



# Elder financial abuse is on the rise — here's what you need to know

Learn how to keep assets safe from scams and what to do if you suspect financial abuse



Financial abuse among older adults is on the rise, and experts say that not only do most cases go unreported, but they can also go unnoticed for quite a while. Here's what you need to know to keep yourself and loved ones safe:

- Financial abuse costs families billions of dollars annually. One study found that it causes \$2.6 billion in losses every year — and elders who experience abuse are more than three times as likely to die as a direct result.
- Know who's at risk: According to a report from the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, three in four older adults who experienced financial abuse had one or more serious health issues. More than half required assistance with daily activities.
- In one in three cases of elder financial abuse, the victim and perpetrator live in the same home.

- As the boomer generation continues to age, the number of cases of elder financial abuse is expected to increase.

These incidents don't just happen stateside. They happen here at home, too. Josephine Mariano, Bank of Guam Senior Vice President and Central Operations and BSA Administrator reports, "We've seen it all: lottery scams, inheritance scams, love letter scams, etc. Education is important and we do our best each day to protect our customers from falling victim."

"The best advice we can give customers and especially our elders is DO NOT ever disclose your credit card number, debit card number, bank account number to anyone over the phone, via email or social media," Mariano says. "If you suspect that the call is a scam, take down as much information as you can (name, phone number, etc.) and call the police or report it to the Office of the Attorney General."

Thankfully, there's plenty you can do to stay safe. Start by getting to know the warning signs:

- Most cases go unreported because the elder is either unable or embarrassed to speak up. Talk to your loved one regularly about their finances. If your loved one discovers they have been part of a financial scam, they may feel shame or guilt and be reluctant to talk about money or the situation. (This is especially true if the perpetrator is someone they know and trusted.) Don't get angry — this may make the situation worse for them.
- Be on the lookout for unusual activity, such as frequent or large withdrawals, hidden or missing financial documents, a change in routine (ATM withdrawals instead of visiting a bank branch, for example), new credit cards or accounts, checks written as gifts or loans, late or missed payments, loans or payments to new "friends" or helpers, closing accounts and withdrawing from investment accounts (without regard for the associated fees).
- Watch for missing — and new — valuables and other property, including cars and real estate. Ask for documentation of any sales or purchases.
- In more overt cases of financial abuse, bank statements may be sent to a new address without consent, or someone may take control of your loved one's finances without the proper power of attorney in place.

Here's how you can be pro-active with your own and your loved ones' finances to stay safe and protected:

- Stay connected. Those who are isolated, lonely or experiencing grief are more at risk of experiencing elder financial abuse.
- Protect checking accounts by treating checkbooks like cash — keep them in a safe place, and check balances regularly. All your accounts may not be attached to an ATM card, however it is best practice to monitor account balances. Use checks and debit or credit cards instead of cash to have a record of all payments.
- Don't share passwords, PINs and other sensitive information. If your loved one has caregivers in their home, make sure that all passwords are hidden (not posted in plain sight or accessible on a shared computer).
- Check credit reports regularly, and help your loved one report any suspicious activity to the proper authorities. You can access your credit reports for free at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com).
- Help your loved one check their finances routinely, including all checking, savings, investment and retirement accounts. If they don't want to learn to use online or mobile banking tools, work with them so that a responsible party can monitor their accounts for fraud or misuse.
- If your loved one is no longer able to mind their own finances, speak with an attorney about your options. A power of attorney is a certified document that allows someone to legally act on behalf of

another. Such a document can help prevent your loved one from being taken advantage of as they age. Having one in place ahead of time can prevent confusion and potential problems later on.

- Be aware of the latest scams that target older adults. Remind your loved one that no one will call them to ask for money transfers, credit card information or other sensitive information and to not share such information via email or text message.

“If you (or a loved one) did disclose sensitive information such as your card numbers, bank account numbers and social security number, immediately call your bank so we can help you protect the funds in your account,” Mariano advises.

Show compassion and empathy for your loved one. Everyone makes mistakes, and they likely want to see the best in people. Remind them that you are there to support them and can help them set up bank accounts or safeguard their finances.

If you have additional questions about protecting your assets or a loved one’s, contact Bank of Guam.

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*Information obtained from the Elder Financial Protection Network and the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission Office of the Investor Advocate.*