



Office for  
the Aging



Office of Children  
and Family Services

## World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) Regional Press Event Toolkit

June 15, 2023

The NYS Office of Children and Family Services and NYS Office for the Aging are inviting local programs to hold local press events on June 15 in recognition of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD). The following toolkit is designed to offer tips and suggestions to support that effort by Adult Protective Services, Offices for the Aging, Elder Abuse Enhanced Multidisciplinary Team members (E-MDTs), local law enforcement, NYS Coalition on Elder Abuse members, and others interested in sponsoring an event. Participating agencies are also welcome to use their own WEAAD materials and event agenda. For assistance with this toolkit or other questions, please contact Roger Noyes at NYSOFA: [roger.noyes@aging.ny.gov](mailto:roger.noyes@aging.ny.gov).

### **Suggested materials to prepare ahead of time:**

- Find a convenient location for the WEAAD press conference, such as the office of the host organization (e.g., County or City/Town Government Office Building, a community center, etc.). Make sure the location has seating for press and a staging area for remarks with a podium and PA system if necessary.
- Invite speakers, confirm their participation, and assign a host presenter (such as the County Executive/Commissioner or local official involved with elder abuse prevention and/or intervention) who will introduce the event and the speakers. If possible, identify a person in the community and/or family members who have experienced elder abuse – someone who is able to tell their story and be a voice of encouragement for others to seek help. This event will be most powerful as a coalition presentation, with experts from each discipline sharing information and solutions from their area of expertise.
- Prepare a press release that includes quotes from all speakers. (A template has been provided in this toolkit.)
- Prepare a media advisory inviting press to the local WEAAD event. (A template has been provided in this toolkit.)
- Gather speakers' notes ahead of time to make sure all of the relevant points are raised during the press conference and that the remarks complement one another. (Some draft talking points have been provided in this toolkit which you can customize with local information.)

## Suggested Timeline for Week of the Event

- **June 13:** Invite the media using the sample media advisory in this toolkit (please customize). The advisory can be sent to local press contacts by including the advisory in the body of an email (be sure to bcc email recipients). Invite print, television, and radio contacts covering your region.
- **June 13-14:** Make follow-up calls with reporters/newsrooms. Talk to the reporter, assignment editors, producers to make sure they received your advisory. Stress why it's important to attend the event. Request that reporters/assignment editors put the event on their calendars for June 15 (for TV news especially).
- **June 15 (a few hours pre-event):** Resend the media advisory as a reminder.
- **June 15 (during the event):** Have a staff person available to greet the media and provide them with a copy of your press release. Collect the names and contact information for all reporters attending in case any follow-up is needed. Take pictures.
- **June 15 (post-event):** Send an electronic version of your press release to all press contacts along with photo(s) and caption information (newspapers may still run a news report based on the release/photo even if they didn't send a reporter to the press conference).

## Sample Media Advisory

*Please customize your advisory with as much locally specific information as possible. Your headline should feature the principal speakers.*

### **\*Media Advisory\***

**For planning purposes:** June 13, 2023

## **[NAME OF COUNTY/CITY/LOCALITY] County/Local Officials, Law Enforcement and Community Partners Unite to Raise Awareness on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, June 15**

*Press conference to offer vital information about the signs and forms of elder abuse, how to identify it, and local resources to help*

June 15 is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which aims to promote a better understanding of abuse and neglect of older persons by raising awareness of this often hidden epidemic. Local organizations have formed important partnerships to address elder abuse in [NAME of COUNTY or REGION], from law enforcement to Adult Protective Services, Offices for the Aging, and other community partners. Join them on June 15 to learn more about elder abuse, its prevalence, signs of abuse, and where the public can turn for help.

**WHAT:** A press conference to raise awareness of elder abuse on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day and to inform the public about local resources to help identify, report, and obtain support services related to elder abuse.

**WHEN:** June 15, 2023, at [TIME]

**WHERE:** [LOCATION NAME AND ADDRESS]

**WHO:** [COUNTY/LOCAL OFFICIALS' NAMES], Law Enforcement, Adult Protective Services, [NAME] County Office for the Aging, [LIST OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, SPEAKERS' NAMES, AND TITLES].

