

# Elder Abuse: A Community Problem with Community Solutions

*Your involvement matters in the prevention of the devastating and life-threatening problem of elder abuse.*

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“We are losing our elders to an epidemic rarely talked about or even acknowledged. An epidemic that leaves some ashamed, some afraid and too many dead.”

- *The American Academy of Family Physicians*



# The Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention

*Committed to ending elder abuse in Maine.*

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PREVENTION

# The Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention

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The mission of the Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention (MCEAP) is to support collaborative efforts to combat elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

- ▶ MCEAP promotes a unifying vision which addresses elder abuse, and drives this vision by advocating for public policy, supporting collaboration between existing resources, and facilitating cross disciplinary communication.
- ▶ MCEAP acts as a resource for training and education efforts among existing stakeholders.

# The Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention

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MCEAP is comprised of public and private organizations and agencies, and individuals from all across Maine.

- ▶ For more information, or to join the Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention, please visit:
  - ▶ [www.elderabuseprevention.info](http://www.elderabuseprevention.info)

# Learn about Elder Abuse

*What it is, who it involves, how often it happens, why victims might not seek help, and how victims are impacted.*

# “ELDER ABUSE” DEFINED

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Generally, **elder abuse** is:

- ▶ Any physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, neglect, abandonment, or financial exploitation of an older adult by another person or entity that occurs in any setting (e.g., home, community, or facility), either within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust and/or when an older adult is targeted based on age or disability.

# TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE

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## ▶ **Physical abuse**

- ▶ Inflicting, or threatening to inflict, physical pain or injury on a vulnerable older adult, or depriving them of a basic need.

## ▶ **Sexual abuse**

- ▶ Non-consensual sexual contact of any kind, or coercing an older adult to witness sexual behaviors.

## ▶ **Psychological abuse**

- ▶ Inflicting mental pain, anguish, or distress on an older adult through verbal or nonverbal acts.

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# TYPES OF ELDER ABUSE

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## ▶ **Neglect**

- ▶ Refusal or failure by those responsible to provide food, shelter, health care or protection for a vulnerable older adult.

## ▶ **Abandonment / Isolation**

- ▶ The desertion of a vulnerable older adult by anyone who has assumed the responsibility for care or custody of that older adult.

## ▶ **Financial Exploitation**

- ▶ Illegal taking, misuse, or concealment of funds, property, or assets of a vulnerable older adult.

*The different types of elder abuse often occur at the same time.*

# VICTIMS OF ELDER ABUSE

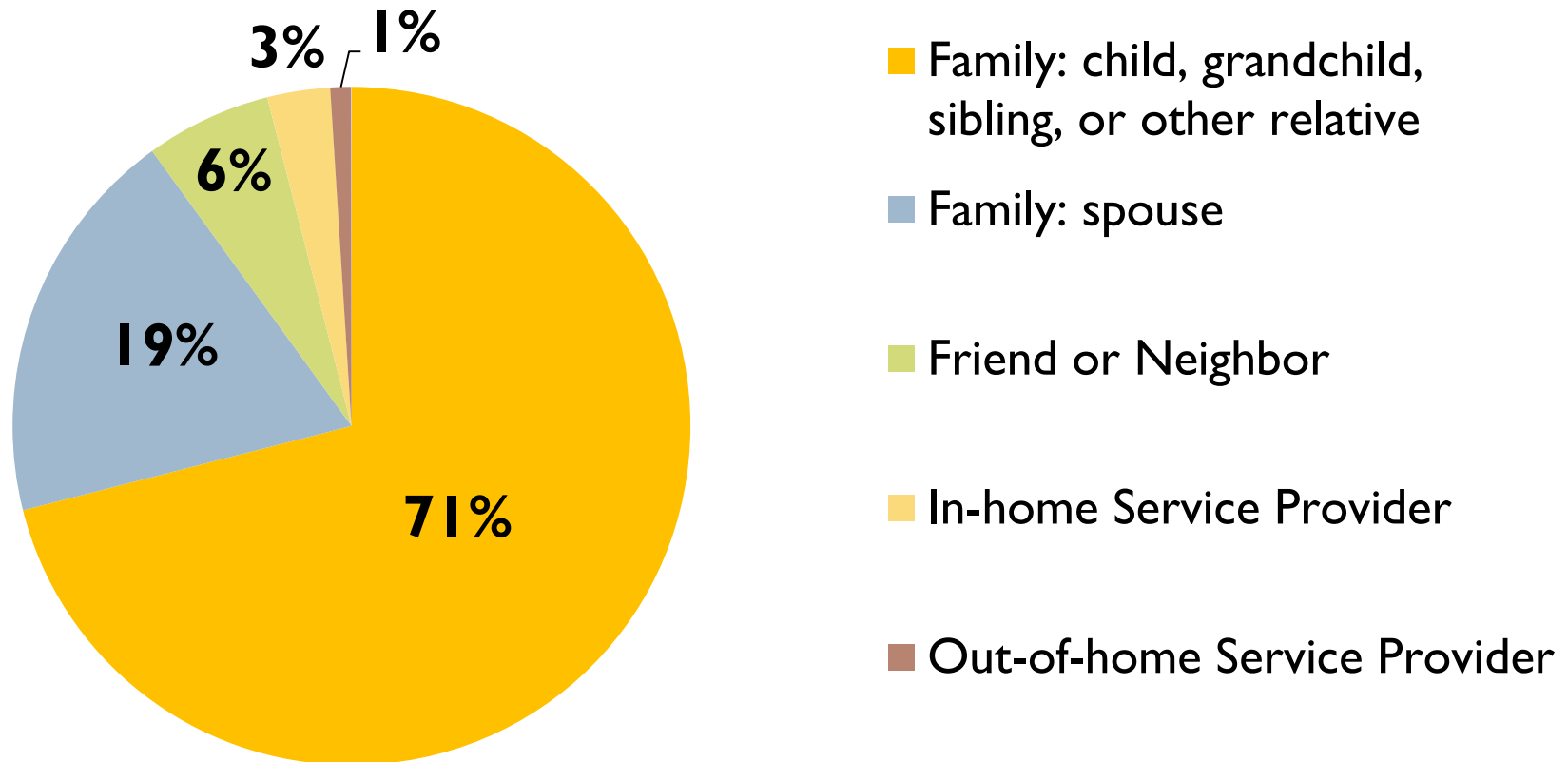
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**Abuse can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time.**

