Wolastoqey
Tribal Council Inc.

New Brunswick Law Foundation
Fondation pour le droit au Nouveau-Brunswick

ELDER ABUSE: WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO SEEK HELP

Content Warning: This resource covers various forms of abuse, violence, and colonization.

If you are an elder experiencing abuse, know an elder who is being abused, or suspect that an elder has been subjected to abuse, it's important to know that **you are not alone,** and help is available. This booklet is a guide to help you understand elder abuse and shares practical steps to take to ensure the safety and well-being of elders.

Throughout this resource, the term "elder" is used to refer to older adults in a general sense. It is not intended to refer to "Elders", who are respected knowledge keepers and cultural leaders in many Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Elders Are at Higher Risk of Abuse

Colonization and genocide have profoundly shaped the realities of Indigenous communities. Forced displacements, the residential and day school systems, and ongoing experiences of oppression and racism have deeply affected family structures, community relationships, and the ways elderly people are treated.

These legacies have disrupted the transmission of culture, traditional knowledge, and the respect afforded to elderly people, at times contributing to cycles of harm. As a result, expressions of disrespect have become more prevalent and, in more serious circumstances, may lead to elder abuse.

Forms of Elder Abuse

- **Neglect:** When a caregiver does not adequately take care of an elder who cannot care for themselves.
- **Financial abuse:** The misuse of an elder's money, often without their knowledge or consent. This could be theft, withholding money, or setting overly restrictive rules on how an elder may use their money.
- **Physical abuse:** An act of violence towards an elder, such as hitting, slapping, and using physical restraints.
- **Sexual abuse:** A non-consensual sexual act towards an elder, such as unwanted touching, kissing, etc.
- **Psychological or emotional abuse:** An act towards an elder that minimizes their self-worth and dignity. Examples include yelling, criticizing, threatening, humiliating, etc.
- **Medical abuse:** When a caregiver withholds necessary medical treatment from an elder or intentionally misuses medications (e.g. overdosing, providing incorrect doses or medication).
- **Spiritual abuse:** Preventing an elder from attending worship services, from practicing their culture, or mocking religious and cultural beliefs.

What Are the Signs of Elder Abuse?

There are many potential signs that someone may be suffering from elder abuse. These include:

- Fear of caregivers;
- Missed bill payments;
- Sudden change of their will;
- Overly sedated or lethargic;
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs);
- Unusual withdrawals from their bank account;
- Malnourishment;
- Going without necessities (i.e., toilet paper, food, etc.);
- Skin conditions, bruises, marks, and pressure sores.

Who Can Be an Abuser?

An abuser can be anyone. They may try to isolate the elder, separating the victim from their community and loved ones. Oftentimes, abusers are individuals who have a relationship with the victim, such as:

- A spouse or romantic partner;
- A family member;
- A friend;
- A caregiver;
- Staff in a nursing home or special care home;
- A landlord.



Factors That Can Increase the Likelihood of Elder Abuse

There are many possible factors that can lead to elder abuse.

Being aware of these factors may help you recognize abuse, but **nothing justifies elder abuse.**

Family members may abuse elders due to:

- Poor family relationships;
- An existing cycle of abuse in the family;
- The abuser trying to “get even” with the elder for past events;
- The abuser’s inability to care for an elder because they:
  - suffer from substance use disorder;
  - do not understand the aging process;
  - lack sufficient resources to care for an elder; or
  - are overwhelmed from caring for other dependents.

In nursing homes or similar care facility environments, the following factors may also increase the risk of elder abuse:

- Lack of training for staff;
- Inadequate management or leadership for staff;
- Overworked staff;
- Poor resourcing for staff and services.



I Think I Am Being Abused, or I Think an Elder I Know Is Being Abused. What Should I Do?

You are not alone. You have options to get help. Speaking up and reporting abuse is an important step for protecting elders. Below are some general steps that can help you **report elder abuse.**

1. Gather important information and records

Try to collect as much detail as possible about the abuse. When did it start, what is happening, who is involved? It is useful if you have supporting records as well (such as financial statements, medical reports, photos, etc.).

2. Contact a trusted person

Some elders may not wish to report abuse for many reasons. Sometimes they are ashamed or scared about what will happen to them if they report abuse. Being in an abusive situation can be lonely, isolating and scary. This is why it is especially important for elders to have a trusted person to talk to.

- If you are an elder facing abuse, consider seeking support from a trusted person in your life. This could be a family member, friend, counsellor, spiritual leader, or doctor.
- If you think an elder may be abused, try to create a safe space for them to share their concerns with you. Talk to them privately and listen with empathy.

3. Report abuse to a professional organization

- **Wolastoqey resources:** The Wolastoqey Tribal Council Inc. (WTCI) Department of Health Services provides shared health services to Wolastoqey communities. Staff will seek more information on your situation. They will deal with your reports in a confidential manner and help connect you with relevant resources to deal with and get out of the abusive situation. Contact the Home and Community Care Coordinator at the WTCI Department of Health for more information. As of December 2025, the Coordinator's email is: elaina.bigras@mawiw.ca.

