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The 7 very subtle signs of financial abuse that it's vital you recognise



MONEY EXPERT

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Australians



Unlike the bruising that occurs in cases of physical abuse, the signs of financial abuse are often far more subtle. Source: Getty

We're finally starting to talk about elder abuse, albeit slowly. Those working in the elder abuse space often describe the current situation as being where domestic and family violence was 20 years ago – unseen, under-reported, with a community largely unaware.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, which was established in October 2018, is now shining a spotlight on the issue. As is the Government's **National Plan** to respond to the abuse of older Australians, which was released in recent weeks.

The upcoming 2019 National Elder Abuse Conference, co-hosted by Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia and Caxton Legal Centre, will also drive the conversation forward. The conference aims to harness the insight, creativity and passion of international, national and local experts to challenge the status quo and create action to end elder abuse.

Thanks to the hard work of elder abuse researchers, lawyers and community advocates, we're bringing much needed awareness to the issue in Australia. But would you recognise the subtle signs of elder abuse if they were happening to you, or someone in your own backyard?

One of the most common forms of elder abuse is financial. However, it can also be one of the hardest types of elder abuse to recognise.

Unlike bruises, the outward signs of financial abuse aren't easily seen by the older person, their family members or friends. To compound the issue, if you're the person experiencing abuse, it can be awkward to discuss your financial situation with others, and people often feel shame or embarrassment when talking about acts perpetrated by family members.

So, to ease the conversation and ensure fewer people experience financial abuse, there are some red flags of which everyone who is close to older Australians should be aware. Here are seven common signs of financial abuse to look out for in friends or family members that may indicate they're at risk.

Missing items from the home, particularly high-value items such as artwork

Financial abuse doesn't only mean withdrawing cash from a person's bank

account – it can also involve stealing items or taking items to sell for cash. This could be artwork, furniture or jewellery, which you may notice is missing.

A sudden and inexplicable change of lifestyle

Many older people have routines that include regular events and hobbies. If an older person suddenly stops participating in these activities, such as golfing or bingo, it may be because they can no longer afford it. If the money they would usually spend on these activities has been taken, the older person may feel that they can't tell anyone.

Missing medical appointments or lacking other necessities

Australia's pension system provides support to thousands of Australians and has been designed to ensure life's basic necessities are covered. If you notice an older person's fridge is empty or they are unable to pay for medical attention, this may indicate that their pension, superannuation or savings account is being drained by someone else.

Giving extravagant gifts to someone for no clear reason or refusing to discuss these gifts

If an older person says that they have gifted an extravagant item to someone else, such as a car or holiday, but cannot afford to pay for their own necessities, be wary. Be particularly aware if they are defensive or refuse to discuss the situation, because there is a chance they have been manipulated or

pressured into purchasing the gift.

Moving other people into the home or selling the home

For many older people, their most valuable possession is their house. Sometimes, family members will insist on moving into an older person's house under the guise of caring for them. However, this can also be a tactic to live rent-free or force the older person to pay

for their bills. If an older person is upset or uncomfortable about relatives moving in with them, this could be a sign they have been pressured into the arrangement.

Unexplained and unusual attention towards an older person from an acquaintance or neighbour

It isn't only relatives that can take advantage of older people – neighbours and acquaintances may take advantage of someone's loneliness and use their friendship for financial gain. If there is someone that is going to extreme lengths to get close to an older person, this could be a sign that their motivations are far from innocent.

Changes in banking practices or financial documents such as wills

Many older people choose to withdraw their pension from the bank on a weekly or fortnightly basis and use cash to budget their spending. However, if someone begins suddenly withdrawing amounts that are

larger than usual, or withdrawing cash more

larger than usual, or withdrawing cash more frequently than usual, their habits may have changed as a result of pressure from their abuser.

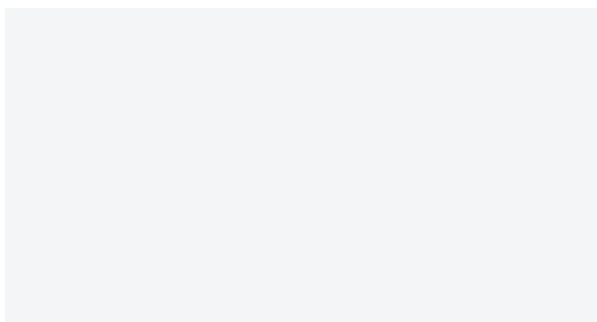
The abuse of older people is an issue we must continue to address as a community, and we must be aware of the signs. While Enduring Powers of Attorney have been designed to protect older people, at times an EPOA can be used as a means to separate the older person from their assets. This will be the

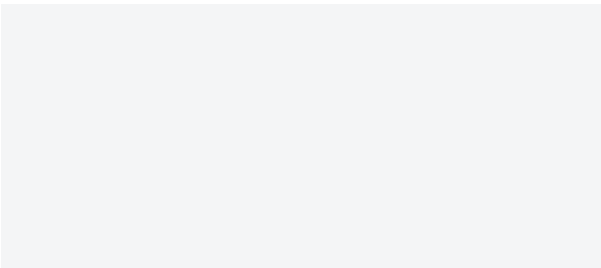
subject for a future post, so stay tuned for more.

In the meantime, being on the look-out for the more subtle signs of financial abuse can help everyone play their part in protecting older Australians.

If you are concerned about your situation, or that of a friend or relative, you can call the confidential national elder abuse hotline to seek advice and support. The number is 1800ELDERHelp or 1800 353 374.

To find out more about the 2019 National Elder Abuse Conference, visit www.neac2019.com.au. Anyone is welcome to attend, including professionals, academics, advocates and those with lived experiences of elder abuse.








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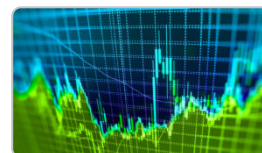


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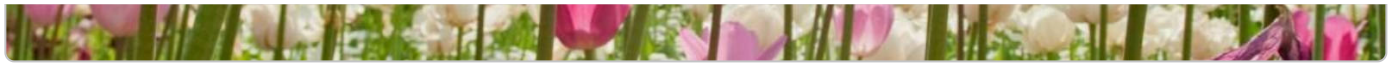
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