



Help Starts Here.

Information on Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults

Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults means... violence against seniors or mistreatment of seniors, including neglect of seniors who depend on others for care.

Abuse/neglect of older adults takes many different forms: physical, sexual, emotional, and financial. Other forms are related to giving medication improperly (e.g., to control behaviour) and taking away rights (e.g., to privacy, to make treatment decisions). Many types of abuse, and some types of neglect, are criminal offences. All types of abuse and neglect are harmful to seniors. 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 seniors 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, or others involved in their lives. Abuse and neglect are often related to seniors' 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 seniors 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 a senior caring for a physically dependent spouse is subjected to chronic verbal abuse.

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 to the healing process.

Why some victims don't seek help?

Some seniors 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 seniors 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.**

What laws protect older adults?

The Criminal Code

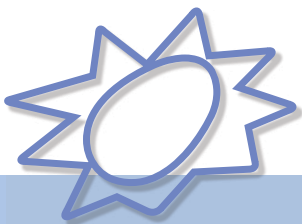
Various criminal offences apply to abuse and neglect of older adults. For example: assault, unlawfully causing bodily harm, sexual assault, uttering threats, intimidation, forcible confinement, failure to provide the necessities of life, theft, fraud, and extortion.

Seniors have the right to decide whether they want to report a crime committed against them (except for limited circumstances where they are unable to make this decision).

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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Information for Victims of Crime

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 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 Services

Victim Services 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. The VictimLINK line 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.

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 makes referrals to designated agencies (see **resources** section on back page), where reports of abuse or neglect involve adults who may not be able to manage independently. The Public Guardian and Trustee investigates reports of financial abuse, and may provide financial management services for adults incapable of managing their own affairs.

Designated Agencies under the Adult Guardianship Act

Regional Health Authorities and Community Living B.C. 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 Coalition to Eliminate the Abuse of Seniors provides information and advocacy services on abuse and neglect of seniors. The BC NurseLine 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.
- 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 victim services in your community by getting information from VictimLINK.
- 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.

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

Resources

BC Coalition to Eliminate the Abuse of Seniors

- Call toll free in BC at 1-866-437-1940
- E-mail: ceas@telus.net

BC NurseLine

- Call toll free in BC at 1-866-215-4700, 24 hours every day
- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call 1-866-889-4700
- Translation services in over 130 languages on request

Crime Victim Assistance Program

- Call toll free in BC at 1-866-660-3888
- E-mail: SGCrimeVictimAssistanceProgram@gov.bc.ca

Public Guardian and Trustee

- Call the Vancouver office at (604) 660-4444; call the Victoria office at (250) 356-8160; or call 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

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

VictimLINK (Victim Services Information and Referrals)

- Call toll free in BC at 1-800-563-0808, 24 hours every day
- If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call Information Service Vancouver's TTY Service at (604) 875-0885. If calling from outside the Lower Mainland, call collect.
- Multi-lingual

