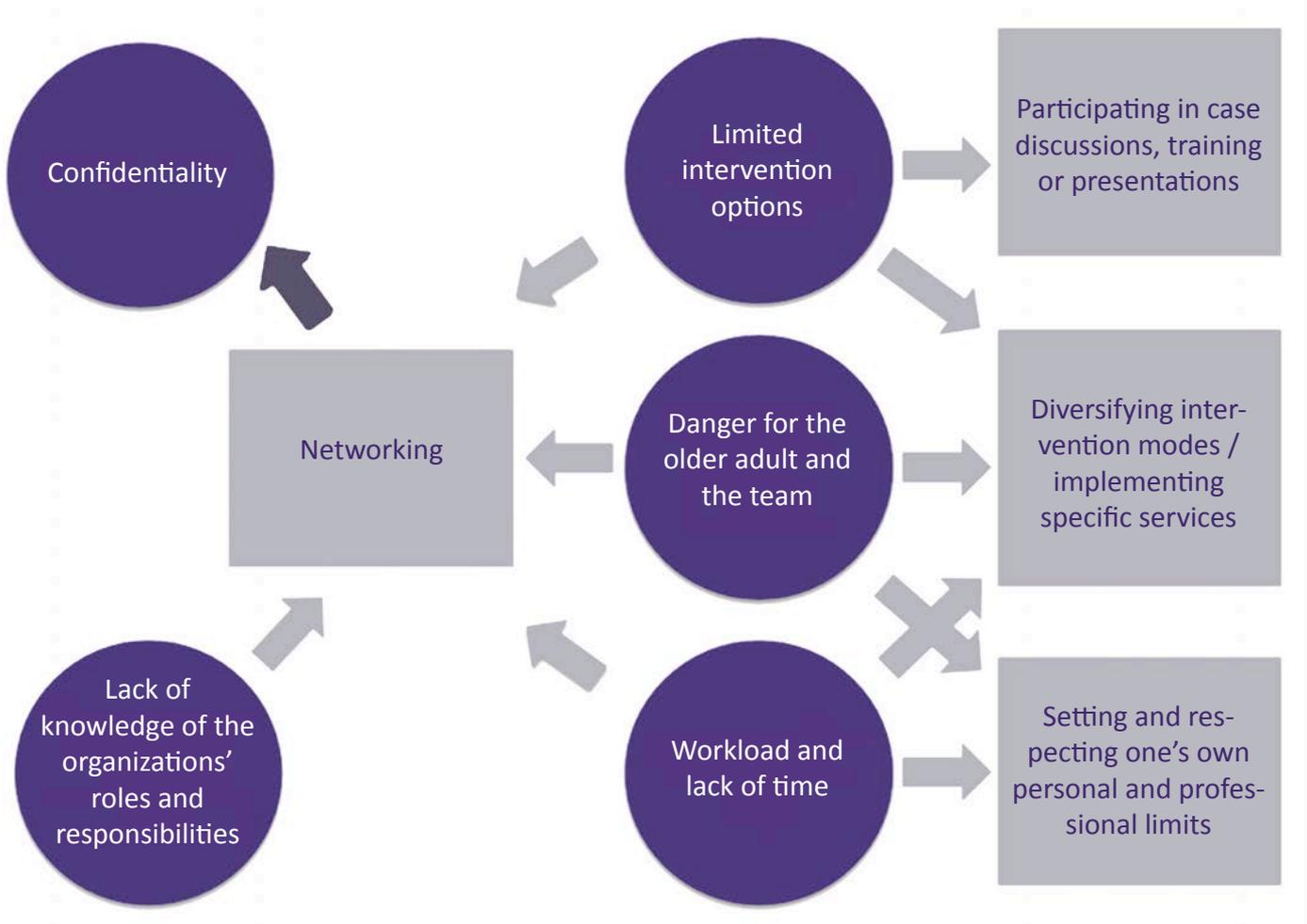
- The older adult may already have had access to or may have been previously referred to one or another organization;
- The older adult has the opportunity to create a relationship of trust with a police officer or a practitioner:
  - This relationship of trust helps with reporting mistreatment, whether by using LSN services or filing a complaint to the police department;
  - In addition, the time spent working together allows the police officer and the practitioner to develop mutual knowledge, more comfortable teamwork, and closer collaboration, thus making their efforts more flexible and increasing the older adult's degree of comfort and his/her trust in them;
- The presence of the police officer and the practitioner helps the older adult to better understand the mandates, roles and responsibilities of each individual as well as how services are organized within the LSN and the police department;
- The police presence facilitates access to and contact with isolated older adults, particularly those who are not receiving LSN services;
- The team's presence increases the older adult's sense of safety.

