

## Financial Abuse of Older Adults

Older adults can experience several different kinds of harm from people they rely on or trust. Abuse and neglect in later life can affect an older adult's health, happiness, and safety.

Abuse can occur to older adults of any culture, ethnic group, social background or religion. Approximately one in 12 or 46,000 older adults in British Columbia experience abuse or neglect at some point. It can take many forms, including physical, emotional, financial, sexual, spiritual or social.

### What is financial abuse?

Financial abuse is the most common type of abuse that people may experience in later life, representing over one-half of known situations of abuse. Financial abuse means using a person's money or property without their permission. Financial abuse can take away the older person's resources, choices, and options.

Financial abuse typically involves a family member or another person who puts themselves in a position of trust with the older adult. Financial abuse can occur when a family member or friend takes over financial decisions and control of the older adult's money. Financial neglect occurs if a family member or friend controls the money and does not meet the older adult's needs.

Financial abuse and neglect negatively affect the trust that family members have in each other. Adult children may not consider or realize that their actions are financially abusive or neglectful toward their parent(s).

Common examples of financial abuse include:

- A family member who repeatedly pressures a parent for money or borrows money from them, but never repays it;

- A person who misuses a power of attorney;
- A family member who sells a parent's house or other property and then uses the money for one's own benefit;
- Adult children who use a parent's pension, and then make the parent ask them for pocket money.

Financial abuse may involve any amount of money or any size of property. Some forms of financial abuse involve theft or fraud, and these are considered crimes.

### Who can experience financial abuse?

Both older men and older women can experience financial abuse. Women tend to experience financial abuse more often than men. Some women may be financially inexperienced, particularly if they have not worked outside the home or have not had much experience managing money.

Older women also tend to have fewer resources. They may be forced to live in a situation of abuse or neglect for a longer time period because they tend to live longer than men.

### Why does financial abuse occur?

Financial abuse occurs when a person's sense of need, entitlement, or greed for the money is greater than their ability to remain fair, honest and caring with the older person.

In some cultures, there are expectations and assumptions about who gets money after a parent dies. Others in the family may feel this is not fair, but they may not be able to do anything about it.

Older parents and their grown children may use banking machines or joint accounts together to make helping easier, but they may not recognize the risk in doing so.

Financial abuse is more likely to occur during a health crisis or after a major change in health. Some older adults become vulnerable to financial abuse when their spouse, partner or close friend dies. They now have many new decisions to make, but they are grieving the person's death. Older adults may also become more vulnerable to abuse during a major change in health.

### **What are the health effects of financial abuse on older adults?**

Financial abuse hurts older adults in many ways. Financial abuse seldom stops by itself and can occur with emotional abuse. Many financial abuse situations involve lies, threats or intimidation, which are forms of emotional abuse. These situations can lead to ongoing stress and financial strain for the older person.

A parent may feel very hurt by the person's behaviour, but they may not ask for the money or talk about the situation. Things can become worse over time and sometimes lead to physical abuse.

Financial abuse can use the older person's finances and reduce their ability to take care of themselves. It can negatively affect their health by reducing the resources available for proper housing, good nutrition, medication, and healthy activities.

### **How to prevent financial abuse**

If you depend on someone to do the banking, especially if your health is changing or you need to go to the hospital or into a care facility, consider alternatives such as having the bank automatically pay your bills.

If lending money, write down the amount, the person's name and the date you loaned it. This can help you remember what was given, what was promised, and whether it was a loan or a gift. It is important for both parents and children to recognize always that this is the parent's money. For any major decision involving property, consider using a notary, lawyer, or community advocate.

### **For more information**

**If you discover a crime or dangerous situation is occurring to an older adult, call the police or 911 immediately.** If you are not sure if an older person is being abused or neglected and you want to talk to a health professional, you can call the BC NurseLine 24 hours a day for information and advice.

For resources available in your community, contact the **Home and Community Care Office** in your local health authority, or contact the **B.C. Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors** at 604-437-1940 or at [www.bcceas.ca](http://www.bcceas.ca).

For information on legal services, including how to access legal aid and advice, contact the **Legal Services Society of BC LawLINE** at 604-408-2172 or 1-866-577-2525 (outside of Greater Vancouver) or at [www.lss.bc.ca](http://www.lss.bc.ca).

**For more information, see other topics in the [BC HealthFiles Elder Abuse Prevention Series](#).**



For more BC HealthFile topics visit [www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/index.stm), or visit your local public health unit.

**Call the BC NurseLine to speak to a registered nurse, available 24-hours every day:**

- In Greater Vancouver, call 604-215-4700
- In BC, call toll-free 1-866-215-4700
- Deaf and hearing-impaired, call 1-866-889-4700
- Pharmacist available 5pm to 9am every day
- Translation services in over 130 languages upon request.

**Visit BC HealthGuide OnLine – a world of health information you can trust at [www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org)**