

## NEWS RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 14, 2023

#### **World Elder Abuse Awareness Day highlights need to protect seniors throughout the year**

VICTORIA –World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) is marked on June 15 each year to raise awareness, prevent and respond to abuse and neglect of seniors.

“British Columbians greatly value and care for seniors, however we also recognize older people can be more vulnerable due to frailty and dependence on others. While many seniors will not experience abuse, it’s important for people report any concerns because we know abuse of seniors does happen,” said Isobel Mackenzie, BC Seniors Advocate.

Overall, we know the most reported form of abuse is financial, and it is most often committed by a family member. Elder abuse can also be physical, emotional, psychological, sexual or other and can include mistreatment, neglect and self-neglect perpetrated by friends, neighbours, caregivers or commercial vendors.

“Recognizing and acting when we fear a senior may be abused is critical to combat the rising prevalence of the mistreatment of older people in B.C. My office’s 2021 review and report of seniors abuse found instances are on the rise, and less than half of people who witnessed abuse reported it, mostly because they didn’t know who to call,” said Mackenzie. “If you are concerned that a senior may be being abused, please report it to your local health authority which is the agency designated to investigate.”

Signs of potential abuse include:

- being unkempt or not well nourished;
- being agitated, anxious or fearful of being alone with a specific person;
- fractures, bruising or burns including unusual patterns or location of injury;
- history or pattern of unexplained accidents or injuries;
- lack of money for necessities when income appears to be adequate;
- sudden withdrawal of money;
- unexplained or forced changes to legal documents such as property titles, wills, powers of attorney or representation agreements;
- change in social patterns, interactions and buying habits; or
- exclusion from social gatherings or inaccessibility to family or long-term friends.

“Today is an important day to raise awareness but it’s important to continue to be proactive and look out for the seniors in our lives throughout the year to ensure they are safe from abuse and neglect,” said Mackenzie.

**Quick Facts:**

- Office of the Seniors Advocate Report (December 2021) - *Hidden and Invisible: Seniors Abuse and Neglect in British Columbia*: <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/osa-reports/hidden-and-invisible-report/>.
- The review highlights that reports of abuse and neglect of people 65+ increased significantly between 2016-2021 with:
  - 49% increase in report of abuse, neglect and self-neglect to health authorities (Designated Agencies)
  - 69% increase in reports of victims of violent crime to the RCMP
  - 87% increase in reports of physical abuse to the Vancouver Police
  - 49% increase of financial abuse to the Vancouver Police
  - 30% increase in reports of abuse to bc211
- Elder abuse was officially recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in 2011. WEAAD is a day each year when the world voices its opposition to elder abuse, a human rights violation, and enhances the recognition of the dignity of older persons and their right to live free of fear and violence.

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The Office of the Seniors Advocate is an independent office of the provincial government with a mandate of monitoring seniors' services and reporting on systemic issues affecting seniors. The office also provides information and referral to seniors and their caregivers by calling toll-free 1 877 952-3181, BC211, via email at [info@seniorsadvocatebc.ca](mailto:info@seniorsadvocatebc.ca), Canada Post and the OSA web site <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/>.

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# BACKGROUND

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## Preventing and Reporting Elder Abuse and Neglect in B.C.

- **Designated Agencies (Health Authorities)**  
Designated agencies under *the Adult Guardianship Act*, have a responsibility to investigate reports of suspected abuse or neglect of vulnerable adults and seniors. To report abuse, neglect or self-neglect, whether the person is in a health facility or the community, visit:  
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/partners/health-authorities/regional-health-authorities>
- **Reporting to the Police:**  
If you think a senior is being abused, taken advantage of, or neglected, and you believe that the senior is in immediate danger, call the police (9-1-1).
- **Financial Elder Abuse**  
Information about financial elder abuse and what it looks like is available in a [video by the BC Securities Commission and Office of the Seniors Advocate](#).
- **Public Guardian and Trustee**  
If you have concerns about the financial and legal affairs of a vulnerable adult or senior:  
<https://www.trustee.bc.ca/services/services-to-adults/Pages/assessment-and-investigation-services.aspx>
- **Seniors First BC: Seniors Abuse & Information Line (SAIL)**  
SAIL is a safe place for older adults, and those who care about them, to talk to someone about situations of abuse or mistreatment, or to receive information about elder abuse prevention.  
Telephone: 1-866-437-1940 (toll-free) or 604-437-1940  
Website: <http://seniorsfirstbc.ca/>
- **Government of BC – Scams and Frauds**  
Website: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/seniors/financial-legal-matters/scams-and-fraud>

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