

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM FINANCIAL ABUSE

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Did you know that financial abuse is the number one crime against older Canadians? You don't have to have a lot of money to be targeted. Unfortunately it is commonly a trusted person in the older person's life such as a spouse, adult child, caregiver or friend who may commit the financial abuse. Often the money or property is never recovered.

Some common types of frauds and scams include the following:

a) Identity theft

This occurs when someone tries to steal your personal information, so that they pretend to be you. They may use this information to apply for a credit card, take out a loan or mortgage, get a cell phone or withdraw money from the bank. The person will try to get information about your bank card number, your PIN or personal identification number, health card number, driver's license or social insurance number. Report to the bank any lost or stolen wallet, any missing mail you are expecting, or any unusual activity on your account.

b) Credit/debit card frauds

This occurs when a person uses your card, or a copy of it, to make purchases or withdraw money from your account. Reduce the risk of your credit card or debit card information being stolen or misused by:

- keeping your card in sight
- memorizing your PIN - DO NOT write it down
- shielding your hand when you enter your PIN
- NEVER giving your PIN or account passwords to another person.

c) Online scams

It is hard to keep up to the variety of online scams appearing every day. Some examples include the following:

- asking for your help such as "Nigerian letter scam"
- saying there is a problem with your bank account or tax return, or that your computer is running slowly or has viruses

- offering a prize but asking you to pay bogus taxes or fees or buy a product or service first in order to receive the prize
- offering an online auction – where items are misrepresented or not delivered
- being led to a fraudulent copy of a legitimate website where you're asked to provide personal information
- malicious software transmitted by opening e-mail, accessing a website, or downloading infected programs.

Sometimes scams are easy to spot because of spelling and other mistakes. Check first before you respond to suspicious email. For information on the latest scams check out the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre at www.canadianantifraudcentre.ca or phone your local RCMP.

d) Phone and door-to-door scams

Someone may phone or visit you and pretend to be from a charity, an employee of a credit card company, providing a house renovation service, or claiming to be a distant relative. They may offer you free travel or accommodations, or say that you have won a prize (but you have to cover the taxes or transportation, legal fees, etc.). During this holiday time, callers may be claiming to be from a charity asking for your donations, and may use a name similar to a legitimate charity. True charitable organizations are worth supporting, however the following precautions should be taken:

- Ask for the information in writing. Ask how much of your donation goes directly to the charity, and how much to administrative costs.
- Never give out your personal or financial information over the phone or at the door
- Call the charity and find out if they know about the appeal.
- Check out Revenue Canada at 1-800-267-2384 to see if the organization is registered. Request a charitable tax receipt.

(The information above has been adapted from "Frauds and Scams", a publication from the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors and "Seniors Guidebook to Safety and Security" from the RCMP.)

For further information on protecting yourself from financial abuse, check out the Canadian Antifraud Centre at www.canadianantifraudcentre.ca or phone 1-888-495-8501. Contact your local RCMP and ask for or print off the booklet, *Seniors' Guidebook to Safety and Security* from their website at www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca (under "Publications" – Crime Prevention)

For assistance in dealing with financial abuse or other kinds of abuse or neglect of older adults, contact Seniors' Services/Adult Protection Unit, Yukon Health & Social Services, 456-3946 in Whitehorse or toll free 1-800-661-0408 extension 3946.

Remember prevention is key. Share this article with others. For information on legal tools that can reduce the risk of abuse, check out the Yukon Public Legal Education Association website at www.yplea.com and click on Seniors Education. We have print information in our office on wills and estates, enduring power of attorney, advance directives and other legal information of use to seniors and elders. Call me at 393-2044 or email yplea.seniors@gmail.com.