- **Provincial resources:** You may also report elder abuse to the Province of New Brunswick's Adult Protection program. When you report abuse through this program, a social worker will ask you more information about the abuse such as:
  - What happened to cause you to make this referral?
  - What is your relationship to the individual or family being reported?
  - Do you know the situation first-hand or second-hand?
  - What is the problem?
  - Have you noticed anything concerning the adult's appearance (such as bruises or marks)?
  - What are the details of any incidents (such as time and date)?
  - Are there any witnesses?

The Adult Protection program phone line is **available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.** Anyone can report or make a referral regarding elder abuse. The program will not disclose who reported the abuse without consent, unless ordered to do so by a judge.

There is no penalty for reporting suspected elder abuse, even if it turns out that you were wrong.

If the information provided meets the Adult Protection program's criteria, a social worker may begin an investigation into the matter. This includes meeting with the elder, alleged abuser, family, friends, and professionals to figure out the extent of the abuse and what is the best way forward. Next steps can include:

- Providing social services, such as personal care, housekeeping, meal services, supervision, etc.;
- Placing them under protective care;
- Contacting the police;
- Referring them to the proper agency or service;
- Taking them to the hospital.

If you live on reserve, you are encouraged to contact a member of the WTCI Department of Health Services, or a home and community care staff member at a Wolastoqey community health centre, for support when reaching out to the Adult Protection program.

You can report elder abuse to the Adult Protection program through:

- **Email:** sd-ds@gnb.ca
- **Phone:** 1-833-733-7835. Press option #1 to reach a social worker trained in adult protection and explain your situation.
- **For urgent matters:** If you, or someone you know is at risk of immediate harm or danger, please call the police.

How Can I Help Prevent Elder Abuse or Neglect

Tips for families and loved ones to prevent abuse:

- Maintain your relationships with older family members and friends;
- Learn to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect;
- Discuss any signs of abuse or neglect when you see them;
- Suggest family counselling and tell them about support services available, if necessary;
- Offer financial advice, if possible;
- Try to reduce family stress;
- Stay connected by checking in regularly, through visits, calls, texts, etc., and support them in maintaining social connections and participating in extracurricular activities whenever possible.

Tips for elders at risk to prevent abuse:

- Maintain your friendships;
- Learn to recognize the signs of abuse and neglect;
- Report any abuse;
- Keep your money in a bank and your valuables in a safe;
- Be aware of your financial situation;
- Deposit your own pension or disability cheques instead of sending others, or arrange for direct deposit;
- Join an elder’s group or service club;
- Understand your rights;
- Don’t be afraid to ask for help.

Community Support Services for Elders

There are many other support services available in New Brunswick to help elders. Some of these services include:

- **Adult day centers**
  Provide a safe environment for socialization, activities, and respite care during the day. For more information, click here.
- **Attendant care**
  Provides personal support for daily living tasks, including bathing, dressing, and mobility.
- **Meals on Wheels**
  Delivers nutritious meals directly to the homes of those unable to prepare their own. For more information, click here.
- **Nursing, long-term or special care homes**
  Provide housing and medical care for those who require ongoing assistance. For more information, click here and here.
- **Homemaker or housekeeper services**
  Help with household tasks like cleaning, laundry, and meal preparation. The First Nations and Inuit Home and Community Care (**FNIHCC**) program provides these services to Indigenous people living in First Nation communities. For more information, click here.
- **In-home services and supplies**
  Offer medical equipment and support to help elders live independently at home. The Non-Insured Health Benefits (**NIHB**) program provides eligible medical supplies and equipment specifically to First Nation clients. For more information, click here.
- **Legal advice clinic (available in some areas)**
  Provides access to legal information and guidance on elder-related issues.
- **Extra-mural program**
  Delivers healthcare services at home for those with medical needs. For more information, click here.
- **Counselling services**
  Offers professional support for mental health and emotional well-being.

- **Support groups**
  Create opportunities for elders to connect with others facing similar challenges.
- **Volunteer services**
  Provide companionship and assistance with errands or transportation.
- **Advocacy groups**
  Support the rights of elders and help them navigate systems to access necessary resources.
- **Transition houses**
  Offer temporary shelter and support for those escaping unsafe living situations. For more information, click here.
- **Victim Services**
  If you are a victim of a crime and have reported it to the police, Victim Services staff may be able to assist you as the case proceeds through the criminal justice system. For more information, click here.
  - Terry David Young, who is from Bilijk (Kingsclear First Nation), currently works as a Senior Indigenous Consultant and the Department of Justice and Public Safety. His role is to help the Department better understand and support the needs of victims in First Nations communities by building relationships, listening to concerns, and connecting those needs with provincial victim services.

- **WTCI Department of Health Services**
  Health Services Directory

These services will not end elder abuse alone, but they may help provide a safe space for elders and connect them to a community that can provide support, advice, and healing.

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