



# Preventing Abuse of Older Adults

## Information Sheet

### Get Help

**If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911.**

For help in your community or for more information, please call the 24-hour Family Violence Info Line toll-free at **310-1818** or visit [www.familyviolence.alberta.ca](http://www.familyviolence.alberta.ca).

Alberta Children and Youth Services is proud to lead Alberta's Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying Initiative.

### We don't like to think it, but some older adults and elders are abused

- Most older adults get along well with their family members. But in some cases, older adults are abused by family members, caregivers or strangers
- Abuse of family members happens to both older and younger family members. In Canadian surveys, older adults are less likely than younger people to report to police abuse or neglect within their family relationships.<sup>1</sup> However, abuse of older adults does happen
- A 1999 Statistics Canada survey indicates that about seven per cent of older Canadians have reported they have experienced some form of emotional or financial abuse in the previous five years<sup>2</sup>

### What is abuse of older adults?

#### Abuse tactics

- Abuse of older adults is any action or inaction that can harm an older person's health or well-being. Abusive behaviour is used to control, harm or frighten the older person
- Abuse of older adults can take many forms. Abuse tactics may be emotional, financial, spiritual, medical, physical or sexual. Abuse tactics may also include intimidation or neglect

#### Who is abused?

- Any older person may become a victim of abuse. Men and women of any income level, cultural or ethnic group can be victims of abuse. Those who have physical or mental health issues are at greater risk, but healthy seniors may also be victims
- Ninety per cent of older adults live independently. That makes it easier for abuse of all kinds to go undetected. As the number of older adults in our population increases, abuse of older adults may increase<sup>3</sup>

#### Who abuses older adults?

- In 2004, 39 per cent of older women and 21 per cent of older men who were victimized, were victimized by a family member<sup>4</sup>
- In some cases, the abuse of older adults is a continuation of years of spousal abuse



- In some cases, adult sons or daughters who abuse their older parents live in the same home as the older parents
- In cases of physical violence reported to police, older women were more likely to be abused by their spouses. Older men were more likely to be abused by their adult children

## *How to help* an abused older adult

### If you suspect that an older adult is being abused

1. Understand the older adult may not know this is abuse, or may not want to admit it.
2. Find the right words to open the door for the person to talk.
  - “You’re not alone. It can happen to anyone. It’s not your fault and you didn’t do anything wrong. But we do need to protect you. Let’s figure out how to do that. I know we will be able to find help”
  - “Whatever happens, and whatever you decide to do, I’ll back you. Tell me how can I help – now or whenever”
3. Once the older adult understands this is an abusive situation, encourage the person to contact community agencies and other resources to get help. These organizations can help the person assess their level of risk or danger, help them with safety planning and connect them to other sources of help.

## *What are clues* that an older adult is being abused?

Any of the following might be a clue that someone is abusing an older adult:

### If there is emotional or physical abuse, the older adult may:

- Seem frightened, withdrawn, depressed or apathetic
- Seem groggy or “dopey”
- Seem too thin or have lost a lot of weight
- Be wearing dirty clothing or clothes not suitable for the season
- Not have glasses, hearing aid or dentures
- Have bruises, sores or broken bones

### If there is financial abuse, there may be:

- Unexplained sale of property or items missing from the victim’s home
- Someone other than the older adult cashing pension cheques, or the older adult’s bank account being overdrawn

<sup>1</sup> Ogradnik, L. (Ed.). (2008, October). *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 2008* (Catalogue No. 85-224-X). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/pdfs/fv-85-224-X1E-2008\\_e.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/pdfs/fv-85-224-X1E-2008_e.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Trainor, C. (Ed.). (2002, June). *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 2002* (Catalogue No. 85-224-X1E). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/85-224-X1E/85-224-X1E00002.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ogradnik, L. (Ed.). (2006, July). *Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile 2006* (Catalogue No. 85-224-X1E). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada. Retrieved from [http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/pdfs/fv-85-224-X1E2006000\\_e.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/pdfs/fv-85-224-X1E2006000_e.pdf)