



# Preventing Abuse and Neglect of Older Adults



**Community Legal  
Information**  
Empowerment Through Knowledge

# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Prevention Tips</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>What is abuse and neglect of older adults?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>What are the types of abuse?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Who are the victims of abuse?</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>What are the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Why does abuse happen?</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Why is abuse often not reported?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Is there a law that protects older adults?</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>What do victims of abuse need?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>In cases of self-neglect, can I force someone to get help?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>How do I report abuse to the police?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Where else can I get help?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Support Services</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>More Resources</b>	<b>26</b>

# Introduction

This publication is for anyone who wants to be informed about preventing abuse and neglect of older adults on PEI, Canada.

This publication gives:

- Information about abuse and neglect.
- Tips for preventing abuse and neglect.
- Information about support services and resources.

## About Us

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Community Legal Information provides understandable and useful information about the law and the justice system in Prince Edward Island.

### Contact

**Telephone**

902-892-0853

1-800-240-9798

**E-mail Address**

info@legalinfopei.ca

**Website**

[www.legalinfopei.ca](http://www.legalinfopei.ca)

**Social Media**

Community Legal Information  
@legalinfopei



**The information in this guide is not legal advice, and it does not replace guidance from a lawyer.**

# Prevention Tips

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## Prevention Tips for You

- Plan for your future while you are still healthy and independent. Make a power of attorney, will, and healthcare directive.
- Keep your home secure.
- Stay involved with your community and friends.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Check the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre website for previous and current scams:  
[www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca](http://www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca)
- Register your phone number on Canada's Do Not Call List to prevent being scammed by unknown callers:  
[www.lnnte-dncl.gc.ca/en](http://www.lnnte-dncl.gc.ca/en)
- Get a phone with caller ID and don't answer calls from unknown callers.

## Prevention Tips for Families and Caregivers

- Help your aging family member or friend by staying informed. Read Community Legal Information's publications on wills, power of attorney, and healthcare directives.
- Make decisions that are respectful and considerate of the older adult.
- Do a safety check of the home. Is the house/ entrance/ bathroom accessible? Are there things to trip on?
- Be honest with yourself about what you can do. Get help when you need it.
- Be prepared for caregiver stress and plan for respite care.
- Learn about community resources available for older adults.
- For more information, see Elder Abuse Awareness: [www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/campaigns/elder-abuse.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/campaigns/elder-abuse.html)





# What is abuse and neglect of older adults?

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Many families experience abuse or violence at home. **Abuse** is any action or inaction that harms a person's health and well-being. Abuse of older adults is sometimes called elder abuse or senior abuse.

An older adult can be abused by:

- A family member or friend.
- A paid caregiver.
- A romantic partner.
- Someone they rely on for basic needs.
- Staff in hospitals or group residential settings, such as community care facilities, private and public nursing homes, or seniors housing.
- Someone in a position of trust.
- A stranger pretending to be a person of authority – for example, scam callers.

Someone who abuses an older adult usually:

- Has control or influence over the victim.
- Is known and trusted by the victim. Some victims of abuse may depend on the people who hurt them for food, shelter, personal care, companionship, or transportation.

Abuse can happen to older adults who are:

- Competent and able to make decisions for themselves. Competent means able to understand financial or legal matters and make informed legal or financial decisions.
- Incompetent. Incompetent means unable to understand financial or legal matters and make informed legal or financial decisions.



**Abuse can be a crime. For example, assault and theft are crimes.**

## What are the types of abuse?

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The abuse may be one incident. The abuse may be several small incidents that, if seen alone, might not be considered abuse.

Physical abuse includes:

- Assaulting someone (slapping, pushing, hitting, or kicking).
- Forcing someone to stay in a room, bed, or chair.
- Causing physical pain.
- Handling roughly.

Sexual abuse includes:

- Making unwanted sexual comments or jokes.
- Watching or recording someone for a sexual purpose without consent.
- Unwanted sexual contact, from touching to intercourse.
- Forced or coerced sexual contact in a relationship or marriage.

Financial abuse includes:

- Forcing someone to sell property or possessions.
- Pressuring someone to buy things for others.
- Stealing money, cheques, or possessions.
- Using debit or credit cards without permission.
- Fraud or forgery.
- Misusing a power of attorney.
- Misusing a joint bank account.

Scams can be:

- Internet messages asking for personal information.
- Internet messages that appear to be from someone you know, but are really from a scammer.
- Phone calls asking for financial or personal information.
- Phone calls demanding that you pay money or go to jail.
- Phone calls from someone pretending to be a family member or friend needing emergency help.
- Someone coming to the door and offering to do house repairs for cash.
- Investment offers that promise high returns.