- ▶ Elder abuse affects both men and women, all cultures, races, and socio-economic groups.
- ▶ It happens in any setting: in the home, in long-term care facilities, and in the community.
- ▶ Women and “older” elders (80 years old and older) are the most common victims of elder abuse.

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# PERPETRATORS OF ELDER ABUSE



Elder abuse is most often perpetrated by the victim's own family members.  
**Approximately 90% of abusers are family members.**

# PREVALENCE

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**Studies indicate that somewhere between 11-24% of people over age 60 experience some form of abuse or neglect each year.**

- ▶ This means that tens of thousands of older adults in Maine are abused each year. As Maine's vulnerable population continues to grow at a rapid pace, more and more Mainers will be impacted by elder abuse.
- ▶ Without action, this problem will only become more extreme. It is projected that by 2030, Maine's 65 and older population will surpass the national average with over **1 in 4** people falling within this age range.



*This graphic depicts the 11% of people impacted by elder abuse.*

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# ELDER ABUSE REPORTS: “THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG”



Elder abuse is significantly underreported. Though exact numbers are unknown, it is estimated that only 1 in 14 cases of abuse is actually reported to the authorities.

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# ELDER ABUSE REPORTS: “THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG”

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There are several potential reasons why a victim might not report abuse:

- ▶ The victim is **dependent** on the abuser for care and he or she is threatened with the loss of independence if the abuse is reported.
- ▶ When the abuse is at the hands of a loved one or family member the victim might have to overcome several **emotional responses** prior to feeling comfortable enough to tell someone.
- ▶ The victim might be **fearful** of the system response.
- ▶ The victim might be fearful of **retaliation**.
- ▶ The victim is **socially isolated**.
- ▶ The victim might be in **denial** that they are experiencing abuse, or **unaware** that what they are experiencing is abuse or neglect.
- ▶ Generational values can lead a victim to believe that what they are experiencing is normal, or a **“family problem”** not to be shared with community service providers.



# THE IMPACT OF ELDER ABUSE

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- ▶ Victims of elder abuse are **three times more likely to die** within the next decade compared to their non-abused contemporaries.
- ▶ Older victims often experience shame, pain, economic loss, spiritual and physical anguish, institutionalization, and **poor quality of life**.
- ▶ **Financial losses are devastating** for older adults, making it difficult or impossible to obtain housing, food, and other needed services.

# Take Action to End Elder Abuse

*Elder Abuse is a community problem with a community solution.*

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# RAISE AWARENESS

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Through awareness, it is possible to end elder abuse in Maine and across the world. **Your involvement matters!**

- ▶ Take action to help end elder abuse in your family, among your friends, and in your community.