**Contact:**

[NAME/TITLE OF CONTACT FOR PRESS INQUIRIES]  
[PHONE]  
[EMAIL ADDRESS]

## **Suggested Talking Points and Speakers' Notes**

*Please customize these as much as possible with local information – and assign topic areas according to discipline/expertise/role*

### **Why We Are Here (host organization)**

- Today is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), a global event to raise awareness of the cultural, social, economic, and demographic circumstances affecting elder abuse and neglect. This is a global problem, and one that exists here in [NAME of COUNTY or REGION].
- We are joining together today at all levels – government, law enforcement, and community partners – in a united front to support victims of elder abuse, bring perpetrators to justice, achieve restitution, and create mechanisms to improve care for elder abuse victims.
- Joining us today are [INTRODUCE SPEAKERS].
- We are also proud today to convey words of support from Governor Kathy Hochul in a proclamation recognizing World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in New York State [READ FROM PROCLAMATION].

### **What is Elder Abuse?**

- Elder abuse can include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; financial exploitation; and neglect (including self-neglect).
- Abuse can happen to any older person, by a loved one, a hired caregiver, or a stranger. Abuse can happen at home, at a relative's home, or in an eldercare facility.
- There are many signs of possible elder abuse. The community is an important set of eyes and ears. Therefore, it is critical for family, caregivers, health practitioners, friends, and neighbors to watch for these signs and act accordingly if an individual:
  - Seems depressed, confused, or withdrawn.
  - Is isolated from friends and family.
  - Has unexplained bruises, burns, or scars.
  - Exhibits poor hygiene or appears underfed, dehydrated, overmedicated or undermedicated, or is not receiving needed care for medical problems.

- Has bed sores or other preventable conditions.
- Exhibits recent changes in banking or spending patterns.
- [According to the 2011 comprehensive study, \*Under the Radar: New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study\*](#), each year over 300,000 older adults are victims of elder abuse in New York State – a preventable social problem that impacts many of New York State’s most vulnerable individuals.
- Elder abuse is found in all communities. It is not limited to individuals of any race, ethnic or cultural background, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation.
- Elder abuse is often hidden and unreported; statewide, for every reported case of elder abuse, 23 cases go unreported.
- Financial exploitation is the most common form of elder abuse. It is almost twice as common as the second most common form of abuse: physical abuse.
- Statewide, for every reported case of financial exploitation, 43 cases go unreported.
- Individuals with Alzheimer’s disease and other neuro-cognitive impairments are at a greater risk of elder abuse. Informal caregivers and family/friends are most often the perpetrators.
- [According to the 2016 \*New York State Cost of Financial Exploitation Study\*](#), conducted by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services, Bureau of Adult Services, the statewide impact of financial exploitation has been estimated to range from \$352 million to \$1.5 billion annually; this includes the costs to victims, service agencies, and public benefit programs.

### **Social Isolation, COVID-19, and Stresses on Working Caregivers**

- Older adults who are socially isolated are at increased risk for elder abuse.
- Well before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2017, the U.S. Surgeon General declared a "global epidemic" of social isolation. This problem has been exacerbated on an historic scale during the pandemic, putting more older adults at risk of abuse while disconnecting people from the community supports that would otherwise detect abuse.
- As many adults have socially isolated in the pandemic, reports of elder abuse have increased.

- In fact, a study in the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* suggests that 1 in 5 older people has experienced elder abuse during the pandemic – an increase of nearly 84%.
- Many older adults are forced to isolate with abusers. There has also been a major increase in financial scams targeting older adults during the past three years.
- We also have a caregiving crisis. This crisis has increased the demands on overburdened caregivers, which can be a driving factor for neglect, financial abuse, or physical harm.
- Substance abuse is also on the rise, especially among caregivers, 33% of whom use substances to cope versus 6% of the general population. While not always a direct cause of abuse, most instances of domestic abuse involve alcohol or other substances.
- We all have a duty to be alert, to take action, and get the supports or relief necessary to prevent abuse in all of its forms.

### **Real Life Story Presentation**

*[Use this opportunity for an individual to share their story, how the abuse was identified and addressed, and the resources they relied upon for help. What lessons can they convey to the public about their story?]*

### **What the Law Says**

- Elder abuse is not only a shameful exploitation of vulnerable individuals; certain forms of abuse are criminal.
- New York State Social Services Law outlines several definitions for abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional, financial, and active and passive neglect.
- N.Y. Penal Law Article 260 protects the welfare of vulnerable elderly or those adults with physical/mental impairment.
- For law enforcement to intervene and pursue any criminal charges, the suspected abuse must be reported and properly investigated.
- The law (New York Social Services Law §473-b) also grants immunity from civil liability to anyone who reports suspected elder abuse in good faith.
- Specific to financial exploitation of older adults, New York State's Social Services Law defines financial exploitation as the improper use of an adult's funds, property, and/or resources by another individual [Social Services Law, Section

473 (6) (g)], and authorizes Adult Protective Services (APS) to investigate cases of exploitation.

