



Help Starts Here.

Information on Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults

Abuse and neglect of older adults means... any action or inaction by any person that causes harm or risk of harm to an older person. When there is an expectation of trust, the consequences can be particularly harmful. Elder Abuse includes physical, mental or emotional harm, or damage or loss in respect of financial affairs (i.e., financial abuse). Examples include intimidation, humiliation, physical assault, sexual assault, overmedication, withholding needed medication, censoring mail, invasion or denial of privacy or denial of access to visitors, neglect and self neglect. Many types of abuse, and some types of neglect, are criminal offences. All types of abuse and neglect are harmful. If you are experiencing abuse or neglect, or have in the past, **help is available.**

What behaviours could be considered abuse and neglect?

Abuse and neglect encompass a wide range of behaviours. Here are some examples:

- assault, rough treatment, or inappropriate restraint
- failing to meet the physical needs of someone who requires care
- chronic verbal abuse that belittles or intimidates
- leaving a person who requires care alone for long periods of time
- stealing money or possessions, or using money for unauthorized purposes
- failing to meet someone's financial needs when responsible to do so
- unwanted sexual contact or sexual harassment
- giving too much or too little medication
- making decisions for someone who is capable of making them, against the person's wishes

While abuse and neglect are often intentional sometimes they are not. For example, neglect may occur if a family member is caring for an older adult and is having difficulty coping.

Who does it happen to?

Abuse and neglect happen to both women and men, and to older adults of different ages, abilities, cultural and economic backgrounds, and sexual orientation.

Older adults may be victimized in private homes, care facilities, or public places. They may be victimized by family members or relatives, care providers, strangers or others involved in their lives. Abuse and neglect are often related to older adults' living and family circumstances. For example:

- Physical violence may be a continuation of family violence that started some time ago, such as violence against women by their spouses.
- Financial abuse may be committed by adult children who are financially dependent on their parents and feel "entitled" to their money.
- Emotional abuse by family members may be associated with longstanding family problems.
- Abuse or neglect may occur when older adults become dependent on others for care. Some caregivers – whether paid workers or family members – abuse the power they have over those in their care, and breach the trust placed in them. Some caregivers may lack the ability to provide adequate care.
- Abuse may also occur to older adults who are in a caregiving role, such as when an older adult caring for a physically dependent spouse is subjected to chronic verbal abuse.





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Whatever type of relationship, past or present, that a victim has with someone, **abuse or neglect is the fault of the person who commits it.**

How may victims be affected?

Although victims are not responsible for others' abusive behaviour, victims of abuse or neglect often feel ashamed. Other feelings may include shock, numbness, a sense of violation, powerlessness, anxiety, fear, confusion, anger, depression, and grief. Some victims may feel alone. Loss of trust is a key issue for many.

Emotional distress may result in physical symptoms such as stomach trouble, headaches, or worsening health conditions. Physical violence can cause bruises, broken bones, and other injuries and health problems.

Financial abuse can have serious financial and legal consequences, as well as emotional and health consequences.

Emotional support from others and feeling in control of one's life are important for recognizing the problem, addressing it and healing/recovering.

Why don't some victims seek help?

Some older adults may be embarrassed to reveal abuse or neglect, particularly if a family member is involved. Some may not know how to get help, or be unsure if what they are experiencing is considered abuse or neglect. Some may worry about repercussions on their family member or caregiver.

Some older adults may have difficulty seeking help because of cultural or language barriers, their physical situation, or a disability. Others

may be afraid to tell. They may fear retaliation from the person who harmed them. Or they may fear losing services they need, losing their money, having to move, or breaking up the family. They may worry about not being believed.

Relatives, friends, or others who suspect abuse or neglect may not want to interfere or "take sides" in a family matter. They may worry that further harm or worse care will result if they report abuse or neglect in a care facility. Or, they may simply not know what to do.

If you are in a situation that you feel is harmful in any way, **let someone know.**

Which laws protect older adults?

The Criminal Code

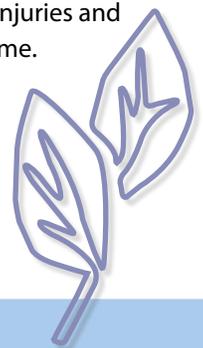
Various criminal offences apply to abuse and neglect of older adults. For example: assault, unlawfully causing bodily harm, sexual assault, uttering threats, intimidation, forcible confinement, failure to provide the necessities of life, theft, fraud, and extortion.

Older adults have the right to decide whether they want to report a crime committed against them. In some circumstances, when an older adult is unable to make this decision, someone may report the crime on their behalf. Witnesses can also report a crime.