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# RECOGNIZE THE RED FLAGS OF ABUSE

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Learning to recognize the **red flags** of elder abuse is an important first step in prevention!



# RED FLAGS

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- ▶ Sudden changes in the older adult's appearance: poor hygiene, dressed improperly for the weather, sunken eyes, bedsores, loss of weight.
- ▶ Sudden changes in the older adult's personality: increased or unreasonable levels of anxiety, fearfulness and/or depression.
- ▶ The older adult becomes uncommunicative and unresponsive.
- ▶ Sudden or swift decline in the health: malnourishment or sudden loss of weight.
- ▶ Visible injury that has not been cared for, or cannot be explained with a realistic explanation.



# RED FLAGS

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- ▶ A change in routine: no longer attending events or participating in events enjoyed in the past.
- ▶ Social isolation or the older adult not allowed visitors.
- ▶ Sudden loss of ability to meet financial obligations.
- ▶ Going without things the older adult needs or has always had in the past.
- ▶ The older adult states or implies that they have had conflicts or problems with their caregiver.

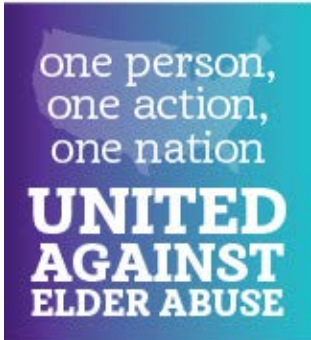
# SAY SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING, PUT SUPPORTS IN PLACE!

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- ▶ **Talk about it.** Make sure friends and family are aware of the risks of elder abuse.
- ▶ **Plan ahead.** Encourage friends and family to plan for their future.
- ▶ Learn to recognize the **red flags** of elder abuse.
- ▶ If you see something that concerns you, **report it.**



# ENGAGE COMMUNITY



- ▶ Knowing the **red flags** of elder abuse and **where to go for help** are important first steps in community education and elder abuse prevention.
- ▶ Engage people through grassroots organizing, campaigning for public awareness, and celebrating observances such as **Older Americans Month (May)**, or **Elder Abuse Awareness Day (June 15th)**.

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# Elder Abuse Task Force (EATF) or Triad

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Become an active member and advocate in your local community.

EATF groups are multidisciplinary community partnerships that meet regularly to work toward the common goal of ending elder abuse and helping seniors who have experienced abuse.

- ▶ If you want to find an active group or start a new EATF in your community, visit: [www.elderabuseprevention.info](http://www.elderabuseprevention.info) for tips on how to do this, including a step-by-step guide.

Triad is a national community policing initiative to meet the crime-safety needs of seniors.

- ▶ To find a Triad in your area, contact your local Sheriff.

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# Getting Help

*Maine agencies that can respond to an elder abuse situation.*



# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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**Disclaimer:** Nothing in this presentation is meant to provide legal advice or information pertaining to any kind of legal reporting requirement that might apply to any given profession.

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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**If you are worried about immediate danger, call 911!**

If the threat of danger is not immediate, try talking to the senior about your concerns.

- ▶ Encourage him or her to seek help. Offer your support and be respectful. Understand that these situations can be incredibly complicated. Most victims know when they are being mistreated and may not feel empowered or able to stop the abuse. Manipulation, deceit, and exploitation may make it very difficult for a senior to recognize they are being mistreated. This is especially true if the situation involves a family member.

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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Report your concerns to **Adult Protective Services**. Even if you aren't sure that what you are seeing is abuse, it's best to let APS know of your concerns.

- ▶ 24-hour, 7 days/week toll-free – 1-800-624-8404
- ▶ 207-624-8404 if calling from outside the U.S.
- ▶ TTY (24/7) Maine relay **711**
- ▶ If your suspicions are confirmed, APS will help the senior get to a safe place and get appropriate support services.

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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Legal Services for the Elderly (LSE) offers **free** and **confidential** legal help to Mainers age 60 and older.

- ▶ The attorneys at LSE can help Maine seniors with a wide range of civil legal problems including elder abuse and exploitation, debt collection, housing issues, and problems with public benefits.

[www.mainelse.org](http://www.mainelse.org)

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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Getting free and confidential help from LSE is easy. The first step is for the senior to call the Helpline and ask for help.

**1-800-750-5353**

- ▶ You can help the senior call by using a speaker phone, calling with the senior on a conference call, or making the initial call and then putting the senior on the phone to ask for help. Once a senior makes a request for help and gives LSE permission to speak with others, LSE can begin to gather information from those trying to help the senior.
- ▶ The phone is answered Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. and those calling after hours can leave a message.

