

Elder Abuse and Neglect

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Elder abuse and neglect has become an increasing societal concern. Elder abuse is any action or lack of action done (or not done) on purpose that harms an older adult. The harm can be physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, financial, or some combination of these things. Neglecting an older adult by not doing something can be as abusive as actually hitting or hurting the older adult physically.

The *Alberta Human Rights Act* does not directly address the problem of elder abuse and neglect. However, there has been discussion amongst policy and lawmakers about whether to adapt a human rights approach to “older” people (defined by the United Nations as people over 60) and elder abuse.

For example, the World Health Organization’s Active Aging Policy Framework (2012) recognizes elder abuse as a violation of human rights and a significant cause of injury, illness, loss of productivity, isolation and despair. Every province and territory in Canada has human rights legislation that protects people from discrimination based on age. Some provinces like Quebec have addressed elder abuse/neglect in human rights legislation by adding protection against exploitation.

If you are being abused or neglected, consult with the resources at the end of this publication for more information.

**If you think you are in immediate danger
call 911.**

What does abuse look like?

Abuse can take many forms. Here are some examples of physical, emotional/psychological, sexual and financial abuse:

Physical abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sedating a person through over-medication.• Under-medicating a person when drugs are needed.• Holding back or not giving enough food.• Purposely exposing a person to severe weather.• Physically confining a person for a long time.	Emotional/psychological abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Threatening to do something to a person or to something/someone they care about.• Mental cruelty.• Forced socialization or isolation.• Treating a person like a child.• Not allowing a person to make decisions for themselves.
Sexual abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Forced oral contact (for example, kissing).• Grabbing or groping.• Genital contact.• Oral sex.• Vaginal or anal penetration.• Forced exposure to pornography.	Financial abuse <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stealing money, belongings, credit cards or pension cheques.• Forcing a person to make or change a Power of Attorney, Enduring Power of Attorney or Will.• Forging a signature on personal cheques or legal documents.• Holding back money that a person needs.• Convincing a person to invest in fraudulent investment schemes.• Pressuring a person to provide services without pay.• Forcing, convincing or tricking a person to sell a home or possessions or to pay for unnecessary services.• Abusing Power of Attorney, Guardianship or Trusteeship responsibilities.

What does neglect look like?

Neglect can include:

- Failing to provide adequate clothes, food, medication, personal care, hygiene, medical care or social activities.
- Placing the older adult in an unsafe or isolated environment.

Neglect can be intentional or unintentional. Unintentional neglect can occur when a caregiver does not provide necessities because of a lack of skill, information or interest.

What can I do in an elder abuse or neglect situation?

If you are being abused or neglected, consult with the resources at the end of this publication for more information. If you think you are in immediate danger, call 911.

If you know someone who may be abused or neglected, you can approach the discussion with the older adult about the abuse by:

- Directly and respectfully asking if the abuse is occurring.
- Encouraging them to contact others such as a doctor, lawyer, or social worker.
- Identifying benefits that can help them be more independent.
- Providing information about counselling services for the abused or abuser.
- Explaining that protecting the abuser's reputation will not stop the abuse.
- Encouraging the use of community services such as drop-in centres.
- Helping make an appointment to get a thorough health assessment.

Where to find more information

Provincial Abuse Line

Call 1.855.4HELPAB (443.5722)

Connect with resources, support, services and referrals.



Family Violence Info Line

Call 310.1818

Talk to trained staff over the phone toll-free 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in more than 170 languages.

Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta

Canadian Law for Older Adults website

<https://www.oaknet.ca/abuse>

You should not rely on this publication for legal advice.
It provides general information on Alberta law only.

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