



News Release

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HOLIDAYS CAN BE A TIME FOR FAMILIES TO SPOT ELDER FRAUD

(RICHMOND, Va.) — Adult children who suspect their parents may be financially exploited by a relative, caregiver or friend can often spot signs when family members gather during the year-end holidays.

Financial exploitation of older adults can involve the mishandling, fraud or theft of income, money, accounts, assets, or property. It can be perpetrated by trickery, intimidation or coercion. It's rarely reported, often because victims may blame themselves, be dependent on the perpetrator, feel embarrassed or want to protect the perpetrator. National estimates suggest that only 1 in 25 cases of financial exploitation are reported, with one study suggesting that older Americans lost at least \$2.9 billion to financial exploitation in 2010.

The DARS Adult Protective Services Division's upcoming annual report indicates that of the 9,140 substantiated cases of adult abuse, neglect and exploitation among Virginians, 75 percent of the cases occurred among adults age 60 or older. Financial exploitation occurred in 1,079 of the total substantiated cases. Typically, elder fraud is committed by relatives of victims, yet relatives also often are the ones to spot the trouble.

"When families gather for the holidays, it is a great opportunity to check in with aging parents about how they are doing. Family members may notice memory changes or impairments in critical thinking, which could affect how well a parent is managing his or her finances. Unopened bills and confusion over the balance of a checking or savings account could indicate cognitive changes," said DARS Commissioner Jim Rothrock.

If you see such changes, he said, gently raise concerns and ask questions when parents are at ease. Parents may be reluctant to discuss finances with their children, so consider asking a trusted financial or legal representative or clergy to join the conversation.

Older adults may feel isolated and disconnected from loved ones who may live at a distance, making them easy targets for scams such as fake lottery and charity scams as well as “grandparent scams,” cons in which the scam artist poses as the grandchild who has a financial emergency and needs money wired to him immediately.

“Unknown scammers aren’t the only people who take advantage of older adults,” said Program Consultant Paige McCleary of DARS’ Adult Protective Services Division. “Unfortunately, perpetrators of financial exploitation are frequently family members, including adult children. Family members who are experiencing financial difficulties, job loss or substance abuse may take advantage of an aging parent and have little regard for the financial chaos and personal destruction they can cause.”

Signs of elder fraud for family members to watch for include:

- Transfer of property or savings
- Excessive payment for care and/or services
- Change in payee, power of attorney or will
- Caregiver of older adult is overly frugal
- Unusual or new people living in the household
- Older adult is kept isolated
- Signatures on check that do not resemble the individual’s signature
- Individual doesn’t know what happened to money
- Social Security benefit is not deposited into the proper account
- Individual reports signing papers and doesn’t know what was signed

What to do? Adult children who suspect financial exploitation can take steps to stop it. Report suspected financial exploitation of an older adult to your local department of social services’ Adult Protective Services unit or call the toll-free, 24-hour APS hotline at (888) 832-3858. Law enforcement may also need to be contacted and law enforcement and APS often collaborate to stop the exploitation and prevent further maltreatment.

Prevention is best. Older adults should plan for their financial future to ensure control over assets and resources and put wishes concerning financial arrangements in writing to reduce the chance of future misunderstandings. Monitor savings, checking or retirement account balances for accounting irregularities. Keep an inventory of jewelry and other personal items.

For more tips and information, visit the Adult Protective Services’ website at <http://1.usa.gov/1drVdOJ> or the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Board’s website at www.consumerfinance.gov/older-americans/.

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The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, in collaboration with community partners, provides and advocates for resources and services to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and

independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families. For more information, visit www.vadars.org or follow DARS on Facebook at www.facebook.com/vadars or Twitter at @vadars.