

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 Illinois' Elder Abuse and Neglect Act, elder abuse means causing any physical, mental or sexual injury to an eligible adult, including exploitation of such adult's financial resources. It includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, confinement, passive neglect, willful deprivation and financial exploitation. An eligible adult means a person 60 years of age or older who resides in a domestic living situation. (Chapter 320 ILCS 20/1 et seq.)

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 your local elder abuse provider agency. You may also make a report by calling the statewide Elder Abuse Hotline at 1-866-800-1409 or 1-888-206-1327 (TTY).

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 licensed long-term care facility, contact the Illinois Department of Public Health's Nursing Home Hotline at 1-800-252-4343. To report abuse/neglect of persons with disabilities (age 18-59), call the Illinois Department of Human Services, Office of Inspector General 24-hour Hotline at 1-800-368-1463.

Who Must Report?

Illinois' Elder Abuse and Neglect Act requires that when an older adult, because of dysfunction, is unable to self-report, professionals and state employees must report, within 24 hours, any suspected abuse, neglect or financial exploitation to the Department on Aging's Elder Abuse and Neglect Program. The requirement to report includes any time a mandated reporter is engaged in carrying out his or her professional duties. All people are encouraged, even when not required, to voluntarily report any suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of a person 60 years of age or older.

State Resources

Illinois Department on Aging
www.state.il.us/aging

Senior HelpLine: 1-800-252-8966
1-888-206-1327 (TTY)

Elder Abuse Hotline:
1-866-800-1409
1-888-206-1327 (TTY)

State Long Term Care Ombudsman Program: 1-800-252-8966
1-888-206-1327 (TTY)

Office of Attorney General Senior Citizens Consumer Fraud Hotline: 1-800-243-5377
1-800-964-3013 (TTY)

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. **State Fact Sheet: Illinois**

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* website at www.ncea.aoa.gov.

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217-785-3356 www.state.il.us/aging



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.

The template was customized with state specific information by the state's department of aging and/or protective services. The NCEA is not responsible for the state specific information, including any statistics, legal codes, or state contact information provided.

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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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