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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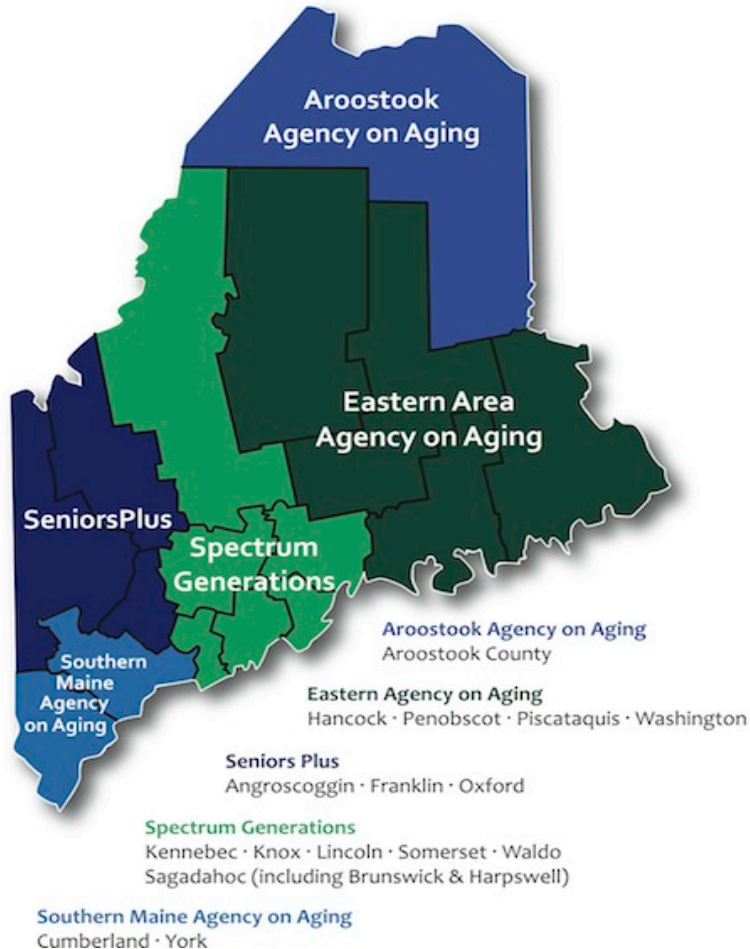


Maine's Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) are the leading source of information for seniors on aging, healthy living and benefits. If you make a referral to your local AAA, the agency will wrap services around the senior. The AAA makes sure seniors:

- ▶ Are getting the nutrition they need (Meals on Wheels/Congregate)
- ▶ Are getting benefits they're entitled to (SNAP, VA, Medicare, etc)
- ▶ Get connected with services in their area (heat, food, transportation)
- ▶ Get help managing their chronic conditions/preventing falls
- ▶ Get help providing care to loved ones (respite, training)
- ▶ Understand their options as they age (long term care)
- ▶ Are referred to help if they're victims of abuse

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

## 5 Area Agencies on Aging in Maine



Your local Area Agency on Aging has supports and services available to assist older victims of financial exploitation, abuse, and neglect.

Contacting your local Area Agency on Aging requires the senior's consent.

**One number gets you to your  
local agency  
1-877-353-3771**

[www.maine4a.org](http://www.maine4a.org)

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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## **Domestic Violence affects people of all ages!**

If you suspect someone is the victim of domestic violence, Maine's domestic violence resource centers can help.

- ▶ The eight domestic violence resource centers of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence offer victims safety, provide advocacy, support, and other needed services. Victim's advocates can be an excellent source of support for both you and the person you want to help.



# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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Victims may be afraid to call. Support their decisions.

Make the call together if that seems helpful.

Ensure victims that this support is confidential and can be anonymous.

Call to educate yourself and find out how to be most supportive and helpful to someone who is being abused.

Call the Domestic Violence Helpline:

- ▶ **(24/7) 1-866-83-4HELP**
- ▶ **(24/7) TTY 1-800-437-1220**

[www.mcedv.org](http://www.mcedv.org)

# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

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If you suspect someone is the victim of sexual abuse, Maine's sexual assault support centers can help.

Call the Sexual Assault Crisis and Support line:

- ▶ **(24/7) 1-800-871-7741**
- ▶ **(24/7) TTY 1-888-458-5599**

[www.mecasa.org](http://www.mecasa.org)



Questions?

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# NO EXCUSE FOR ELDER ABUSE



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