World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) established WEAAD on June 15, 2006. Since its inception, organizations from around the world, including governments, community agencies, educational institutions and professionals in the field of aging, have held events to raise awareness of elder abuse. For more information about the history of WEAAD visit www.inpea.net/weaad.html.

The Government of Alberta addresses elder abuse through the Addressing Elder Abuse in Alberta – A Strategy for Collective Action. The colour purple was chosen by the INPEA so you are encouraged to incorporate it into as many aspects of your activities as possible.

Build Awareness

Preventing and reducing elder abuse starts with knowledge. Raising awareness can help Albertans understand the factors that contribute to the abuse of older adults, how to recognize abuse and where to go for assistance. Albertans can make a crucial difference in keeping older adults free from abuse and helping those who are abused.

Elder abuse is any action or inaction by self or others that jeopardizes the health or well-being of any older adult and is divided into six categories: physical, emotional, financial, sexual, medication and neglect. Elder abuse is often committed by someone known to the victim, such as a family member, friend, or caregiver. Financial and emotional abuse are two of the most frequently reported forms of elder abuse. It can happen to anyone.

According to various research, approximately four to eight percent of older adults may experience elder abuse, affecting their health, well-being and independence. All members and sectors of society need to work together to end this unacceptable behaviour.

Steps to Consider When Planning Activities

WEAAD is a great opportunity for you to engage with other groups and individuals to plan events together.

Define the goal of your activity. Decide what you want to achieve – if you are someone who works with older adults, use your experience as inspiration for your activity. Key messages about older adults can assist you with this step.

Deciding on your goal should help you reach the right audience who will contribute to and participate in your activity. Pick a theme or adopt the Government of Alberta’s theme of “Learn the Signs. Break the silence”.

Consider the best time to hold your activity. Think about your audience’s schedule and about other events happening in your community that may potentially conflict with your activity. You may want to keep the following in mind:

► Are the sites you prefer/need available?
► If it is an outdoor activity do you have contingency plans for inclement weather?
► Is there a major holiday or other main community event or festival taking place at the same time? You may want to avoid planning activities around this time unless you are working together.
► Do you have plenty of time to publicize your event/activity or to plan the agenda?
► Do you need to obtain any permits?

Choose a venue that is easily accessible, near public transportation, with adequate parking and large enough to accommodate everyone. Decide in what order activities should take place and ensure your audience knows what to expect at your activity/event. A flexible, well-planned agenda will prepare you for the unexpected.

Determine what you will need to make your activity successful. Below are some items which may be overlooked:
► purple ribbons
► refreshments and snacks
► podium, microphone, sound system, computer, speakers and projector
► suitable seating
► decorations
► transportation for participants
► entertainers
► event insurance (for potential injuries)

Aim to make your activity as inclusive as possible. In some societies, attitudes allow for abuse to continue and not be detected. A lack of respect for older adults may be one of these factors. In some cultures, this lack of respect can contribute to abuse of older adults. Everyone deserves to be safe and everyone shares a role in creating safe and respectful communities. This means understanding that each individual is unique and valuing these differences. These differences include, but aren’t limited to:
► race and ethnicity
► age, gender, sexual orientation
► sexual orientation
► socio-economic status
► physical abilities
► religious and political beliefs

It is important to keep biases in check, especially in situations of elder abuse. Anyone working with older adults must be sensitive to cultural differences before reporting abuse, as the definition of abuse can vary between cultures and in some cultures the word abuse is not translatable. Always remember, biases can be challenged and unjust actions and behaviours can be changed. It is important to:
► Treat others with respect.
► Avoid using stereotypes, even positive ones. Making generalizations about anyone’s ethnic group is not appropriate under any circumstance and can be damaging.
► Challenge others if they make inappropriate comments. These comments must never go unchallenged.
► Learn about others’ cultures, races, religions, etc. Often people show a lack of respect due to ignorance or misinformation.