**!** *It is important to consider the ethnocultural background of the older adult, whose immigration experience, beliefs and values may influence the way he/she perceives the police officer and the practitioner.*

## 8. Challenges for the Team Practice and Solutions

Like all practices, the team practice does have its inherent challenges. Figure 4 below connects each challenge and solution explored in this section of the guide.

Figure 4: Challenges and solutions for team practices



## 8.1 Respecting Confidentiality

Respecting the confidentiality of personal information is crucial when the older adult does not give consent for a team intervention or for the team to contact other resources. Within this context, the police officer and the practitioner must comply with the codes of ethics of each organization and of each professional association concerned by their interventions. This respect for confidentiality is important, but delicate, which further complicates:

- Information exchanges between the police officer and the practitioner on the team;
- Information exchanges between the team and other resources.

### Solutions

In addition to the advice presented in section 6.3.2 of this guide for obtaining the consent of the older adult, there are several possible solutions for the team:

- Understand and respect the confidentiality-related limits of each resource involved when exchanging information;
- Share general information, including essential information about the situation, without discussing any particulars that would make it possible to identify the older adult;
- Encourage the police officer's or the practitioner's organization to draw up an agreement, a protocol or an action plan by setting parameters for sharing information amongst themselves;
- In the event of serious and imminent danger, the team may use protection measures which imply the ability to communicate without the older adult's authorization.

"Confidentiality remains a stumbling block at all levels. This has always been the case. I understand this is a problem, but hopefully we'll one day be able to consult with each other as is the case for victims of intimate partner violence. So, the patrol officer writes up a report, and immediately asks the alleged victim for consent, and then sends us the completed request, which already provides official authorization so that I can communicate with the victim."-Practitioner

**!** *Communication skills and trust between team members or other resources are essential in order to carry out interventions while respecting the standards of confidentiality.*

## 8.2 Limited Intervention Options to Meet the Older Adults' Needs

When intervening in a context of mistreatment, the team will tend to encounter several obstacles. The police officer and the practitioner must cope with:

- A lack of knowledge on certain problems;
- The specific characteristics of resources that are called upon: waiting lists, shortages (staff, materials, funds or time), staff turnover, established priorities or an inability to reach isolated older adults;
- Reluctance of the older adult to report the mistreatment situation;
- The risk of disrupting the relationship of trust between the older adult and the team members;
- Insufficient evidence of a situation of mistreatment, for example, to undertake a police or judicial intervention.

## Solutions

In order to maximize their intervention options, the police officer and the practitioner can:

- Participate in case discussions, training or presentations, in order to seek new knowledge and new avenues or practices;
- Diversify their intervention methods or establish specific services;
- Network in order to connect the resources available to counter mistreatment of older adults.

### 8.3 Insufficient Knowledge of the Mandates, Roles and Responsibilities of Each Resource

In the context of an intersectoral practice, it is normal for the team members to be unfamiliar with the mandates, roles and responsibilities of each resource available to meet the needs of older adults in general, or older adults in situations of mistreatment in particular. This unfamiliarity may lead to misunderstanding, conflicts, rivalries, or competition.

## Solutions

The team can benefit from networking opportunities in order to create ties with other resources, to exchange views on their respective mandates, roles and responsibilities, and to get to know and respect each other.

### 8.4 Danger for the Older Adult or Team Members

Some situations of mistreatment pose a high level of danger to the older adult, the police officer or the practitioner, for example when:

- The situation is so serious that it can be life-threatening for the older adult;
- The person who mistreats is present at the scene of the intervention;
- One of the persons present during the intervention or involved in the situation of mistreatment has a mental health disorder.

