

Protecting Ohio's Older Adults



Older adults are the fastest growing segment of Ohio's population. They are also living longer, often with chronic conditions and limitations that make them vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Since 2000, The HealthPath Foundation of Ohio's Prevention of Family Violence initiative has helped lay the groundwork for enhancing services and resources to prevent all forms of family violence in our 36-county service area. Because older adults are often vulnerable and elder abuse is common but overlooked, HealthPath has chosen to focus on protecting Ohio's older adults.

Safe Elders

Victims of elder abuse come from all walks of life and are both men and women. Elder abuse is about as common as falls that require emergency care and new diagnoses of cancer. The Ohio Family Violence Prevention Project estimates that more than 105,000 Ohio older adults are abused or neglected each year. However, not all incidents are filed with Adult Protective Services (APS) across the state. To help ensure that older adults who are living in the community are safe and supported, The HealthPath Foundation of Ohio has selected Safe Elders as one of our result areas for 2017–2021.



Over **105,000** Ohio older adults are abused, exploited, or neglected, but only 1 in 6 of these adults, or **16,400**, filed reports.

What Influences Safety and Support

Increasing awareness, reducing isolation, and supporting caregivers all play a role in keeping older adults safe and supported. Family, friends, and community members often don't report elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation because they don't know what signs to look for, how to intervene, or who to report their suspicions to. Older adults themselves may realize what's happening, but they hesitate to report it because they are worried people will think they aren't capable of living on their own and taking care of themselves. Financial exploitation is particularly difficult to report, because in the majority of cases, it is family member or friend who is taking advantage of the older adult, and not a scam by a stranger.

Older adults are at a higher risk of being socially isolated or lonely. While senior centers offer a variety of social programs, older adults may have barriers to transportation. They may not be physically able to drive, they may not have a car, or their community may not be walkable. As budgets tighten and demand has increased, transportation programs are often limited, especially in rural areas. Meal programs for seniors, whether home-delivered or congregate, can help keep older adults from being completely isolated. The demand for meal programs has increased while funding has stayed flat, meaning agencies provide fewer meals per week, per person.

Unpaid caregivers, such as adult children, siblings, or other family members or friends, are a fast-growing segment of the population. These caregivers are often balancing the demands of a job and their own families with those of caring for an older adult. Caregivers who are stressed may not be as able to care for the older adult, which puts the older adult at risk. There is a shortage of resources in some parts of the state, and it can be hard to find qualified, in-home services that support both the older adult and their unpaid caregivers.





What HealthPath Will Fund

To help ensure that Ohio's older adults living in the community are safe and supported, HealthPath will offer funding through three initiatives: Workforce Development, Direct Service, and Community Connections. HealthPath will consider projects that align with the following strategies:

Workforce Development

(funded in 2017, 2019, 2021)

- Train professionals and paraprofessionals who interact with the elderly on how to recognize and report abuse, neglect, and exploitation
- Provide cultural competency training for workers who care for the elderly

Direct Service

(funded in 2018, 2020)

- Test the reliability of promising programs and practices for increasing the safety of older adults
- Support the development and scaling of a representative payee model

Community Connections

These will be community-driven projects that could include:

- Multi-generational initiatives that support older adults living in the community
- Community awareness campaigns that increase the visibility of older adults
- Programs that create a more age-friendly community
- Programs that help older adults talk with their adult children and families about how they can live in the community safely
- Programs that provide youth with hands-on, problem-based learning about keeping older adults safe in the community