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## **Elder Abuse: An under-reported but growing problem**

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State officials are concerned that elder abuse may be a growing problem in Oregon as it is nationally. National studies estimate that 3-5 million seniors age 65 and older nationwide have experienced abuse, but only one in five abuse cases is reported. With the holidays upon us and families visiting with one another, DHS would like to remind people of the signs of elder abuse.

“No type of abuse should be tolerated, but elder abuse is an under-reported crime because people do not know how to recognize the signs, and they don’t know how to report it when they do see it,” says James D. Toews, the Department of Human Services (DHS) assistant director for seniors and people with disabilities. “We have to raise awareness of elder abuse and ways to report it before we can hope to prevent it.”

Approximately 13 percent of Oregon’s population is now 65 years or older with nearly 76,000 Oregonians having reached age 85.

DHS reviewed 20,000 calls regarding allegations of abuse of elderly or physically disabled Oregonians in 2009. Of those calls 12,447 warranted DHS investigation in either the community or in facilities.

A new brochure from the DHS Seniors and People with Disabilities Division outlines adult abuse reporting. It can be found and downloaded at the [DHS forms website](#).

The signs of elder abuse include physical injuries, emotional or behavioral changes, a decline in self-care, and changes in financial status. A complete list of the signs of abuse is available on the [DHS website](#).

(more)

Oregon law defines elder abuse as physical injury not caused by accident, neglect leading to harm, abandonment, intentional infliction of physical pain or injury, unwanted sexual contact or the inability to consent to sexual contact, and taking or threatening to take money or property.

Anyone witnessing or suspecting abuse of seniors or people with physical disabilities is asked to call the toll-free abuse hotline: 1-800-232-3020. DHS and Area Agencies on Aging provide protective services and investigate reports of suspected abuse. They determine if abuse has occurred and work with law enforcement when a potential crime may have occurred.

“Our staff does an excellent job of identifying these situations and providing assistance, but they need help from the public,” says Toews. “As Oregon’s population ages, this type of abuse is bound to increase unless we all become more aware of the signs of abuse and more willing to report or prevent it.”

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