

## Being Alert to Scams

Scammers often prey on the loneliness and isolation of seniors. Research suggests that elderly women in their 80's and living at home are often the most likely targets for financial scams and fraud. For any scam, an especially vulnerable time is the three years after some major stress, such as the loss of a spouse or a change in health or housing. Older people may fall victim to fraud because they

- are too trusting, and too good mannered to be rude
- believe the salesperson is nice, friendly and caring
- are impressed with fancy credentials and titles.

For families wanting to help protect their parents from scammers, it is helpful to strive for open, two-way communication when it comes to finances. It is important not to come across as patronising or have them think you don't trust their judgement, while at the same time you want to protect them from being too trusting and other common pitfalls.

Giving your parents stern warnings or demanding power of attorney may seem like the way to go, but this can threaten their independence and cause possible resentment if they feel you are saying they lack judgement and are unable to take care of themselves. Offer advice, be supportive and reassure them it can happen to anyone so they don't feel stupid.

You also don't want to create an environment of fear and mistrust which threatens their sense of security living at home.

### Some helpful things you can do

- check out the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) [consumer alerts](#) which provide information on the latest phone scams
- check out the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) [information for seniors](#) and subscribe for free to [Scamwatch](#) which has specialist advice for older Australians on common scams and an email alert on new scams
- get a copy of the ACCC publication, [The Little Black Book of Scams](#) which details common scams to look out for, how to protect yourself and where you can find help
- check out your state/territory consumer protection agency, which will have information on latest scams, and where you can report any scam activity
- reduce the number of unsolicited phone calls by going on the ACMA [do not call register](#) for free

- consider replacing the home landline with a mobile, where scam calls are less frequent
- report a suspected scam to [Scamwatch](#) or to your State/Territory consumer protection agency
- call the local police if theft or fraud is suspected.

### **Precautions to take to avoid common scams**

- be wary of door-to-door salesman, offers for unsolicited home maintenance work, claims that emergency work is required, requirements for deposits or full payment before work is commenced, pressure to accept their offer on the spot, cash only requirements
- don't enter into any financial agreements without first getting advice, and never sign a document you don't understand
- always get more than one quote for work that needs to be done, get everything in writing before work commences, check licences and references
- don't give financial information (eg credit card, bank account details) over the phone or directly to someone
- seek recommendations from others

### **What you can do as a family member**

- maintain regular contact and talk with your family member about what is happening in their daily life so that you know who is coming and going
- ask your relative to only use a trusted contractor and not to engage anyone on the doorstep. If they are concerned they should ring you
- keep up to date with the latest scams and discuss these with your parents
- remind them never to give information over the phone re their personal details. It may be helpful to write a note near the phone/computer as a reminder not to divulge information such as bank accounts, passwords, social security details