For more information about, or to report, previous and current scams, go to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre:

**[www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca/](http://www.antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca/)**

Emotional and psychological abuse includes:

- Yelling, name calling, intimidating, humiliating, insulting, frightening, threatening, or ignoring.
- Treating an older person like a child.
- Withholding visits from children or grandchildren.
- Bullying in a seniors residence, club or organization.
- Mocking, belittling, or otherwise disrespecting someone's spiritual beliefs or cultural heritage.

Neglect is:

- Failing to provide a safe, clean living environment with appropriate food, heat, clothing, medication, and other necessary supplies.
- Intentionally failing to ensure a dependent person has companionship, social interaction, intellectual stimulation or other things they need.

Self-neglect is when a person refuses, delays, or is unable to arrange for their own care. People suffering from self-neglect can also suffer from mental or physical illnesses.

Signs of self-neglect:

- Lack of personal care and hygiene
- Malnutrition
- Unsafe or unclean living conditions
- Drug abuse
- Refusal to take medications





Dating violence can affect anyone.

You are in an abusive relationship if someone you are dating:

- Tries to control what you do and where you go.
- Keeps you from spending time with friends and family.
- Puts you down and calls you names.
- Slaps or pushes you around.
- Forces you to have sex.
- Threatens to kill themselves if you leave them.

## Who are the victims of abuse?

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Abuse and neglect can happen to anyone. It can happen no matter your:

- Age
- Cultural background
- Income
- Gender

It can happen to people who live:

- Alone
- In a community care facility or nursing home
- With family

# What are the signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect?

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Signs and symptoms of abuse and neglect:

- Depression, fear, anxiety, or lethargy
- Unexplained physical injuries
- Weight change
- Dehydration
- Fear of a caregiver
- Low self-esteem
- Untreated medical problems
- Anxiety or agitation
- Inappropriate clothing or clothing in disrepair
- Poor hygiene, rashes, or pressure sores
- Over-sedation
- No explanation for missing money or personal items (including jewellery, eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures)

Take these signs seriously, even if there are other explanations.

The older adult may not show any of these signs or symptoms. If you suspect something is wrong, it is a good idea to investigate further.

# Why does abuse happen?

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Factors in abuse by a family member:

- A period of high stress
- Substance abuse
- Mental health problems
- Reduced income
- Reduced mobility
- The death of a loved one

Sometimes, abuse by a family member may be:

- Part of a cycle of violence.
- A way of getting even with someone who used to be abusive.

Factors in abuse by staff in nursing homes, hospitals, group homes or community care facilities:

- Lack of training
- Low pay
- Over-work
- Understaffing
- Frustration
- Poor health
- Lack of supervision and mentoring
- Personal problems that affect the way staff provides services to older people in their care

Sometimes, the abuser may not understand that the way they are treating the older person is abusive.

There is no excuse for abuse! The personal circumstances of the caregiver or family member is not an excuse.

If you are a caregiver and feel overly stressed, call **Home Care and Support** for help.

- West Prince **902-859-8730**
- East Prince **902-888-8440**
- Queens **902-368-4790**
- Kings (Souris) **902-687-7096**
- Kings (Montague) **902-838-0786**

The **Alzheimer's Society** has helpful services and programs.

- **902-628-2257** or **1-866-628-2257**
- **[www.alzheimer.ca/pei/](http://www.alzheimer.ca/pei/)**

The **Seniors Safe @ Home Program** in Charlottetown can visit an individual's home and recommend household safety measures. For example, installing grab bars and safety rails.

- **902-368-4889**
- **[www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/social-development-and-housing/seniors-safe-home-program](http://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/social-development-and-housing/seniors-safe-home-program)**





# Why is abuse often not reported?

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Abuse can be a crime. For example, assault and theft are crimes.

Victims of abuse may not report abuse because they:

- Are afraid of the abuser.
- Are afraid of what will happen to the abuser.
- Don't think anyone will believe them.
- Have low self-esteem and feel responsible for the abuse.
- Are dependent on the person.
- Experience language or cultural barriers that make it hard to report abuse or access services.
- Are afraid they will be put in an institution or forced to leave their home.
- Don't think that anyone could help them.
- Are ashamed to tell anyone that a family member is abusing them.
- Are afraid of being shunned by the rest of the family.
- Are afraid of being denied access to the grandchildren.

Family or friends may not report abuse because they:

- Don't know who to call.
- Fear the abuse may get worse if they say anything.
- Are afraid they will have to take over the care of the older person.
- Don't want to interfere or get involved.
- Don't know if the abuse is a crime.
- Fear they will damage relationships with other family members.
- Are asked by the older person not to report it.
- Aren't sure if abuse is occurring.
- Are afraid of the abuser.

