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# ELDER ABUSE

**IT'S TIME  
TO FACE  
THE REALITY**



## Psychological Abuse



## Financial Abuse



## Physical Abuse



## Elder Abuse: What it is and who can help

One in five Canadians believes they know of a senior who might be experiencing some form of abuse. Seniors from all walks of life are vulnerable to elder abuse and it is happening in communities across Canada.

Outlined here is basic information on how seniors and Canadians can spot elder abuse as well as information on how to help stop it.

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### What is elder abuse?

Elder abuse is any action by someone in a relationship of trust that results in harm or distress to an older person. Neglect is a lack of action by that person in a relationship of trust with the same result. Commonly recognized types of elder abuse include physical, psychological and financial. Often, more than one type of abuse occurs at the same time. Abuse can be a single incident or a repeated pattern of behaviour.

Financial abuse is the most commonly reported type of elder abuse.

## **Why does elder abuse happen?**

Elder abuse often occurs because of the abuser's power and control over an older person. In some situations, the abuse may also result from addiction issues (drugs, alcohol or gambling), mental health problems, a cycle of family violence or ageism. Abuse can happen when the aggressor wants to intimidate, isolate, dominate or control another person.

## **Who abuses seniors?**

Older adults affected by abuse often know and trust the person mistreating them. Elder abuse can be caused by a family member, a friend, someone who provides assistance with basic needs or services, or health care providers in institutional settings. In many situations of elder abuse, the abuser is dependent on the older adult for money, food or shelter.

## **Who is affected by elder abuse?**

Most older people who experience abuse are able to make decisions for themselves.

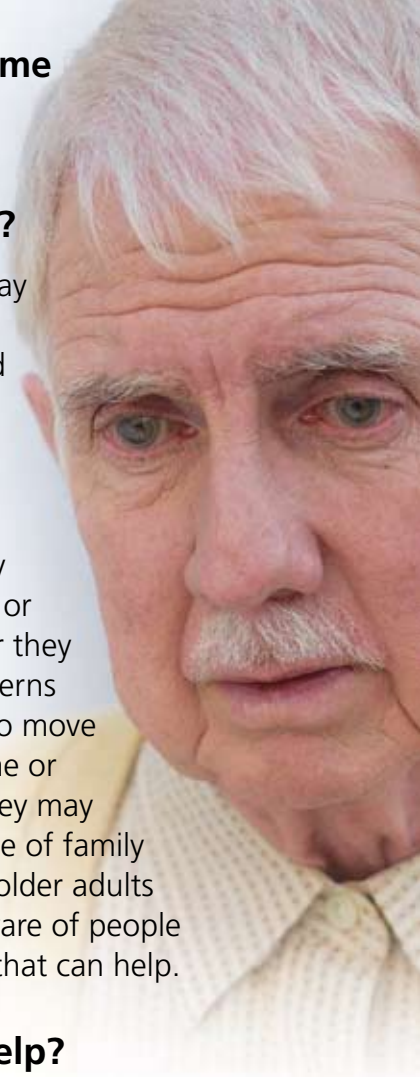
**Abuse can happen to anyone, in any family or relationship. It can happen to people of all backgrounds, ages, religions, races, cultures and ethnic origins.**

## **Why are some older adults reluctant to talk about elder abuse?**

Older adults may feel ashamed or embarrassed to tell anyone they are being abused by someone they trust. They may fear retaliation or punishment, or they may have concerns about having to move from their home or community. They may also feel a sense of family loyalty. Often, older adults may not be aware of people and resources that can help.

## **Who can help?**

It is important that the older person have access to information to make informed decisions and be aware of available help. This may include support and assistance from family members or friends, health care providers, social services, police, legal professionals and/or members of faith communities. No one ever deserves to be abused or neglected.



## **What are indicators of elder abuse and neglect?**

Elder abuse and neglect can be very difficult to detect. The following signs and symptoms may indicate that an older adult is being victimized or neglected:

- fear, anxiety, depression or passiveness in relation to a family member, friend or care provider;
- unexplained physical injuries;
- dehydration, poor nutrition or poor hygiene;
- improper use of medication;
- confusion about new legal documents, such as a new will or a new mortgage;
- sudden drop in cash flow or financial holdings; and
- reluctance to speak about the situation.

***Raising awareness among seniors about their right to live safely and securely is seen as the most important issue for governments when it comes to elder abuse, with 9 in 10 Canadians (90.5 percent) rating it as a high priority.\****

\* Results of a survey of 3,001 Canadians, including 718 seniors aged 65 and older, conducted between May 21 and June 6, 2008; Environics.

## **Physical abuse of seniors**

Physical abuse of seniors includes actions that injure or risk injuring an older person or cause them physical pain and may include:

- striking;
- hitting;
- pushing;
- shaking;
- burning;
- shoving;
- inappropriate physical and chemical restraints; or
- harm created by over or under medicating.

## **Psychological abuse of seniors**

Psychological abuse of seniors includes actions that decrease their sense of self-worth and dignity, and may include:

- insults;
- threats;
- intimidation;
- humiliation;
- harassment;
- treating them like a child; or
- isolating them from family, friends or regular activities.

## Financial abuse of seniors

Financial abuse includes actions that decrease the financial worth of an older person without benefit to that person and may include:

- misusing or stealing a senior's assets, property or money;
- cashing an elderly person's cheques without authorization;
- forging an elderly person's signature;
- unduly pressuring seniors to make or change a will, or to sign legal documents that they do not fully understand; and
- sharing an older person's home without paying a fair share of the expenses when requested.

## Neglect of seniors

Neglect includes inactions that may result in harm to an older person and may include a caregiver or family member not providing appropriate:

- water or food;
- shelter;
- clothing;
- medication or medical attention; and
- assistance with basic necessities.

Seniors most vulnerable to neglect include those who are socially isolated, and those with serious health conditions.

Abuse happens when one person hurts or mistreats another. Remember:

- Seniors are entitled to respect
- Seniors have every right to live in safety and security
- There is no excuse for abuse.



***96 percent of Canadians think most of the abuse experienced by older adults is hidden or goes undetected.\****

\* Results of a survey of 3,001 Canadians, including 718 seniors aged 65 and older, conducted between May 21 and June 6, 2008; Environics.

## Federal activities on elder abuse

Federal initiatives on elder abuse complement and build upon efforts by the provinces and territories as well as by national, regional and local organizations to address the abuse of older adults.

The **New Horizons for Seniors Program** is designed to help ensure that seniors benefit from, and contribute to, the quality of life in their communities through social participation and active living. The program was expanded in 2007 to include elder abuse awareness activities. The Elder Abuse Awareness component of the New Horizons for Seniors Program helps non-profit organizations develop national or regional education and awareness activities to reduce the incidence of abuse of seniors.

The **Family Violence Initiative (FVI)**, a partnership of 15 federal departments, agencies and Crown corporations, is coordinated by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The FVI promotes public awareness of the risk factors of family violence and the need for public involvement in responding to it. It also strengthens criminal justice, health and housing systems responses, as well as supporting data collection, research and evaluation efforts to identify effective interventions.



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To find out more on what  
the Government of Canada  
is doing for seniors visit  
**[www.seniors.gc.ca](http://www.seniors.gc.ca)** or call:

**1 800 O-Canada (1-800-622-6232)**

**TTY: 1-800-926-9105**

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