

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. Relatively few cases are identified, as elders often are reluctant to report the mistreatment. 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 for 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 the National Center on Elder Abuse, elder abuse refers to intentional or negligent acts by a caregiver or “trusted” individual that causes (or potentially causes) harm to a vulnerable elder. Most common categories of abuse are neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse and exploitation, emotional or psychological abuse and neglect

(including verbal abuse and threats), abandonment, and self-neglect. **Each state has laws that authorize the provision of adult protective services in cases of elder abuse, but state law varies in terms of age of eligibility to receive protective services, the types of abuse, neglect and exploitation covered, investigation responsibility and procedures, and reporting laws.**

In Nebraska, Adult Protective Services serves vulnerable adults who are defined as persons 18 years and older who have a substantial mental and/or functional impairment. Persons eligible for Adult Protective Services have a substantial physical limitation or mental condition that prevents them from living independently or providing self-care. These persons are unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

The types of abuse covered by NE law are physical abuse, cruel punishment, unreasonable confinement, exploitation, sexual abuse, and denial of essential services, including self-neglect.

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.

What Should I Do if I Suspect Elder Abuse?

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

Make a report and call the hotline
 Nebraska Adult Protective Services
 1-800-652-1999

Who Must Report?

Any person may report when they have cause to believe that a vulnerable adult has been abused, neglected or exploited or observes a vulnerable adult in such a situation.

Mandatory reporters are law enforcement and persons in the medical, developmental disability, behavioral health fields including paraprofessionals (Neb. Rev. Statute Sec. 28-372).

Other State Resources

State Unit on Aging
 1-800-942-7830 (Nebraska only)

Nebraska Long Term Care
 Ombudsman
 1-800-942-7830 (Nebraska only)

Nebraska Office of Attorney General
 Senior Outreach Hotline:
 (888) 287-0778

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

Warning Signs

Often various types of abuse occur at the same time.

- **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* website at www.ncea.aoa.gov.

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Adult Protective Services
301 Centennial Mall S
P.O. Box 95026
Lincoln, NE 68509

Hotline: 1-800-652-1999
www.dhhs.ne.gov

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***

