

Financial Caregiving Fact Sheet

AGE, DISABILITY AND IMPAIRED DECISION-MAKING

It is believed that among the almost 480,000 people over the age of 65 who self-identify as either partly or solely American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN), 50% have a disability. Another 200,000 under age 65 are living with a long-term disability or health condition which qualifies them for Medicare. (1)

There are many types of disabilities. Some are visible and some are not. Some people are born with a disability and some acquire them through an accident, illness, chronic disease, or the natural aging process. Physical or other cognitive impairments like dementia and Alzheimer's disease can limit mobility and can also affect our ability to make good decisions.

Many disabilities can worsen as we age. Currently, about half the population between ages 80 and 89 have a medical diagnosis of substantial cognitive impairment. As life expectancy continues to rise, more and more Elders with disabilities will be dependent on others for help managing their finances. (2)

When a loved one loses the ability to reason, their retirement and financial plans can be put in jeopardy. Research tells us that with Alzheimer's disease, the judgment needed for financial decisions is impaired even at the beginning of the disease, though you might not see it. (3)

DISABILITY AND ELDER FINANCIAL ABUSE

Elders with cognitive impairment (trouble remembering and learning new things) and disabilities that require help with activities of daily living (routine activities that people tend to do every day without assistance: eating, bathing, dressing, toileting, walking, and continence), are more vulnerable to financial abuse. Financial exploitation - the misuse or withholding of an older adult's funds, property or assets by another - is a problem that costs Elders \$2.9 billion a year and it is growing. Instances of Elder financial abuse are vastly underreported, with only 1 in 44 cases ever reported. Studies with small sample sizes do not adequately present the extent of the problem in Indian Country. (4) (5) (6)

Situations of financial exploitation commonly involve trusted persons in the life of the vulnerable Elder, such as: caretakers, family, friends, medical providers, or bankers. Elders have the right not to be abused, threatened or intimidated. If you think someone close to you is trying to take control of your (or your loved ones) finances, you should in most cases, contact your local Adult Protective Services office, generally a part of your county or state department of social services. You can find contact information at www.eldercare.gov, a public service provided by the U.S. Administration on Aging, or by calling 1-800-677-1116. For life threatening emergencies, contact your local police department.

PROTECTING YOURSELF AND LOVED ONES

You do not have to wait until a financial disaster happens or all the money in the bank disappears before taking action. There are steps you can take now to protect yourself or your disabled loved one from financial loss or exploitation.

- Make plans to allow others, whom you trust, to handle financial matters, if it becomes necessary due to failing health or other reasons. Before a decision is made, look into the many reliable resources available to learn how to make a plan that honors you or your loved ones wishes. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) offers materials that directly address the subject of managing someone else's money and financial security for people with disabilities. Visit <http://www.consumerfinance.gov/> for more information.
- If you or a loved one might have a condition that may eventually impair financial decision-making ability, consult your primary care doctor who can refer you to a trained professional.
- In the meantime, get control over financial information by:
 - ◊ Shredding receipts, bank statements and unused credit card offers before throwing them away.
 - ◊ Locking up your checkbook, account statements and other sensitive information when others will be in your home.
 - ◊ Never giving personal information like your Social Security number or account numbers to anyone over the phone unless you initiate the call.
 - ◊ Keeping a paper trail by paying with checks and credit cards instead of cash.

When it comes to financial caregiving, planning ahead and taking positive steps towards managing money can provide peace of mind and economic wellbeing for you and your loved ones.

SOURCES

- 1) U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2014, <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmmk>
- 2) Agarwal, S. et al, The Age of Reason: Financial Decisions over the Life Cycle and Implications for Regulation http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Projects/BPEA/Fall%202009/2009b_bpea_agarwal.PDF
- 3) Rosenblatt, C. "The Grey Zone": How to Handle Partially Incompetent Aging Parents <http://www.forbes.com/sites/carolynrosenblatt/2012/09/05/the-grey-zone-how-to-handle-partially-incompetent-aging-parents/#b0023de206af>
- 4) National Council on Aging, <https://www.ncoa.org/public-policy-action/elder-justice/elder-abuse-facts/>
- 5) National Adult Protective Services Association, <http://www.napsa-now.org/policy-advocacy/exploitation/>
- 6) Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, https://www.cms.gov/Outreach-and-Education/American-Indian-Alaska-Native/AIAN/LTSS-TA-Center/pdf/Elder_Abuse_Lit_Review.pdf

This fact sheet is not intended to provide legal advice or serve as a substitute for your own legal counsel.

This document was supported, in part, by a grant (Grant #: 90HD0012-01-00) from the Administration for Community Living, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Administration for Community Living or DHHS policy.