

## 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?**

North Carolina’s adult protective services law addresses abuse, neglect and exploitation. The law is designed to protect adults who are victims of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, financial exploitation, neglect, self-neglect or abandonment. Examples include physical violence, isolation, identity theft, or the theft or embezzlement of property.

[NC §108A, Article 6]

### **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, contact adult protective services at the department of social services in the county where the adult is living.

**Contact Your Local Social Services at: [www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/local](http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/local)**

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

### **Who Must Report?**

NC’s adult protective services law requires anyone who has reasonable cause to believe an adult is a victim of abuse, neglect or exploitation to report this to the county department of social services, adult protective services.

### **State Resources:**

#### **CARE-LINE**

24 hours a day, 7 days a week  
1-800-662-7030

NC Division of Aging  
and Adult Services  
(919) 733-3818

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

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## 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](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov).

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[www.ncdhs.gov/aging](http://www.ncdhs.gov/aging)



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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***