

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 15, 2017**

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Coalition working to prevent abuse and exploitation shares information about services at Elder Abuse Awareness Day event

BISMARCK, N.D. – Abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of older adults and other vulnerable individuals happens – even in our close-knit, family-focused state.

Last year, the North Dakota Department of Human Services received 1,737 calls reporting suspected abuse, neglect or financial exploitation of vulnerable adults. Individuals involved typically include total strangers, such as in the Jamaican lottery scam situation, and trusted individuals in positions of authority and decision-making roles, including family members.

The West Central Vulnerable Adult Coalition is recognizing Elder Abuse Awareness Day by sharing information about how people can stay safe, avoid being scammed, and access intervention services on June 20 in conjunction with the musicians association's summer concert series in downtown Mandan at Dykshoorn Park. Local musician Victor Schwan will perform old-time music at the Vern Cermak Band Shell, and the Dakotah Lions are hosting their hamburger and bratwurst night.

Food will be available for purchase beginning at 5:30 p.m. The coalition will provide a short program about scams at 6:30 p.m. featuring consumer fraud investigator Tonya Hetzler of the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division. Afterwards, Mandan Police Department Sgt. Rick Widicker will talk briefly about financial investigations. Music will begin at 7:30 p.m.

Bill Willis of the department's Aging Services Division said, "We encourage people to come enjoy music and a meal while learning more about our coalition and the services members offer to prevent and address abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of vulnerable adults and to support health and well-being and enable people to live independently at home as their abilities change."

He said participating coalition members will share resources about the Department of Human Services' Family Caregiver Support Program and Vulnerable Adult Protective Services; the North Dakota Senior Medicare Patrol's efforts that help people prevent fraud and avoid scams; nursing, medication management and health maintenance services offered by Bismarck-Burleigh and Custer Health Public Health Units, Alzheimer's Association dementia care services, and Dakota Center for Independent Living services that promote independence in the home and help people transition from nursing homes and other institutions to community living.

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Dakota Travel Nurse Home Care services, AARP, Protection and Advocacy services, Good Samaritan Society Home Care, and the Medicine Shoppe Pharmacy in Mandan will also have information available. People can register for door prizes at some booths.

Governor Doug Burgum signed a proclamation recognizing Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which is available online at www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/aging/proclamation-elder-abuse-awareness-day.pdf.

Willis said community awareness is invaluable to preventing abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable adults.

“Prevention involves looking out for one another, and we encourage neighbors, friends, family members and service providers to say something if they see something,” he said.

To report suspected abuse, neglect or financial exploitation of older adults and other vulnerable adults, people should call toll-free 1-855-462-5465 (1-855-GO2LINK), or report online at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/adultsaging/reporting.html. Call 911 if someone is in immediate danger and needs emergency services.

The West Central Vulnerable Adult Coalition is co-chaired by representatives from the North Dakota Department of Human Services and the North Dakota Attorney General’s Consumer Protection Division. It was created in 2009 under the leadership of the department’s West Central Human Service Center with grant funding from the National Center on Elder Abuse. The coalition works closely with law enforcement and other partners on prevention and to build a coordinated community response.

The Department of Human Services’ Aging Services Division administers the Vulnerable Adult Protective Services program, which addresses the safety of vulnerable adults who are at risk of harm due to the presence or threat of abuse, neglect or exploitation. The program is offered statewide through the department’s regional human service centers or through local partner agencies. Program details, including information about reporting, are available online at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/adultsaging/vulnerable.html.

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