

To the Editor:

Wednesday, June 15, is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, when communities and organizations worldwide highlight the problem of elder abuse. To their lasting credit, Americans have confronted and addressed the issues of child abuse and domestic violence, but as a society we have largely ignored elder abuse. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day seeks to change that.

Every year an estimated 5 million older Americans – or 1 in 10 people over 65 – are victims of elder abuse, neglect, or exploitation. For every reported case of elder abuse or neglect, research indicates as many as 20 cases go unreported.

Elder abuse can be physical, emotional, financial, and sexual. The results of such abuse can be devastating and long-lasting. Elders who are abused are twice as likely to be hospitalized, four times as likely to go into nursing homes, and three times as likely to die.

As with domestic violence, most abusers are family members. However, seniors can also suffer abuse at the hands of trusted professionals, caregivers, friends, and complete strangers. Abuse can happen in any setting: in the older adult's own home, nursing homes, or assisted living facilities.

For those with seniors in your life, learn the warning signs of abuse, and don't hesitate to report your suspicions. Local police, county-based Adult Protective Services, and Long-Term Care Ombudsman programs are available for assistance.

Also, take steps to prevent yourself or a senior in your life from becoming a victim of financial abuse. Complete your advance directives and living will and make a trusted individual your power of attorney. By documenting your wishes, you can protect yourself. Encourage the seniors in your life to plan ahead.

Elder abuse of any kind is unacceptable. Our seniors deserve to live in a safe, abuse-free environment. The goal is to recognize and prevent elder abuse – not just on June 15, but every day.

For more information, visit the National Center on Elder Abuse's website at [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov) or call your Garrett County ombudsman at 301-334-9431, ext. 6140.

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