

Abuse and neglect of older adults: Understanding different experiences

Abuse and neglect in later life can affect a person's health, happiness, well-being and safety. The most common types of abuse and neglect are physical, emotional, financial, sexual, spiritual or systemic. These can occur at home, in the community or in institutional settings.

Abuse or neglect of older adults may come from family members, caregivers, acquaintances or strangers. More often, it comes from the older adult's spouse, partner or adult children. It is less common for older adults to experience harm from strangers, except for financial abuse or fraud.

Other types of abuse include ageism, medication abuse, professional abuse and resident-to-resident abuse. These can occur in formal long-term care settings, such as nursing homes or hospitals.

Older adults who are socially isolated, cognitively impaired, physically frail, living in institutionalized settings or dependent upon others for care are at an increased risk of experiencing abuse.

What is the most reported type of abuse?

Financial abuse is the most reported form of abuse faced by older adults. Older adults are vulnerable to this type of abuse because they may depend on others to help them with financial matters. Also, some older adults may lack experience with finances, or online and ATM banking.

How do different genders experience abuse?

Abuse hurts older adults of all genders. However, gender influences the risks, severity and varying effects of abuse:

- 2SLGBTQIA+ older adults are more at risk for abuse than heterosexual older adults
- Older individuals who identify or present as women. These groups are impacted more often by family violence than older men
- Older adults with fewer financial resources may find it harder to leave an abusive relationship. Historically, women have been lower income earners than men
- Older men are less likely to have a network to provide support and protection. This can increase their risk of abuse or neglect

What may prevent older adults from getting help if they are being abused or neglected?

There are many barriers to seeking help if they are being abused or neglected, including:

- Feelings of embarrassment, guilt or shame that someone they trust is hurting or taking advantage of them
- Feeling they must help and protect their spouse, partner or children, even if their spouse, partner or children are abusive
- Family members discourage older adults from taking action to protect their child,

sibling or other parent. This includes those who do not want to “take sides”

- For 2SLGBTQIA+ older adults, possible mistrust of public organizations and systems. These groups include health care systems, long-term care staff and the police
- Lack of knowledge about local resources available

What should I do if I witness elder abuse?

If you see a crime or a situation that puts an older adult at immediate risk, call the police or **9-1-1** right away. Advise the police that you want to report a situation of suspected elder abuse, neglect or self-neglect.

Call the Seniors Abuse Info Line (SAIL) at 604-437-1940 in the Lower Mainland, or toll free at 1-866-437-1940.

For more information

For more information about elder abuse and neglect, or to get help, call or visit the following services:

- Seniors First B.C. at <https://seniorsfirstbc.ca>

- Government of B.C. – [Protection from Elder Abuse or Neglect](#)
- Public Guardian and Trustee at 604-660-4444 or visit www.trustee.bc.ca if an older adult’s finances are at risk
- Legal Aid BC at 604-408-2172 or toll-free at 1-866-577-2525 or visit <https://legalaid.bc.ca>
- Victim Link toll-free in B.C. at 1-800-563-0808 or visit [VictimLinkBC](#) for information for victims of family and sexual violence or crime

For more information on abuse and older adults, visit the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC File #93a Preventing abuse and neglect in older adults](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #93b Abuse and neglect of older adults: Information for family caregivers](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #93d Financial abuse of older adults](#)

The logo for "seniors first BC" features the word "seniors" in a bold, dark blue font, "first" in a lighter blue font, and "BC" in a bold, dark blue font. The text is set against a white background with a subtle shadow effect.

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/health-library/healthlinkbc-files or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C., visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.