Elder Abuse Awareness Day is June 15; coalition plans event is Bismarck

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services and other members of the West Central Vulnerable Adult Coalition are sponsoring a World Elder Abuse Awareness Day educational event, June 15 at 12:30 p.m. at the Bismarck Senior Center.

The event features experts from the department and the North Dakota Attorney General’s Office who will share information on how to recognize and report concerns and how individuals can avoid being scammed.

The coalition wants more North Dakotans to know how to prevent, identify and report suspected abuse, neglect and financial exploitation of vulnerable adults. To support their efforts, Governor Doug Burgum has proclaimed June 15 Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Last year, the number of reports of suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of vulnerable adults in North Dakota grew by 19%, increasing to 2,941 reports. According to experts, elder abuse and exploitation are often underreported.

Abuse can be physical, verbal or emotional. Signs of neglect can include changes in personal care such as hygiene, or signs of malnourishment, and may involve self-neglect. Exploitation may be financial.

“We encourage people to be the voice for those individuals who cannot or may not be able to speak up on their own behalf. Some people are unable to advocate for themselves because of cognitive reasons, including confusion or forgetfulness, or physical reasons. Others don’t say anything out of fear or because they don’t want to get a family member or someone else in trouble,” said Michelle Gayette, the assistant director of the department’s Adult and Aging Services Division.

“There are services available to prevent and intervene if a vulnerable adult is being abused, neglected or exploited. Our goal is to connect more people to those services,” she said. “Please don’t assume someone else will report a concern.”

To report suspected abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult, contact the reporting line toll-free at 855-462-5465 and select No. 2, 711 (TTY). People can also make a report online at https://bit.ly/3aGVSTD. If a vulnerable adult is in immediate life-threatening danger, call local law enforcement first and then file a report.

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Anyone can make a report, but some professionals and individuals such as health care professionals and others are required by law to report abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable adults. Reporters’ names and reports are confidential.

Almost one in three North Dakotans ages 65 and older lives alone. Without strong social networks and access to support services in the community, these individuals are at increased risk for social isolation, self-neglect, abuse and exploitation, including financial exploitation.

Relatives, neighbors, friends and other individuals in the community can prevent concerns by regularly calling and visiting older adults. They can also encourage older adults whose abilities may be changing to seek out in-home care and support services such as help with housecleaning, chores, nonmedical transportation or personal care from reputable providers.

To learn more about vulnerable adult protective services and reporting concerns, visit www.nd.gov/dhs/services/adultsaging/reporting.html. Individuals can get help connecting with other needed services and support such as senior meals, help with housekeeping and personal care services by contacting North Dakota’s Aging and Disability Resource Link toll-free at 1-855-462-5465 and selecting option No. 1, 711 (TTY) or at carechoice@nd.gov or online at https://carechoice.nd.assistguide.net/.

To view the official proclamation, visit https://www.governor.nd.gov/proclamations and click on Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

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