



Scam Proofing Older Adults

Tips for Family Members and Friends



March is Fraud Prevention Month. Statistics show that between four per cent and 10 per cent of Canadian older adults (seniors) experience financial abuse, including fraud.

Home is where older adults should feel the safest. Fraudsters use tactics to invade the security of older adults from inside and outside their homes. The result being scammed out of their personal information and money. Some Fraudsters drive around neighborhoods during the day, looking for vulnerable older adult. Once identified they return trying to sell unnecessary repairs or goods. Other methods used to target older adults include mail, telephone, and email fraud.

Characteristics that make Older Adults Vulnerable

- **Availability:** Older adults are often seen as targets because they are retired, may be less mobile, and are at home to take calls or visitors. Scam artists can easily scan a neighbourhood for older adult victims.
- **Isolation and Loneliness:** Older adults are more likely to be alone because families move away and sometimes have little or no interaction with loved ones. Some older adults have no one to assist them when considering major decisions. Due to their isolation, friendships can often be limited, making them vulnerable to friendly cold callers who drop by their home. Some scams are perpetrated by individuals who work to build new friendships with older adults and then prey on their vulnerabilities.
- **Health Issues:** Chronic health issues may lead to difficulties maintaining personal properties. Older adults may need to rely on outside sources for help. Unscrupulous workers can bilk seniors out of thousands of dollars for a job that should only cost hundreds of dollars or they recommend repairs that are not needed.
- **Prosperity:** Money is one of the most notable reasons for vulnerability in older adults. Scammers see them as a supply of wealth that includes homes, property, life savings and other assets.

What to Do if You Become a Victim of Identity Fraud

- Contact your local police to report the incident. Reports should be filed with the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre (1-888-495-8501), the central agency in Canada that collects information on fraud related activities.
- Contact all credit card companies, creditors, banks and other financial institutions where you have accounts that may have been affected. Close every account that may have been compromised. Obtain replacement bank or credit cards with a new account number and a new Personal Identification Number (PIN). Closely monitor bank and credit card statements for suspicious activity.
- Obtain a copy of your credit report. Contact both major credit bureaus (Equifax Canada and TransUnion Canada) let them know you have been a victim of identity fraud. Request a copy of your credit bureau report. Request a "Fraud Warning" be placed on your credit file instructing creditors to contact you personally before opening new accounts in your name - these warnings remain on file for 6 years.

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Family and friends can help older adults avoid the humiliation and potential financial devastation of falling victim to a fraudster:

- Shred documents that could be useful to criminals, including bank statements, credit card statements and offers containing personal information, and other financial information once they are no longer required. Documents that need to be preserved, such as tax returns or house and car titles, should be stored in a safe place.
- Insist older adults check with the Better Business Bureau in their community before acting on an offer received by phone or mail. or agrees to a visit from an unknown person, business or charity. If suspicious letters or emails are received, advise the older person to contact a phone number for the legitimate agency they currently have dealings with, not the phone number provided in the letter or the link in the email, to verify the correspondence.
- Have older adult's phone numbers added to the National Do-Not-Call List. Instruct them to hang up if they get solicitation calls. Address the guilt factor by reminding an older adult it can be difficult to recognize a scam.
- Insist personal information is never given out over phone or online.
- Advise older adults not to feel compelled to donate to charities that may solicit. Ask the charity for their registration number and verify the status of the charity with Revenue Canada's Charities Listings. Establish a strong defense by posting a "No Solicitation" notice at the front door.
- Remember new technology has a learning curve. Educate older adults about email and phishing tactics.
- Be curious about individuals who have befriended an older adult. Lonely or isolated older adults may be more vulnerable to criminals who befriend them and provide companionship.
- Older adults who are scammed may be embarrassed and try to hide what happened. Watch for changes in their lifestyle as well as any other unusual financial or business activity. If an older adult is unable to handle his or her finances, encourage them to put a plan in place that helps ensure bills are paid and assets are protected.
- If as a family member, you cannot be there for the older family member, find trustworthy people who can serve as their eyes and ears. Helpers could be neighbors, relatives, friends, faith community members or professional caregivers.