

***Elder Abuse Is a Serious Problem***

Each year hundreds of thousands of older persons are abused, neglected and exploited by family members and others. Many victims are people who are older, frail, and vulnerable and cannot help themselves and depend on others to meet their most basic needs.

Legislatures in all 50 states have passed some form of elder abuse prevention laws. Laws and definitions of terms vary considerably from one state to another, but all states have set up reporting systems. Generally, adult protective services (APS) agencies receive and investigate reports of suspected elder abuse.

***National Elder Abuse Incidence Study***

Reports to APS agencies of domestic elder abuse increased 150 percent between 1986 and 1996. This increase dramatically exceeded the 10 percent increase in the older population over the same period.

A national incidence study conducted in 1996 found the following:

- 551,011 persons, aged 60 and over, experienced abuse, neglect, and/or self-neglect in a one-year period;
- Almost four times as many new incidents of abuse, neglect, and/or self-neglect were not reported as those that were reported to and substantiated by adult protective services agencies;
- Persons aged 80 years and older, suffered abuse and neglect two to three times their proportion of the older population; and
- Among known perpetrators of abuse and neglect, the perpetrator was a family member in 90 percent of cases. Two-thirds of the perpetrators were adult children or spouses.

***Generally Accepted Definitions***

- **Physical abuse** is the willful infliction of physical pain or injury, e.g., slapping, bruising, sexually molesting, or restraining.
- **Sexual abuse** is the infliction of non-consensual sexual contact of any kind.
- **Psychological abuse** is the infliction of mental or emotional anguish, e.g., humiliating, intimidating, or threatening.
- **Financial or material exploitation** is the improper act or process of an individual, using the resources of an older person, without his/her consent, for someone else's benefit.
- **Neglect** is the failure of a caretaker to provide goods or services necessary to avoid physical harm, mental anguish or mental illness, e.g., abandonment, denial of food or health related services.

## ***The Role of the Administration on Aging***

The Administration on Aging (AoA) is the only federal agency dedicated to policy development, planning, and the delivery of supportive home and community-based services to our nation's diverse population of older persons and their caregivers. We provide critical information and assistance and programs that protect the rights of vulnerable, at-risk older persons through the national aging network. State elder abuse prevention activities include:

- **Professional training**, e.g., workshops for adult protective services personnel and other professional groups, statewide conferences open to all service providers with an interest in elder abuse, and development of training manuals, videos, and other materials.
- **Coordination** among state service systems and among service providers, e.g., creation of elder abuse hotlines for reporting, formation of statewide coalitions and task forces, and creation of local multi-disciplinary teams, coalitions and task forces;
- **Technical assistance**, e.g., development of policy manuals and protocols that outline the proper or preferred procedures; and
- **Public education**, e.g., development of elder abuse prevention education campaigns for the public, including media public service announcements, posters, flyers, and videos.

AoA funds the National Center on Elder Abuse as a resource for public and private agencies, professionals, service providers, and individuals interested in elder abuse prevention information, training, technical assistance and research. Their website, <http://www.elderabusecenter.org> includes a state-by-state listing of statewide toll-free telephone numbers.

## ***The Role of State and Local Adult Protective Service Agencies***

State law charges state and local Adult Protective Service (APS) agencies with the responsibility to protect and provide services to vulnerable, incapacitated, or disabled adults. The laws vary in the amount of authority they invest in state APS agencies to oversee local APS programs. Local APS agencies receive and investigate reports of suspected abuse, neglect and exploitation, and provide follow-up services.

## ***What If You Suspect Abuse?***

If you, as a concerned citizen or a service provider, suspect that abuse has occurred or is occurring, report your suspicions to the local APS agency. If the suspected incident involves an older person living in an institutional setting, call the office of the local long-term care (LTC) ombudsman.

It is essential to call the office with jurisdiction over the geographical area where the older person lives. If you are unsure which office to call, you can obtain the correct telephone number by calling AoA's Eldercare Locator at 1-800-677-1116.

### ***What Happens After You Report?***

The APS agency screens calls for potential seriousness. The agency keeps the information it receives confidential. If the agency decides the situation possibly violates state elder abuse laws, the agency assigns a caseworker to conduct an investigation (in cases of an emergency, usually within 24 hours). If the victim needs crisis intervention, services are available. If elder abuse is not substantiated, most APS agencies will work as necessary with other community agencies to obtain any social and health services that the older person needs.

The older person has the right to refuse services offered by APS. The APS agency provides services only if the older person agrees or has been declared incapacitated by the court and a guardian has been appointed. The APS agency only takes such action as a last resort.

### ***You Have Questions About the APS Services***

If you have questions about the services provided to an older person by a local APS agency, call the Director of the local APS agency or the State APS agency. Give them the name and address of the older person and ask them to look into the matter. The AoA does not have oversight responsibility for APS.

Working in close partnership with its sister agencies in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the AoA is the official Federal agency dedicated to policy development, planning and the delivery of supportive home and community-based services to older persons and their caregivers.

The AoA works through the national aging network of 56 State Units on Aging, 655 Area Agencies on Aging, 233 Tribal and Native organizations representing 300 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal organizations, and two organizations serving Native Hawaiians, plus thousands of service providers, adult care centers, caregivers, and volunteers. For more information about the AoA, please contact:



U.S. Administration on Aging  
Department of Health and Human Services  
330 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20201

Phone: (202) 401-4541  
Fax: (202) 357-3560  
e-mail: [aoainfo@aoa.gov](mailto:aoainfo@aoa.gov)  
Web: [www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)