Service providers may not report the abuse because they:

- Fear breaching confidentiality.
- Don't know if the abuse is a crime.
- Think the older person won't be able to testify in court.
- Think the older person would deny the abuse is happening.
- Are asked by the older person not to report it.
- Are afraid of the abuser.

# Is there a law that protects older adults?

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Older adults have the same rights as other people.

There is also an *Adult Protection Act* and Adult Protection program that protects vulnerable adults. A **vulnerable adult** is someone who is not competent.

People are encouraged to report the abuse of vulnerable adults. The identity of the person reporting the abuse is kept confidential under the *Act*.

You are required to report abuse if you are a professional with a duty of care to vulnerable adults. This includes:

- Physicians
- Nurses
- Pharmacists
- Social workers
- Mental health professionals

The *Adult Protection Act* and the Adult Protection Program only apply to vulnerable adults. Adults who are not considered vulnerable adults can access other services. On page 21 there is a list of helpful services and their contact information.

# What do victims of abuse need?

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Victims need the abuse and neglect to stop.

They may also need:

- Safety
- Shelter
- Intervention services
- Access to financial resources
- Help with personal care so they are not dependent on the abuser
- Emotional support and counselling
- Information about the law and the criminal justice system
- Information about what could happen to their abuser

# In cases of self-neglect, can I force someone to get help?

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In cases of self-neglect, seniors may be living in situations that are unhealthy and dangerous. This can be upsetting to someone who cares about them.

If a senior is competent and not putting others in danger, they have the right to choose:

- How they live.
- If they want help or not.





# How do I report abuse to the police?

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To report a crime, call the police.

When you call the police, the person who answers the phone will take information to give to the police. The police may ask for your telephone number and name so that they can get more information from you in the future.

The police can investigate the report. The investigation may include:

- A detailed signed statement from the victim.
- Statements from neighbours, family members, or service providers who saw or heard evidence of the abuse.
- Statements from anyone who knows about previous abuse.
- Photos of any injuries.
- A medical report.
- Other relevant evidence.

If you want to stay anonymous, call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477.

## Police Services

- Emergency 911
- Crime Stoppers 1-800-222-8477
- RCMP Charlottetown 902-368-9300
- RCMP Summerside 902-436-9300
- RCMP Alberton 902-853-9300
- RCMP Montague 902-838-9300
- RCMP Souris 902-687-9300
- Charlottetown City Police 902-629-4172
- Summerside City Police 902-432-1201
- Kensington Police Services 902-836-4499

## Where else can I get help?

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There are people who will help you look at options and help you decide what to do.

Tell someone if:

- You have been abused.
- You think someone else is being abused.

If the abuse is in a facility, talk to the management.

There are support services available who can help prevent or respond to abuse. On page 21 there is a list of helpful services and their contact information.

# Glossary

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**Abuse:** Any action or inaction that harms the health and well-being of a person.

**Competent:** Able to make informed legal and financial decisions.

**Incompetent:** Unable to understand financial or legal matters and make informed legal or financial decisions.

**Vulnerable adult:** Someone who is not competent and capable of making decisions.

# Support Services

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## Community Legal Information (CLI)

We provide presentations on legal topics, free publications, and free confidential legal information. We also host the Lawyer Referral Service, which provides a short consultation with a lawyer for a modest fee.

- 902-892-0853 or toll free 1-800-240-9798
- [info@legalinfopei.ca](mailto:info@legalinfopei.ca)
- [www.legalinfopei.ca](http://www.legalinfopei.ca)

## Seniors Federation - PEI Friendly Visitor Program

The PEI Friendly Visitor Program provides friendship and companionship to Island seniors who may be at risk of becoming socially isolated. Friendly Visitor volunteers are kind, caring individuals over the age of 50. They spend about an hour a week with a senior friend who is at risk of becoming socially isolated.

- 902-368-9008



## **PEI Family Violence Prevention Services (FVPS)**

PEI Family Violence Prevention Services provides confidential support and information to victims of family and relationship violence. All services are free of charge. Services include:

- A 24 hour, 7 days a week, confidential crisis and support phone line.
- Anderson House, which is the provincial emergency shelter for abused women and children. Older women are welcome and there is an accessible unit at Anderson House. You do not need to bring anything with you to Anderson House.
- Outreach services in all regions of PEI provide information and ongoing support to victims of family violence. Outreach workers can help support you if you choose not to go to Anderson House.

Anderson House	902-892-0960 1-800-240-9894 (toll free)
Queen's County Outreach	902-894-3354 ext 224
Eastern PEI Outreach	902-213-7540
East Prince Outreach	902-888-3310
West Prince Outreach	902-859-8849
Men's Services	902-314-3312
Website	<a href="http://www.fvps.ca">www.fvps.ca</a>

## **Chief Mary Bernard Memorial Women's Shelter**

This is a shelter on Lennox Island for women in distress, women without housing, and young mothers who need extra support. Shelter residents have access to employment services, parenting and life skills programs, and the Lennox Island Health Centre. Indigenous and non-Indigenous women are welcome.