“If [psychosocial practitioners are afraid to go] alone, and things have been planned, they can call us before, and they can count on us to go with them. After all, we, too, usually work on our own. For an emergency intervention, you need two responders. Enforcing a P-38 order can’t be done alone.”  
– Police officer

## Solutions

When the team intervenes in a potentially or definitely dangerous situation, it can:

- Diversify its intervention methods or set up specific services, in order to collect information on the situation and to ensure the safety of the team and of the older adult;
- Establish and respect the personal and professional limitations of the police officer and the practitioner, including their risk tolerance level and the protection measures to be undertaken;
- Network in order to mobilize adequate resources in this type of situation.

## 8.5 Workload and Lack of Time

Interventions within contexts of mistreatment exhibit certain particularities that increase the team's workload and give it the impression of lacking the time for optimal interventions:

- These are long-term interventions and are in addition to other situations encountered by the police officer and the practitioner in the context of their original mandates;
- The team encounters high levels of emergency and danger, which require them to speed up the intervention process;
- The team is sometimes more dedicated to certain elements than are members from other organizations, for instance, when it comes to participating in an intersectoral approach and respecting commitments.

The workload and the lack of time experienced by the police officer or the practitioner create a risk of emotional overinvolvement, feelings of loneliness, psychological distress or burnout.

### *Solutions*

In order to avoid the consequences of work overload and lack of time, the team must:

- Diversify its interventions or implement specific services, for example, by seeking various resources or abiding by an informal agreement, protocol or action plan for specific situations;
- Understand, establish and respect its own personal and professional limitations and those of others, for example, by limiting the number of its interventions, or promoting recognition and support of the police officer's and practitioner's individual work;
- Network in order to share its roles and responsibilities with colleagues or other resources.

"At the moment, I have roughly 5 cases out of 40 that are situations of mistreatment. I have already had up to 10. I told management that I couldn't keep up because these are big cases of mistreatment, especially when the Public Curator, lawyers or notaries are involved."  
- Practitioner

## Networking

Team practice is one possible response to mistreatment of older adults, but it is not the only one. It is important to create ties with other organizations or resource persons, in order to:

- Improve the offer of services aimed at countering mistreatment of older adults;
- Encourage understanding of and respect for the role of each resource, in the event of a joint intervention.

“By constantly seeking people’s help in dealing with cases and working with partners outside the Coordinating Committee, we [have learned a lot].”  
– Police officer

The team uses various networking strategies in order to meet the challenges previously mentioned:

- Meeting future partners from Coordinating Committees or Intersectoral Committees;
- Holding face-to-face meetings with future partners: making an appointment with all organizational staff;
- Emphasizing the fact that intersectoral work is an opportunity to help each other and not to delegate tasks to other resources. **Intersectoral work is more a matter of coordinating resources than adding services or tasks;**
- Explaining the goals, benefits and limitations of intersectoral work;
- Compiling contact information for the various resources, for example, by creating an organizational chart.



*It may take some time for the team to become familiar with the various resources involved in countering mistreatment of older adults.*

## 9. Conditions to Ensure Sustainability or to Support a Team

Once the team practice is established, several resources have a role to play in order to sustain the team over time.

### 9.1 Organizations

A team needs recognition and continuous support from its members' respective organizations (including their immediate colleagues and superiors), as well as the Coordinating Committees and Intersectoral Committees to which the team members belong or with which they have ties. These organizations or committees should be able to:

- Understand the team members' roles;
- Communicate about the team practice and its contribution;
- Encourage the team to acquire the know-how and to transfer it to other resources, for example, through training;
- Organize the resources designated for cases involving older adults or mistreatment, for example, by means of a case priority process;
- Provide clinical support to the team members and better caseload management, and work toward decreasing staff turnover within their organizations;
- Ensure the sustainability of Coordinating Committees and Intersectoral Committees on older adults or countering mistreatment of older adults.

