

Facts on elder abuse

What is elder abuse?

- Elder abuse is any intentional or reckless act or willful and negligent disregard, occurring within a relationship of family, trust or dependency, directed at someone 65 years of age or older, that:
 - causes physical, emotional or psychological harm
 - involves the misappropriation or misuse of money or other personal possessions or personal or real property
 - subjects an individual to non-consensual sexual contact, activity or behaviour
 - fails to provide the necessities of life

Who are the victims?

- Any senior can become a victim of elder abuse regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, income or education.
- There is limited data about elder abuse in Canada, and throughout the world. A key reason is that many cases of elder abuse go unreported. However, various studies indicate that between four and eight per cent of older adults in Canada are likely to experience abuse.
- Shame or guilt may stop a senior from revealing their abuse. Sometimes victims simply do not have the capacity to report it. Whether a victim is unable or unwilling, some of the barriers to revealing elder abuse include: fear; love for the abuser; lack of understanding or impairment; lack of awareness of resource options; or acceptance of abuse or neglect as normal.

Who are the abusers?

- Elder abuse is often committed by someone known to the victim, such as a family member, friend, or caregiver. Approximately 25 per cent of crimes against older adults are committed by family members, usually a spouse or adult child.
- Abusers can also include friends, neighbours, paid care providers, landlords and staff, or any individual in a position of power, trust, or authority.

What are the signs of elder abuse?

- Like other types of family violence, the dynamics of elder abuse are complex. Elder abuse is often impacted by the mental and physical conditions of both the abuser and the victim, with these factors interacting in ways uniquely dependent on the individuals involved and the situation.
- Risk factors for abuse include: history of spousal abuse; family dynamics; isolation; troubled relatives, friends or neighbours; inability to cope with long-term caregiving; institutional conditions; ageism and lack of knowledge about the aging process; and society's acceptance of violence.
- Common signs of elder abuse include confusion, depression or anxiety, unexplained injuries, changes in hygiene, seeming fearful around certain people, and fear or worry when talking about money.

What should I do if I think I am being abused?

- **If you are in immediate danger leave the situation.** Go to a safe place immediately, such as a neighbour, friend or relative. Go into a business or ask to be taken to a shelter. *If you are unable to leave your home, call 9-1-1 immediately.*
- **Confide in someone you trust.** Talk to someone you trust about what is happening, such as a friend or family member; public health nurse; social worker; home care worker; someone at your place of worship; or a doctor.
- **Keep a record.** Write down what is happening to you; keep a daily record. This will help you to document the abuse and help others assist you if you need it.
- **Take legal action.** All forms of abuse are immoral. Some forms are illegal. You may want to think about a court protection order that would stop the abusive person from having contact with you.
- **DON'T BLAME YOURSELF. Know that it is not your fault and help is available.** Please ask for help because **you do not deserve to be abused.** Many groups in your community want to help you to protect your rights, safety and your dignity.

Who do I call if I'm being abused or I suspect a senior is being abused?

- Anyone who is being abused and is in imminent danger should contact the police immediately by dialing 911.
- Contact the Family Violence Info Line at 310-1818 for information, advice and referrals. This 24 hour number is toll-free and available 7 days a week. Service is provided in over 170 languages.
- Call the Safeguards for Vulnerable Adults Information and Reporting Line at 1-888-357-9339 (toll-free) to report the abuse of an adult receiving publicly funded care or support services (*Protection for Persons in Care*); complaints of non-compliance to accommodation standards for supported living and long-term care facilities (*Accommodation Standards*); or the actions of a co-decision maker, guardian or trustee (*Office of the Public Guardian*).
- Information on elder abuse is available on the Alberta Seniors and Housing website at www.seniors-housing.alberta.ca.
- The Alberta Elder Abuse Awareness Council website facilitates the sharing of knowledge, resources and tools about elder abuse amongst people who work with seniors in Alberta. Visit the website at www.albertaelderabuse.ca.