B.C.'s Victims Legislation

The Victims of Crime Act sets out the rights of victims of crime to be treated with dignity and respect and to obtain information.

The Crime Victim Assistance Act provides for benefits to help with recovery from injuries and other costs resulting from violent crime.





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B.C.'s Adult Guardian Legislation

The Adult Guardianship Act has special provisions on abuse and neglect (including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial forms of abuse/neglect). These provisions are aimed at adults unable to get help because of a physical restraint, a physical disability, or a condition that affects their ability to make decisions about the abuse or neglect. Designated agencies respond to reports of abuse or neglect involving adults in these circumstances and notify police if it appears a criminal offence was committed.

B.C. laws include other statutes to protect adults in financial and health-care matters: the Public Guardian and Trustee Act, the Representation Agreement Act, and the Health Care (Consent) and Care Facility (Admission) Act.

What kind of help is available?

Police

Police respond to reports of persons in immediate danger or possible criminal offences. They investigate offences and provide information about other agencies that may be able to help.

Victim Service Programs

Victim Service programs are located in community agencies or police stations. They provide emotional support, justice system information, safety planning, referrals to counselling and other services, help in accessing *crime victim assistance benefits*, and support to victims going to court.

VictimLink BC provides information and referrals to all victims of crime, and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence. Call 1-800-563-0808 or go to www.victimlinkbc.ca.

Victims who are injured from violent crime can apply to the Crime Victim Assistance Program for benefits under the Crime Victim Assistance Act. Call 1-866-660-3888

The Public Guardian and Trustee

The Public Guardian and Trustee investigates reports of financial abuse and may provide financial management services for adults incapable of managing their own affairs. It makes referrals to designated agencies if there are concerns about physical risk or harm to the vulnerable adult (see resources section on back page).

Designated Agencies under the Adult Guardianship Act

Regional Health Authorities, Providence Health Care Society, and Community Living BC respond to reports of abuse or neglect of adults who cannot obtain help on their own because of certain physical or mental conditions. They can address a range of health and safety issues and help in informal or formal ways.

Other Services

Community agencies, health clinics, and hospitals provide emergency and longer-term services to help victims recover from physical and psychological trauma. Some agencies provide specialized services, for example, to persons of particular cultural backgrounds and persons with disabilities.

The BC Centre of Elder Advocacy and Support provides information and advocacy services on abuse and neglect of older adults. HealthLinkBC also provides information and advice on these issues. See **resources** section on back page.

Steps to take if you need help

- If you need immediate police or medical assistance, call 911 or the emergency number for your community.
- Talk to another adult you trust. If a family member or friend can provide emotional support or help you in practical ways, ask for help.





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- If you feel safe and able to do so, talk to the person who is causing you harm. Let that person know how the behaviour is affecting you and ask him or her to change it.
- If the situation is not urgent but you want to report a crime, call the non-emergency number for police in your community.
- If the situation is not urgent but you may need medical care, see your doctor or go to a walk-in clinic.
- Contact a victim service program in your community by getting information from VictimLink BC.
- Contact the Public Guardian and Trustee about financial abuse.
- Contact your Regional Health Authority about other forms of abuse or neglect of adults.
- If you have questions about abuse or neglect, or your rights, don't hesitate to ask a victim service worker.

Resources

BC Centre for Elder Advocacy and Support

- Call toll free in BC at 1-866-437-1940
- www.bcceas.ca

HealthLinkBC

- Call toll free in B.C. at 811, 24 hours every day
- Easy access to non-emergency health information and services
- Translation services in over 130 languages on request
- For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance (TTY), call 711
- www.healthlinkbc.ca

Crime Victim Assistance Program

- Call toll free in BC at 1-866-660-3888
- cvap@gov.bc.ca

Public Guardian and Trustee

- Call the Vancouver office at (604) 660-4444, the Victoria office at (250) 356-8160, or the Kelowna office at (250) 712-7576
- Outside these calling areas, call Enquiry BC toll free in BC at 1-800-663-7867 and ask to be transferred to the Public Guardian and Trustee
- E-mail: mail@trustee.bc.ca

Regional Health Authorities (Designated Agencies)

- Check your phone book for the number of the Regional Health Authority serving your community

VictimLink BC

- Toll-free, confidential telephone service available across BC and Yukon 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-563-0808
- VictimLink BC provides service in more than 110 languages, including 17 North American aboriginal languages
- VictimLink BC is TTY accessible. Call TTY at 604-875-0885; to call collect, please call the Telus Relay Service at 711
- Text to 604-836-6381
- www.victimlinkbc.ca
- Email: victimLinkBC@bc211.ca

Please note: This pamphlet provides general information only. It is not a legal document.

