

## *Preventing Abuse and Financial Exploitation of Elders*

*James C. Backstrom  
Dakota County Attorney*

*August 7, 2014*

The Administration on Aging expects that by 2030, the U.S. population over age 65 will have doubled from 2000, with older adults representing 19% of the population.

Stop Abuse and Financial Exploitation of Elders in Minnesota (or S.A.F.E.) is an initiative that began in 2012. A collaboration of agencies, including my Office, joined to address abuse and exploitation against adults in later life. Our mission is to increase knowledge of and access to services for adults later in life who are victimized through abuse and/or financial exploitation.

S.A.F.E. created a 26 minute documentary and DVD called “[Elder Victims: Abused, Exploited, Alone](#)” which is available free of charge through my Office. This was co-produced with Twin Cities Public Television. A mobile phone app was developed for law enforcement which provides tools for investigating and serving victims of these crimes (available through Android or Apple). The website ([www.safemn.org](http://www.safemn.org)) offers handouts and resources free of charge.

### **What is elder abuse?**

In general, elder abuse is any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to an older adult. It's defined by age, relationship, or type of abuse. Victims are often on a continuum from active to having various medical, cognitive or mobility issues. According to the National Institute of Justice, 1 in 10 persons over the age of 60 will be victims of elder abuse during their lifetime.

Victims of elder financial abuse in the U.S. lose close to \$3 Billion each year.<sup>3</sup> What's even more disturbing, is the fact that 2/3 of perpetrators of elder abuse are family members, trusted individuals or caregivers.

### **What types of abuse are we seeing in Dakota County?**

- **Physical abuse is** causing or threatening physical pain or injury.
- **Emotional abuse is** causing or threatening mental pain, anguish or distress with words or actions.
- **Sexual abuse includes** unwanted sexual contact of any kind including forcing an elder to witness sexual behaviors.
- **Financial exploitation involves** the improper taking, misuse, or concealment of funds, property, or assets.

- **Neglect involves** refusal or failure by those responsible to provide necessary food, shelter, health care or protection.

**What are the warning signs and, as a caregiver, what should I be looking for?**

- Physical abuse – bruises, pressure marks, broken bones, burns, weight loss, malnutrition, or poor hygiene.
- Financial abuse – abrupt transfers, changes to Power of Attorney or will, unpaid bills.
- Changes in behavior – strained relationships between caregiver and elderly person, withdrawal from normal activities, unusual depression, or change in alertness.

**Where can this occur?**

- **In the home:** Elder abuse is often committed by someone the elder trusts: a spouse, a sibling, a child or grandchild, a friend, or a caregiver.
- **In a residential facility:** Elder abuse in residential facilities, such as nursing homes and assisted living facilities, may be committed by staff of the business or by visitors or family members.
- Elder abuse can happen anywhere **in the community:** on a street corner, in the grocery store, at the bank, or elsewhere.

How can you help? If you see any of the warning signs of elder abuse, don't be afraid to ask questions, such as:

- 1. Is someone taking or using your money without your permission?**
- 2. Are you afraid of anyone?**
- 3. Is anybody hurting you?**

What should you do if you suspect that you or someone you know is being abused, neglected or exploited? If the elder is in crisis or immediate danger, call 911. Otherwise, make a report with the local law enforcement where the abuse is occurring. You could also contact **Dakota County Adult Protection** at 651-554-6424, which has a hotline answered 24 hours a day. Other resources include:

- The Senior LinkAge Line® at 1-800-333-2433.
- If the elder is living in a long term care facility, you should contact the Ombudsman for Long Term Care at 1-800-657-3591.

<sup>3</sup> Blancato, Robert: Violence Against Older Women and The Elder Justice Act; 3/04/12