- 902-831-2332

## **Adult Protection (Home Care and Support)**

If the person is a vulnerable adult and unable to protect themselves, call Adult Protection Services. A vulnerable adult is a person who is unable to protect themselves from abuse and neglect. Adult Protection is a confidential service. They provide information and they will intervene if it is in the best interest of the adult. Anyone can make a confidential referral to Adult Protection.

If you think a vulnerable adult is suffering from self-neglect, adult protection workers can assess the situation and see if there is a way to help. In PEI, adult protection workers are in Home Care offices.

- West Prince 902-859-8730
- East Prince 902-888-8440
- Queens 902-368-4790
- Kings (Souris) 902-687-7096
- Kings (Montague) 902-838-0786

### **PEI Rape and Sexual Assault Centre (PEIRSAC)**

PEI Rape & Sexual Assault Centre provides free counselling and support for survivors of sexual violence, including adult survivors of child sexual abuse. This service is confidential.

If you have been sexually assaulted, or if memories of child sexual abuse are causing you distress, you may wish to contact the centre.

- Main Office: 902-566-1864 or 1-866-566-1864
- Counselling: 902-368-8055 or 1-888-368-8055
- [www.peirsac.org](http://www.peirsac.org)

### **PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada (PEIANC)**

PEIANC offers a range of programs, services, and resources to newcomers. The association helps newcomers integrate into Canadian and Island society, provides settlement and employment services, and assists in a number of other different areas.

- 902-628-6009
- [www.peianc.com](http://www.peianc.com)
- [info@peianc.com](mailto:info@peianc.com)

## Police Services

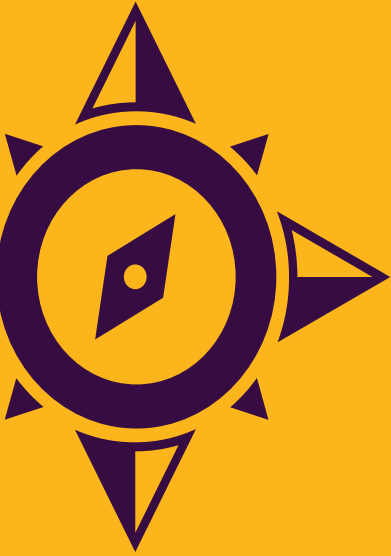
- Emergency 911
- Crime Stoppers 1-800-222-8477
- RCMP Charlottetown 902-368-9300
- RCMP Summerside 902-436-9300
- RCMP Alberton 902-853-9300
- RCMP Montague 902-838-9300
- RCMP Souris 902-687-9300
- Charlottetown City Police 902-629-4172
- Summerside City Police 902-432-1201
- Kensington Police Services 902-836-4499

## Victim Services

Victim Services can provide information about the law, the criminal justice system, and options for your protection. You can contact Victim Services before reporting a crime.

- Charlottetown: 902-368-4582 or [victimservicescharlottetown@gov.pe.ca](mailto:victimservicescharlottetown@gov.pe.ca)
- Summerside: 902-888-8218 or [victimservicessummerside@gov.pe.ca](mailto:victimservicessummerside@gov.pe.ca)





## More Resources

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### Community Legal Information

Community Legal Information offers the following publications:

- Wills
- Powers of Attorney
- Health Care Decisions
- Planning Ahead and Staying Safe: A Guide for Indigenous Seniors on PEI

We also have publications about other legal topics. All publications are free and can be found at [www.legalinfopei.ca](http://www.legalinfopei.ca) or they can be ordered by calling CLI at **902-892-0853** or **1-800-240-9798**.

We also have a video series developed by seniors, for seniors. The video series addresses a variety of topics including, wills, power of attorney, health care decisions, senior care facilities, and other topics of interest. These videos can be found at [www.legalinfopei.ca](http://www.legalinfopei.ca).



Community Legal Information is a registered charity that receives funding from Justice Canada, the Law Foundation of PEI, the Law Society of PEI, the PEI Department of Justice and Public Safety, and other sources. Community Legal Information provides understandable and useful information about the law and the justice system in Prince Edward Island.

For more information on other legal topics, visit [www.legalinfopei.ca](http://www.legalinfopei.ca), email us at [info@legalinfopei.ca](mailto:info@legalinfopei.ca), or call us at **902-892-0853** or **1-800-240-9798**. You can also find us on social media.

Make a donation to support our work at [www.legalinfopei.ca/donate/](http://www.legalinfopei.ca/donate/).

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**Community Legal  
Information**  
Empowerment Through Knowledge