



TRI-VALLEY Help-line

March 2012

Tri-Valley receives many questions from area seniors, younger people with disabilities and caregivers and has created this monthly Help-line column to provide some assistance. We are also available five days a week to answer individual questions in person or on the phone. Our website is also available.

Top 10 Scams Against Seniors

Q: What are the most common scams against seniors?

A: Each year millions of older Americans fall victim to financial scams. Here are the top 10 scams according to the National Council on Aging.

- 1. Medicare/Health Care Fraud:** People posing as a Medicare representative get older people to give them their personal information, or provide bogus services for elders at makeshift mobile clinics, then use the information to bill Medicare.
- 2. Counterfeit Prescription Drugs:** Elders looking for lower price medications may purchase unsafe substances.
- 3. Funeral & Cemetery Scams:** Scammers attend the funeral service of a stranger, claiming the deceased had an outstanding debt with them, and extorting money from relatives to settle the fake debts, or funeral directors will insist that an expensive casket is necessary for cremation, when a cardboard casket is all that is required.
- 4. Fraudulent Anti-Aging Products:** Whether it's fake Botox or bogus homeopathic remedies, anti-aging products are big business. A bad batch of Botox from a renegade lab can be a very toxic substance.
- 5. Telemarketing:** Scammers use fake telemarketing calls to prey on older people. A con artist claims he/she has found a large sum of money and is willing to split it if the person will withdraw funds from his/her bank account, or the scammer gets the elder to wire money on the pretext that the person's child or another relative is in the hospital and needs the money. In

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charity scams, callers ask for money for fake charities, especially after a natural disaster has occurred.

6. Internet Fraud: Automated internet scams simulate virus-scanning software to get seniors to download a fake anti-virus program; or a real virus will open up whatever information is on the user's computer to scammers. In one "phishing" scam, a senior gets an email asking them to "update" or "verify" their personal information to get a tax refund.

7. Investment Schemes: Pyramid schemes like Bernie Madoff's, or "investors" who are looking for a partner to claim inheritance money or invest in complex financial products.

8. Homeowner/Reverse Mortgage Scams: The elder is sent a personalized letter from a supposed assessor's office, offering the homeowner--for a fee---to arrange for a reassessment of their property's value with the promise of a lower tax bill. In the reverse mortgage scam, an elder is given an unsecured reverse mortgage, which can cause them to lose their home when the perpetrators offer money or a free house somewhere else in exchange for the title to the elder's property.

9. Sweepstakes & Lottery Scams: The elder is told they have won a sweepstake, but need to make a payment to unlock the prize. They are sent a check which is deposited in their account immediately, but it takes several days for the fake check to bounce, while the criminals collect money that the senior paid to cover "taxes" on the prize money that eventually bounces.

10. The Grandparent Scam: An older person gets a call from someone who asks, "Do you know who this is?" The elder names a relative the caller sounds most like, and the caller assumes that name, and as a fake relative, asks for money to be wired to pay for overdue rent, car repair, etc.

Tri-Valley continues to be ready to assist you with other questions through its free information & referral HELP-LINE at (508) 949-6640 or 1-800-286-6640. You may also access Tri-Valley by E-mail: info@tves.org or visit the agency's website at: www.trivalleyinc.org

Tri-Valley, Inc. is a private non-profit agency providing in-home and community based services in 25 Southern Worcester County towns. The agency receives funding from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Executive Office of Elder Affairs and Federal financial support under the Older Americans Act furnished by the Central Massachusetts Agency on Aging and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs. Funds are also received from other public and private sources. All donations are welcome and memorials may be established. Marilyn L. Travinski is the executive director. ###