

NEWS from the **North Dakota Department of Human Services**

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Coalition for the prevention of elder abuse and exploitation hosts shred-a-thon to help seniors foil ID theft

BISMARCK, N.D. – In recognition of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, the West Central Vulnerable Adults Coalition is hosting a shred-a-thon event on Monday, June 15, 2009, from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Bismarck Senior Center, 315 N 20th St. Staff from the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division and trained coalition partners will meet with seniors to help them to identify documents they need to keep for personal records and to safely shred other papers that, if disposed of casually, may increase the risk of fraud and identity theft. Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem will be participating in the coalition's event.

"Our coalition was created to prevent abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of seniors and vulnerable individuals," said co-chair Cherry Schmidt, the regional aging services program administrator at the Department of Human Services' West Central Human Service Center. "Instances of financial exploitation, including fraud and identity theft, do occur in North Dakota. We hope this event reminds people about how they can guard against these serious problems."

Schmidt, who worked to build the coalition, co-chairs it with Parrell Grossman, director of the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division.

"Seniors may be reluctant to dispose of any financial documents, and this event will provide them the opportunity to do so with assistance and guidance. Often they don't realize the value of such information to identity thieves when they do discard old records, which can leave them vulnerable to identity theft and scams," Stenehjem said. "Consumer education is the key to preventing fraud, and I am pleased that my office is able to partner with the coalition on this important effort."

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Schmidt and Grossman said the coalition hopes to sponsor other events during the coming year. Coalition partners also include representatives from financial institutions, clergy, higher education, other social service providers, legal services, law enforcement, medical and public health providers, and service providers.

Last year the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) awarded the Department of Human Services a \$10,000 grant to develop the coalition and to support its work. In addition to current initiatives underway in Bismarck-Mandan, coalition members who reside or work in Burleigh, Emmons, Grant, Kidder, McLean, Mercer, Morton, Oliver, Sheridan, and Sioux counties plan to expand their efforts to the 10-county region.

Schmidt said the coalition's goals include working more closely with law enforcement agencies, establishing a speakers bureau, identifying emergency housing options for vulnerable individuals who may be impacted by abuse or neglect, creating and providing information and training, and educating families and the public. Coalition members are also working to build relationships with tribal elder services programs in the region, and to develop links to utility and postal workers, and businesses that may be the first to notice something unusual.

For information about the coalition or to report an incidence of elder abuse or neglect, contact Schmidt at 701-328-8787 or 888-328-2662. For information about preventing identity theft, contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 701-328-3404 or 800-472-2600.

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