

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

Identify, Prevent, and Combat Elder Abuse



Elder abuse is an issue that affects people around the globe. As a result, the United Nations General Assembly designates one day a year – June 15 – as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, a day when we all voice our opposition to abuse inflicted on our older generations.

In California, the Attorney General, through the Bureau of Medi-Cal Fraud and Elder Abuse and the Consumer Law Section, works to prevent and fight elder abuse. These teams help our elders seek justice by investigating and prosecuting many forms of abuse and neglect.

Here are important reminders for elders or dependent adults and their families, friends, and caregivers to help identify, prevent and combat abuse and neglect:

- 1. Identify Abuse and Neglect. Know the Types of Harm. Be Aware.** There are physical, mental, and emotional forms of abuse and neglect that can happen in any setting. These harms can be inflicted by any person, including family members, caregivers, administrators, and contractors or business vendors. Here's what to look for:
 - **Physical abuse** includes all forms of physical and sexual violence including assault. It also includes wrongful use of medications to restrain a person.
 - **False imprisonment**, financial abuse and cybercrimes are also physical abuse.
 - **Neglect** can be a crime, and includes the failure to aid in providing clothing, shelter, and medical care. It also includes failure to protect the victim from health and safety hazards and malnutrition or dehydration.
 - **Mental and emotional abuses** include verbal assaults, threats, and intimidation. They also include isolation, confinement, and retaliation. Subjecting the victim to fear or emotional distress is yet another form of emotional abuse.
- 2. Watch for the Warning Signs. Know How to Identify Dangers to Prevent Harm.** What to look for:

Bodily/Physical Warnings: Unkempt or dirty appearance. Foul odor. Scratches, blisters, lacerations, or pinch marks. Unexplained bruises or welts. Burns from scalding liquids, cigarettes or ropes. Unexplained injuries. Developing or worsening pressure sores. Untreated medical conditions.

Behavioral Warnings: Withdrawn attitude. Confusion or extreme forgetfulness. Depression or anxiety. Helplessness or anger. Fear of speaking freely. Secretive behavior. Changes in eating or sleeping patterns.

Isolation: Abusers may systematically restrict contact that victims have with family, visitors, friends, clergy, and healthcare providers such as a doctor or nurse. This can lead elders and dependent adults to distrust others or be afraid of talking freely.

Financial Scams: Telemarketing fraud, identity theft, predatory lending, home improvement scams, cyber scams, and estate planning scams.

3. Protect Yourself or Your Elder from Scams

➤ **Block unwanted telemarketing calls at home!**

Register your phone number with the National Do Not Call Registry. The Registry is managed by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). You may register your phone number online at <https://www.donotcall.gov>, or by calling toll-free, 1-888-382-1222 (TTY 1-866-290-4236), from the number you wish to register. Registration is free. After 30 days from your registration, telemarketers covered by the National Do Not Call Registry must stop calling you.

➤ **For home improvement, take these steps to be proactive!**

Do:

- ✓ *Get written bids from established businesses. Be suspicious if someone comes to your door or calls you with an offer to do home improvement.*
- ✓ *Obtain the contractor's license number and contact the Contractors State License Board (<http://www.cslb.ca.gov/>), Better Business Bureau (<https://www.bbb.org/>) or your Chamber of Commerce to determine that the person offering to perform the home improvement is licensed and reputable.*
- ✓ *Insist on obtaining referrals and do check on them.*

Don't:

- ✓ *Don't rush.*
- ✓ *Don't accept work from an unlicensed contractor.*
- ✓ *Don't allow work to be done **without a written contract**, which should specify materials used, a completion date and a fair payment schedule that pays for work as it is completed.*
- ✓ *Don't pay a down payment before commencement of work that exceeds one thousand dollars (\$1,000) or 10 percent of the contract price for home improvements, whichever is less.*

➤ **Protect yourself or elders from identity theft!**

- Dispose of papers with personal information by shredding up charge receipts, bank statements, expired credit cards or offers for new credit cards.
- Don't give any of your personal account numbers over the phone unless you have placed the call and know the individual with whom you are speaking.
- Don't "over-share" on social networking websites.
- Don't make transactions on public WiFi networks.
- Don't make online purchases with your debit card. Don't share Social Security Numbers and don't print them on checks, except where those you have initiated contact or are familiar with those requesting your SSN.

Further reminders about your Social Security Number (SSN):

- Never give out your SSN.
- Don't give out your SSN over the phone if someone calls you or when shopping online.
- If you must enter your SSN on a financial, health, or government website, make sure the web address begins with "https" and that a padlock symbol appears in the address bar.
- Some government agencies require your SSN. These agencies include the DMV, welfare offices, and tax agencies. They must show you a disclosure form stating if your SSN is required or optional, how it will be used, and the agency's legal authority to ask for it. Before giving out any information, make

sure the person is really from that agency by finding the agency's contact information from a trusted source or by searching the internet.

➤ **Choose a long-term care facility wisely.**

- Visit online resources. Visit the entire facility more than once and at different times of the day and of the week.
- Contact your local Long-Term Care Ombudsman for information about facilities.
- Ask to see the facility's license and latest inspection report by the California Department of Public Health (<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/>) and the California Department of Social Services (<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/>) on the facility's performance.

4. Report Suspected Abuse or Neglect *Immediately*. Don't Be a Victim. Don't Let It Worsen.

➤ **Mandated Reporting**

Under California law, certain individuals are legally mandated to report known or suspected instances of the abuse or neglect of elders or dependent adults. The following is a partial list of mandated reporters:

- Physicians and medical professionals
- Clergy members
- Employees of healthcare facilities, such as hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, adult day care centers and residential care facilities
- Any individual who assumes responsibility for the care or custody of an elderly person or dependent adult

Important note: Any mandated reporter who fails to report the abuse or neglect of elders or dependent adult may be guilty of a crime.

➤ **For emergencies, call 911 immediately!**

➤ **To report abuse or neglect of an elder or dependent adult in a care facility, call the Bureau of Medi-Cal Fraud and Elder Abuse at the toll-free hotline: (800) 722-0432.** For more specific information about the Bureau, please log onto our website at: <http://oag.ca.gov/bmfea/>.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and should not be construed as legal advice or as policy of the State of California. If you want advice on a particular case, you should consult an attorney or other expert. For information on free legal aid resources in your area go to <http://www.lawhelpca.org>.