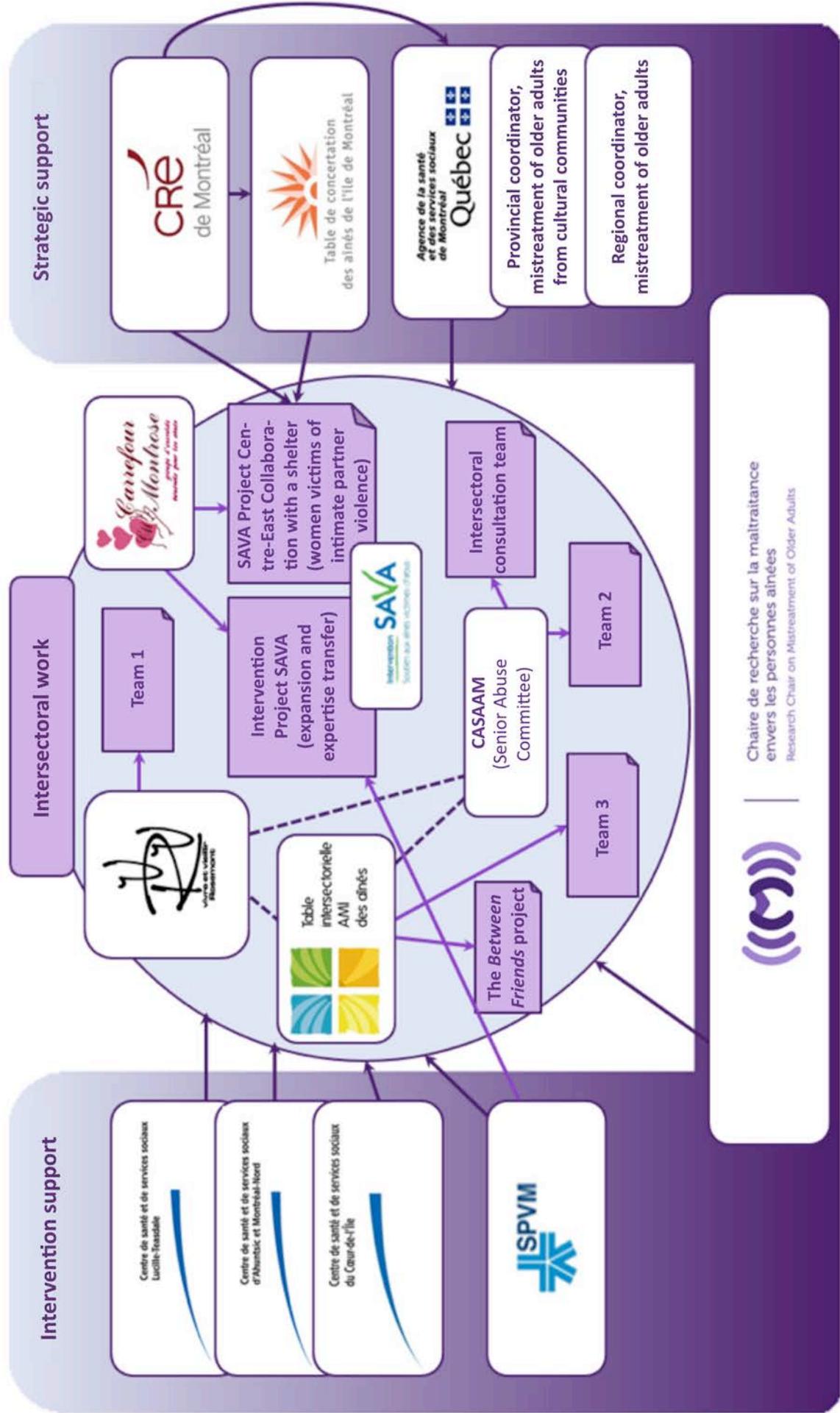
"First and foremost, make sure your employers are ready to cooperate fully. We really need our organization's conviction and belief in the practice in order to be able to do what we do."  
- Practitioner

### 9.2 The Police Officer and Practitioner

The police officer and the practitioner themselves have a key role to play in order to sustain their practice. Following are examples of personality traits, know-how and personal and professional experience that are beneficial to maintaining the team practice:

- Interest in the clientele, related problems, intersectoral work, and learning;
- Openness, sensitivity, humanism and empathy;
- Leadership, interpersonal skills, and the ability to create relationships of trust with older adults as well as with other resources;
- Resourcefulness, flexibility and coping skills, especially to cope with the complexity of situations and organizational issues;
- Ability to showcase the positive impacts of team practice;
- Formal training on older adults or mistreatment;
- Knowledge acquired informally, by contacting other resources and engaging in know-how transfer.

# The Bridging Model: The Intersectoral Practice to Countering Mistreatment of Older Adults in the Northeast of Montreal



Legend :

- Support
- - - Implementation
- ↔ Occasional exchanges
- ▣ Innovation