



How to Spot the Red Flags of Financial Elder Abuse

A look at top scams targeting seniors and what to do if you've been hit

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While the age of technology has brought unprecedented benefits to the world, it also brings a significant risk as well. Cases of elder financial abuse and scams are reported daily, from Medicare fraud to telemarketing scams to prescription drug scams and more. Awareness is key for prevention, and it's essential to identify the top scams that seniors face today. There are many ways to avoid falling for these scams, along with resources to utilize for those being targeted. Our team at Foster Swift cares about protecting our elderly community, and has identified the top scams that affect seniors today in order to provide resources for those who have been targeted to ensure their safety and well-being.

Coronavirus Scams

The COVID-19 pandemic has created new health concerns for seniors, who are considered most at risk medically, as well as the targets of new scams. People are receiving text messages and emails stating the recipient was exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19. When clicked, the links ask for personal information. No one should ever give out sensitive information this way, and the government is not contacting people via text, email, or phone for health questions or to give out stimulus checks. Similarly, robocalls about health insurance options and discounts are being used as scams. Simply delete or block the contact information.

As reported by the Centers for Disease Control, there are very limited amounts of testing capabilities at hospitals around the world. If you receive an offer for an at-home vaccination, test kit, or cure for coronavirus, it is fake. None of these options currently exist. The Federal Trade Commission also cautions that people must do their homework when it comes to donations, especially on behalf of coronavirus affected solicitations. Appropriate research, verification of the charity, and donation tracking must be done well beforehand. Check that the organization qualifies as a nonprofit, and never donate in cash or by wire transfer.

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PRACTICE AREAS

Elder Law



Medicare Fraud

Devious seems inadequate to describe the lengths that scammers go to with Medicare scams, but they have no conscience to get the information they want. To trick seniors, makeshift mobile clinics are set up, with “representatives”, who work to collect sensitive personal information. These people may even perform minimal, nonsense services to add to the sense of authenticity. Once the information is gathered, they use it to bill Medicare and keep the funds.

There are also cases where healthcare providers have proven untrustworthy, making it imperative to look closely at your bills. There have been cases of providers billing Medicare for services that patients never received, billing for services that were more expensive than the ones actually given, and even performing services not medically necessary. These violations are called upcoding, and are reliant on having an uninformed patient. Mistakes in billing certainly happen as well, so it’s important to carefully review all bills and receipts.

Telemarketing Scams

When telemarketing scams are successful, scammers can essentially trick people into giving them thousands and thousands of dollars. A common approach is faking an accident. A telemarketer will call a person, and relay a story about their child, grandchild, or relative, who has been in some kind of accident and needs money right away. Another version of the story is utilized when a relative is traveling. A telemarketer may inform the family that the person is stuck at the border, and needs money. Their passport may have been “lost or stolen”, so they immediately need funds to come back to the United States. This sneaky trickery plays on emotions and one’s sense of urgency, feeling like a life or death decision that needs to be made immediately.

Additional telemarketing scams include fake charity calls. By soliciting on behalf of a fake charity, these con artists ask for donations from susceptible listeners. Preying on both a person’s empathy and potentially their loneliness, these perpetrators turn into friends on the phone, gain funds, then disappear.

Prescription Drug Scams

Buying prescription drugs online sounds far easier than going to a store, and scammers know it. Seniors are specifically targeted by websites offering better pricing, since more and more seniors are turning to internet sales. If an expensive drug is being sold at a fraction of the usual price, a red flag should go up. Non-reputable websites are simply tricking consumers to turn them into customers.

Through the internet, scammers set up websites and conduct marketing campaigns to offer better pricing than a local location. Not only are these drugs not validated by a pharmacist, they could literally be anything, from placebos, to unsafe substances. These counterfeit drugs won’t provide relief or necessary medical benefits. The result is a financial loss, along with potential health repercussions.



Use extreme caution when considering buying drugs on the internet. Pay attention to the packaging and labeling of the prescriptions you use, and monitor your health and any side effects after taking them. Reputable online pharmacies have the Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Site (VIPPS) seal of approval, which is provided by the Association of Boards of Pharmacy in the United States.

You've Been Targeted...Now What?

It happens. Even the most careful person can be fooled into falling for a con. When it comes to our aging seniors, the first step starts with communication. Loved ones should be checking in and having regular conversations about finances and expenses, so that any red flags can be noticed early. Our Elder Care law attorneys at Foster Swift are experts who care and can help identify prevention techniques and recovery steps, so that you and your loved ones are safe from scams.

First, how far are you in the process? Have you given your credit card information out? Cancel it, immediately! Do you question your ability to recognize a scam? Implement a trusted family member to review offers or questionable solicitations. When considering charitable donations or medical changes, verify the validity of the organization and its history. Educate yourself to protect yourself.

There are many resources to help in both recognizing and advising on scams. The AARP Fraud Watch Network has a hotline available, and volunteers there can advise you of the next best step if you're unsure of what to do. If you've been bamboozled by a goods or services type of scam, look at usa.gov for state consumer protection offices, or contact your state attorney general's office. For scams that violate federal law, the Federal Trade Commission handles a significant amount of different issues of fraud. To file a complaint, just go to ftc.gov/complaint, and answer the questions about your encounter. Every bit of information can help piece together the patterns, to mitigate or even shut down the scam entirely.

Despite falling for a scam on any level, it's important to have grace and forgiveness for yourself. Contact a member of our Legal Services team to receive support and advice on how to protect your finances.