

Why Should I Care About Elder Abuse?

Elder abuse is an under recognized problem with devastating and even *life threatening* consequences.

Every day, headlines throughout the U.S. paint a grim picture of seniors who have been abused, neglected, and exploited, often by people they trust the most. Abusers may be spouses, family members, personal acquaintances, or professionals in positions of trust; or opportunistic strangers who prey on the vulnerable.

How big is the problem? No one really knows. Experts estimate that only **one in five cases or fewer are reported**, which means that very few seniors who have been abused get the help they need.

One thing is certain: elder abuse can happen to *any* older individual – your neighbor, your loved one - it can even happen to *you*.

What is Elder Abuse?

According to Maryland law, abuse is “the sustaining of any physical injury by a vulnerable adult as a result of cruel or inhumane treatment or as a result of a malicious act by any person.” Exploitation is “any action which involves the misuse of a vulnerable adult’s funds, property, or person.” Neglect is “the willful deprivation of a vulnerable adult of adequate food, clothing, essential medical treatment or rehabilitative therapy, shelter, or supervision.” Md. Code Ann. Fam. Law §14-101.

Who is at Risk?

Elder abuse can occur *anywhere* – in the home, in nursing homes, or other institutions. It affects seniors across all socio-economic groups, cultures, and races. Based on available information, women and “older” elders are more likely to be victimized. Dementia is a significant risk factor. Mental health and substance abuse issues - of both abusers and victims - are risk factors. Isolation can also contribute to risk.

What Should I Do if I Suspect Elder Abuse?

Report Your Concerns.

Remember: Most cases of elder abuse go undetected. Don't assume that someone has already reported a suspicious situation.

To report suspected abuse in the community, contact Adult Protective Services at 1-800-91-PREVENT or 1-800-917-7383.

If you or someone you know is in a life threatening situation or immediate danger, contact 911 or the local police or sheriff.

To report suspected abuse in a nursing home or long-term care facility, contact the Office of Health Care Quality at 1-877-402-8219

Who Must Report?

Maryland Code Ann. Fam. Law §14-302 requires each health practitioner, police officer, or human service worker who contacts, examines, attends, or treats an alleged vulnerable adult, and who has reason to believe that the alleged vulnerable adult has been subjected to abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or exploitation, to report to the local Adult Protective Services department.

Maryland Resources

Maryland Adult Protective Services
1-800-91-PREVENT or
1-800-917-7383

Maryland Department of Aging
1-800-AGE-DIAL or 1-800-243-3425

Maryland Long Term Care
Ombudsman
410-767-1100 or 1-800-243-3425
ext. 71100

Maryland Office of Attorney
General
1-888-743-0023

Maryland Legal Aid Bureau
Senior Legal Helpline
1-800-896-4213 ext. 7750

Remember: You do not need to prove that abuse is occurring; it is up to the professionals to investigate the suspicions.



Warning Signs

- **Physical Abuse** - Slap marks, unexplained bruises, most pressure marks, and certain types of burns or blisters, such as cigarette burns
- **Neglect** - Pressure ulcers, filth, lack of medical care, malnutrition or dehydration
- **Emotional Abuse** - Withdrawal from normal activities, unexplained changes in alertness, or other unusual behavioral changes
- **Sexual Abuse** - Bruises around the breasts or genital area and unexplained sexually transmitted diseases
- **Financial Abuse/Exploitation** - Sudden change in finances and accounts, altered wills and trusts, unusual bank withdrawals, checks written as "loans" or "gifts," and loss of property

What Can I Do to Prevent Elder Abuse?

- *Report suspected mistreatment* to your local adult protective services agency or law enforcement. Although a situation may have already been investigated, if you believe circumstances are getting worse, continue to speak out.
- *Keep in contact* – Talk with your older friends, neighbors, and relatives. Maintaining communication will help decrease isolation, a risk factor for mistreatment. It will also give them a chance to talk about any problems they may be experiencing.
- *Be aware of the possibility of abuse* – Look around and take note of what may be happening with your older neighbors and acquaintances. Do they seem lately to be withdrawn, nervous, fearful, sad, or anxious, especially around certain people, when they have not seemed so in the past?
- *Contact your local Area Agency on Aging* office to identify local programs and sources of support, such as *Meals on Wheels*. These programs help elders to maintain health, well-being, and independence – a good defense against abuse.
- *Volunteer* – There are many local opportunities to become involved in programs that provide assistance and support for seniors.
- *World Elder Abuse Awareness Day* - Elder abuse is a global issue. Contact your local aging services organizations to find out how your community will observe World Day. Help to raise awareness by talking about the issue.
- *Learn more about the issue* - Visit the *National Center on Elder Abuse* at www.ncea.aoa.gov.



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410-951-7777
www.mdlab.org

This fact sheet template was created by the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA). Portions were adapted from the NCEA publication: 15 Questions & Answers About Elder Abuse (July 2005), available on the NCEA website at: www.ncea.aoa.gov.

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The NCEA is a national resource center that provides technical support and information to professionals and advocates working on behalf of older individuals. It also provides information and referral to the public. The NCEA is not an investigation, nor a reporting, agency, and cannot intervene in cases of suspected elder mistreatment.

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***Together, we have the
power to prevent
elder abuse***