



What's the issue?

Elder abuse is a widespread yet mostly hidden problem. Any situation that limits or controls the rights and freedoms of an older adult is a form of elder abuse. That includes physical abuse, but also psychological/emotional abuse (e.g. threatening, isolating, removing decision-making), financial abuse (e.g. stealing, misusing power of attorney), and neglect.

North American studies show that anywhere from 2-10% of older adults will experience some type of elder abuse each year. Based on that, some 40,000-200,000 seniors in Ontario may be affected. That could rise significantly, with the 65-plus population projected to more than double by 2036.

Some challenges

Under-reporting: The person most likely to abuse a senior is a family member. This contributes to an under-reporting of abuse. Victims are often dependent on the perpetrator, so are afraid of losing that relationship or too embarrassed to speak out. Lack of awareness of resources to help: Even those willing to seek help often do not know where to find it.

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Lack of recognition: Many perpetrators do not even recognize that their behaviour is abusive. Some have a lengthy pattern of abuse, while others become abusive under the stress of caring for an elderly relative with inadequate support.

Long-term care staffing: In long-term care facilities, residents may also be abused by staff members. In some cases, staff may be inadequately trained and/or too overworked to give appropriate care to each resident. Inadequate supervision can lead to resident-on-resident abuse. Many residents who abuse themselves have high needs, e.g. advanced dementia with aggressive behaviour.

For more information: www.elderabuseontario.com

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Questions

- 1 What is being done locally to give seniors easy access to a coordinated network of supports, including homecare?
- 2 How can we ensure adequate staffing levels in long-term care facilities?
- 3 What is being done to properly train nursing home staff in working with dementia patients?
- 4 How would your government ensure oversight of elder care to protect those most vulnerable from abuse?

