

Why should I care about abuse of at-risk adults?

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Consumer Series | Family

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Abuse of at-risk adults is an under recognized problem with devastating and even life threatening consequences.

Every day, headlines throughout the U.S. paint a grim picture of at-risk adults 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 at-risk adults 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*.

Who is at risk?

Abuse of at-risk adults can occur *anywhere* – in the home, in nursing homes, or other institutions. It affects persons 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.

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, dehydration, or loss of access to elders in person or via telephone
- **Self Neglect** – Unusual weight loss, malnutrition, dehydration, unsanitary living conditions, and/or unsafe living conditions
- **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. Keep asking for assistance because it can be harder to find in some locations.
- *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,



Quick Facts

- Colorado Adult Protective Services law defines an at-risk adult as an individual eighteen years of age or older who is unable to perform or obtain services or lack sufficient understanding or capacity to make or communicate responsible decisions concerning the individual's person or affairs.
- All Colorado citizens are encouraged to immediately report suspected mistreatment or self-neglect of an at-risk adult.
- Specific occupational groups are urged by state law to report the mistreatment and/or self-neglect of an at-risk adult. A list of these occupational groups and other information is provided for Coloradans by the Division of Aging and Adult Services.
- Warning signs of abuse include signs of physical abuse, neglect, self neglect, sexual abuse and financial abuse or exploitation.

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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. They are a good defense against abuse because they see individuals on a daily basis and can observe changes.
- *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.

What Should I Do if I Suspect Elder Abuse?

Report Your Concerns.

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

Suspected mistreatment or self-neglect of an at-risk adult living in the home should be reported to the county Adult Protective Services office; visit your county's Department of Human Services website for information on reporting abuse.

Colorado Resources

Division of Aging and Adult Services
Adult Protective Services
(303) 866-2800
(888) 866-4243 toll-free in Colorado
(303) 866-2850 TTY

AARP Elder Watch Program with Colorado Attorney General
(800) 222-4444 Toll-free in Colorado

Colorado Coalition for Elder Rights and Adult Protection
(800) 773-1366

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

Together, we have the power to prevent elder abuse.

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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