- Recently, Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation (S.1560/A.1994 of 2021 and S.7779/A.8799 of 2022) into law to protect older adults from fraudulent use of personal information by authorizing support services on identity theft through non-profit agencies and law enforcement. The legislation allows the Office for the Aging and law enforcement to recognize identity theft as one of the many forms of elder abuse and take appropriate action to help older adults.

## **Statewide Solutions**

- Under Governor Kathy Hochul's leadership, New York State has taken several decisive actions to combat elder abuse.
- New York State is responding to this problem in a variety of ways across multiple state agencies, with the Office of Children and Family Services having received over ten million dollars in federal funding to support, improve and enhance the provision of adult protective services statewide. With this funding:
  - OCFS has joined a national APS public awareness campaign, assisting with the development of national materials and public service announcements to further raise awareness of adult abuse and neglect.
  - Local Departments of Social Services in receipt of this funding have supported vulnerable adults by addressing unsanitary conditions in the home, purchasing PPE for COVID-19 safety precautions, upgrading technology to allow for improved access to investigatory resources and for service referrals to occur while in the field. APS clients have been able to remain in the community with housing, heating, basic needs, and transportation assistance through this funding.
- In 2017, New York became the first age-friendly state in the nation, as designated by AARP and the World Health Organization – a commitment to serving the needs of all older adults, especially those who are most vulnerable. The Governor's budget includes unprecedented supports to build on this promise, including the development of a State Master Plan for Aging that is convening all divisions of government in a coordinated effort to address New Yorkers' core needs as they age.
- When it comes to addressing elder abuse, New York's support structure includes an integrated system overseen by state agencies and local jurisdictions represented here today who are connecting the dots and working collaboratively to protect older adults. These efforts include:
  - Elder abuse education and outreach.

- Receiving, investigating, and referring cases of elder abuse to law enforcement and other appropriate authorities.
- Elder Abuse Enhanced Multidisciplinary Teams (E-MDTs) in every region of the state. These teams convene local agencies in individual counties to meet together to help address complex cases of elder abuse.

### **More Information about E-MDTs**

- The purpose of E-MDTs is to provide a coordinated response to cases of elder abuse. Each county team is made up of professionals from selected public, private, and voluntary agencies representing different disciplines.
- The county teams often include, but are not limited to: the local Office for the Aging and other aging service providers, Adult Protective Services, mental health professionals, health care providers, social workers, human services providers, banking/financial institutions, civil legal services, district attorney's offices, law enforcement agencies, and access to forensic accountants.
- Professionals who suspect that a client is a victim of abuse can contact their local E-MDT Coordinator. To find your county's E-MDT Coordinator, go to <https://www.nysemdt.org/contact>.
- From 2014 to 2022, E-MDT interventions led to a reported \$4.2 million in court ordered or agreed upon restitution in financial exploitation cases. Of this, \$1.2 million was reported returned to the victims.

*[Provide a case example if relevant]*

### **Reporting Elder Abuse**

There are several ways to report both suspicion of and confirmed cases of abuse and neglect in New York.

- Call the New York State Bureau of Adult Services Helpline at 1-844-697-3505.
- Call your local county APS directly at [CONTACT INFORMATION].
- Call 9-1-1 if someone is in immediate danger or risk of harm.
- In New York City, call 3-1-1 to report suspicion of abuse to the appropriate authorities.
- You can also call the Elder Abuse Helpline for Concerned Persons. A concerned person is a family member, friend, or neighbor impacted by elder abuse. These

family members, friends, and neighbors may not know where to turn or who to call. That is where the helpline comes in. Services are free and confidential. It should be stressed that this is a **non-emergency line** at 1-844-746-6905.

