



Evidence-Based

Different kinds of elder abuse situations may need different kinds of prevention strategies. These are some examples (not an exhaustive list) of prevention strategies being implemented in many communities.

- [Abuse Registries & Criminal Background Checks](#)
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## Abuse Registries & Criminal Background Checks

There is no clear or consistent definition of an “abuse registry.” Generally, the term is used to refer to a list of perpetrators of substantiated incidents of elder abuse and, in many instances, used to determine whether those individuals should be prohibited from working with certain vulnerable populations or in certain settings, such as a nursing home.

Registries are often considered a prevention line of defense because people who are found to have abused a vulnerable adult or senior are flagged during a background check when applying for jobs. Visit our [State Laws](#) section to read more about abuse registries.

In addition, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have a National Background Check Program. The program's purpose is to identify efficient, effective, and economical procedures for conducting background checks on all prospective direct patient access employees of long-term care facilities and providers. For more information on this program, as well as an evaluation of the program to date, visit the [CMS National Background Check Program](#) website.

## Addressing Ageism

In the 1960s, Robert Butler coined the phrase ageism, which he defined as:

*“A process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old-fashioned in morality and skills ... Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves; thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings ...”* —Robert Butler, *Why Survive? Being Old in America*, 1975

While some advocates for elders suggest that ageism is a cause of elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, we do not have enough valid research into the attitudes of known perpetrators of elder mistreatment to be able to definitively make that statement. However, ageism contributes to conditions that disadvantage and marginalize older individuals in society. Ageist beliefs and policies categorize seniors as a homogenous group, ignoring diversity issues and individual needs.

Ageism influences the way human rights and citizenship are articulated for older people. Ageism entails prejudices and actions against older people that result in older adults being socially marginalized and devalued. It is argued that these attitudes provide a “covert basis for societal tolerance of elder abuse” (Phelan, A. (2008). “Elder Abuse, Ageism, Human Rights and Citizenship: Implications for Nursing Discourse.” *Nursing Inquiry*, 15: 320–329. doi: 10.1111/j.1440-1800.2008.00423.x). It is argued that a lack of honor and respect of older individuals results in permissive attitudes of, and societal blindness to, disrespect and even violence against older adults. Addressing ageist attitudes within society may begin to reduce the occurrence of elder abuse, or at least increase the public outcry against it.

## Advance Planning Tools

There are a number of advance planning tools that you can employ that will reduce confusion and clarify your wishes in the event you become unable to do so yourself.

Among these tools are:

- Advance directives
- Living wills
- Limited powers of attorney for both health care and for finances

<https://ncea.acl.gov/What-We-Do/Practice/Prevention-Strategies.aspx#ageism>

But in addition to making your wishes known, these tools also can be used to protect against financial exploitation, as well as the possibility of abuse or neglect. Identifying ahead of time a person you trust to manage your finances will help to limit one's exposure to unscrupulous individuals.

Establishing your health care wishes, as well as identifying a health care proxy for decision making, can help protect you by making sure that adequate care will be arranged for you in the event you are unable to care for yourself.

The American Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging has created a helpful guide, [Health & Financial Decisions: Legal Tools for Preserving Your Personal Autonomy \(PDF\)](#), that explains the different planning options available.

## **Public Awareness**

Public awareness efforts are communication tools for promoting or improving health and well-being. Changes in services, technology, regulations, and policy are often also necessary to completely address a health or social problem.

Communication alone can:

- Increase knowledge and awareness of an issue, problem, or solution
- Influence perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that may change social norms
- Prompt action
- Demonstrate or illustrate healthy skills
- Reinforce knowledge, attitudes, or behavior
- Show the benefit of behavior change
- Advocate a position on an issue or policy
- Increase demand or support for services
- Refute myths and misconceptions
- Strengthen organizational relationships

To learn more about communication campaigns, read the CDC's [Pink Book—Making Health Communication Programs Work](#).

Find [ideas about raising awareness in your community](#).