

Allegheny County Department of Human Services
Allegheny County Area Agency on Aging
Protective Services

To report any suspected abuse or neglect of an older adult in Allegheny County, call:

412-350-6905 or 1-800-344-4319.

“Protection from abuse and neglect” are some harsh-sounding words for those of us who work with an aging population. On the one hand, Allegheny County has been blessed with many healthy, active older adults. But, unfortunately, as we age, we often lose the ability to protect ourselves from harm, and to care for our own basic needs. The same people who were once strong and vital become our most vulnerable citizens, and are often in need of someone to look out for their well being. That is why Protective Services are so important.

To formally address these concerns about abuse and neglect of older people, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania passed the Older Adults Protective Service Act in July of 1988. Since its inception there have been more than 100,000 reports of abuse and neglect in Pennsylvania. Last year 1,477 reports of need were taken in Allegheny County, alone. The act is important because it establishes a definite program to first detect abuse and neglect, and then reduce, correct or eliminate incidents of abuse to older people.

So, just what are Protective Services? By definition, they are activities, resources and supports to detect, prevent, reduce or eliminate abuse, neglect (including self-neglect), financial exploitation and abandonment of older adults. The process begins with a “report of need.” This usually comes by way of a phone call from a person who suspects that an older adult in is need of intervention. Sometimes it’s a neighbor, a relative, or some other concerned individual who suspects that the older person may be at risk. This phone call is received by one of the trained staff who are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. If the criteria are met for an eligible report, then it is recorded on a standard form and assigned to a caseworker for investigation.

The criteria for an eligible report are the following:

- ✓ Reside within the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
- ✓ Be 60 years of age or older
- ✓ Have no responsible caregiver
- ✓ Be incapacitated (unable to perform or obtain services necessary to maintain physical or mental health)
- ✓ At imminent risk of danger to person or property

After a report is investigated, which is completed within 20 days, the older person is then offered help. It may include a care plan for in-home services, financial management services, or in extreme circumstance arranging for court-ordered intervention or guardianship determination. First and foremost, though, emphasis is always placed on the individual’s right to self-determination. Anyone, who has mental capacity, has the legal right to refuse services.

Reporting of abuse or neglect can be anonymous. The law is meant to help the victim and the caregiver through intervention. In emergency or life-threatening situations, help will be immediate. Otherwise, the protective service worker will conduct a face-to-face visit with the older person within 24 to 72 hours, depending on the urgency.