### **What Happens When You Call APS**

- In responding to referrals, APS will initiate an investigation to determine if the person is eligible for protective or other services. APS will identify risks and needs, offer and arrange for services to reduce risks and address unmet needs to support the adult's ability to stay in the community for as long as possible.
- A case may be referred to law enforcement for criminal charges.
- An adult may refuse help, and those with mental capacity have the right to exercise free choice in deciding whether to accept services.
- If an adult appears to be capable of understanding the risks and chooses to stay in an abusive or neglectful situation, APS will offer services and try to work with the adult to accept help. If there are questions about the adult's mental capacity, then a mental health evaluation will be pursued to determine if court-ordered interventions should be provided.

### **Other Resources to Help**

- As noted earlier, caregiver stress is a major risk factor for abuse. There are supports available through your Office for the Aging to help.
- Office for Aging programs include caregiver support groups and respite services, which provide temporary relief for caregivers, including temporary substitute care or supervision of adults. All local offices for the aging provide respite services and NYSOFA directly funds 10 respite programs.
- For caregiver assistance, call NY Connects at 1-800-342-9871 or contact your local office for the aging directly at [CONTACT INFORMATION].
- While many of the resources we've outlined are community-based, there are other resources available for individuals who have a concern for the safety or welfare of an older adult in a nursing home, assisted living facility, or other facility.
- All cases of abuse should be referred to APS or law enforcement; but families and friends of residents in facilities can also consult the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program, which is available in every region of the state to help residents understand and exercise their rights to quality care. The statewide helpline is 1-855-582-6769.

## Sample Press Release

*Please customize as much as possible with local information*

[LOGOS]

**For Immediate Release:** June 15, 2023

### **[NAME OF COUNTY/CITY/LOCALITY] Officials, Law Enforcement and Partners Unite on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, Share Local Resources to Help Victims**

[NAME OF COUNTY OR REGIONAL OFFICIALS], law enforcement and community partners marked World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in [NAME OF COUNTY OR REGION] on June 15 by sharing information about the signs and forms of elder abuse, how to identify it, and local resources to help.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day aims to promote a better understanding of abuse and neglect of older persons by raising awareness of this hidden epidemic. Local organizations have formed important partnerships to address this problem collaboratively in [NAME OF COUNTY OR REGION] – organizations ranging from law enforcement to Adult Protective Services, Offices for the Aging, multidisciplinary teams, and other community partners.

During a press conference on June 15 in [NAME OF COUNTY/REGION], [NAME OF COUNTY OR REGIONAL OFFICIALS] joined with officials from Adult Protective Services, the [NAME] County Office for the Aging, law enforcement, and community partners to share critical information for the public.

[INCLUDE QUOTES FROM SPEAKERS]

Elder abuse can include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; financial exploitation; and neglect (including self-neglect). There are many signs of possible elder abuse. It is incumbent on family, caregivers, health practitioners, friends, and neighbors to watch for these signs, especially if an older adult:

- Seems depressed, confused, or withdrawn.
- Is isolated from friends and family.
- Has unexplained bruises, burns, or scars.
- Exhibits poor hygiene or appears underfed, dehydrated, overmedicated or undermedicated, or is not receiving needed care for medical problems.
- Has bed sores or other preventable conditions.

- Exhibits recent changes in banking or spending patterns.

According to the 2011 comprehensive study, *Under the Radar: New York State Elder Abuse Prevention Study*, each year over 300,000 older adults are victims of elder abuse in New York State, including approximately [NUMBER] cases in [NAME OF COUNTY/REGION]. Elder abuse is often hidden and unreported; statewide, for every reported case of elder abuse, 23 cases go unreported.

Financial exploitation is the most common form of elder abuse. According to statewide data, for every reported case of financial exploitation, 43 cases go unreported.

Older adults who are socially isolated are at increased risk for elder abuse. Well before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2017, the U.S. Surgeon General declared a "global epidemic" of social isolation. That problem has been magnified on a historic scale over the last two years of the pandemic, putting more older adults at risk of abuse while disconnecting people from the community supports that would otherwise detect it. In fact, a study in the *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* suggests that 1 in 5 older people has experienced elder abuse during the pandemic, an increase of nearly 84%.

There are several ways to report both suspicion of and confirmed cases of abuse and neglect in New York:

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Caregiver stress is a major risk factor for abuse. There are supports available through your Office for the Aging to help. Programs include caregiver support groups and respite services, which provide temporary relief for caregivers, including temporary substitute care or supervision of adults. All local offices for the aging provide respite services and NYSOFA directly funds 10 respite programs.

For caregiver assistance, call NY Connects at 1-800-342-9871 or contact the [NAME] County Office for the Aging directly at [CONTACT INFORMATION].

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