

Sample Communications

Op-Ed

Building a World without Elder Abuse

Stable Cross-Cultural Connections Protect Us All

This World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), we are renewing our commitment to a just society in which we can all age with dignity and live free from abuse. Far too many of us are denied these fundamental rights because of social isolation, which puts older people in our communities at risk of elder abuse. We must come together today—and every day—to work harder in the year ahead to do right by ourselves and each other.

● Lead with the tested *Justice* value to illustrate that we all have a stake in preventing and addressing elder abuse.

● Collective language, like “we” and “us”, helps reinforce the idea that this is a shared concern with implications for all members of society.

Our communities are at higher risk of elder abuse when social networks are weak or fragmented, when residents don’t know each other well or interact with each other on a regular basis. If neighbors don’t chat about the weather or the price of gas, they aren’t likely to express concern when the mail piles up on the porch or if they overhear an angry dispute.

We all depend on community integration, but many barriers to it exist. Immigrants and ethnic minorities face unique hurdles to assimilating into a community. Differences in language, religion, and cultural traditions contribute to the vibrancy of our society. But, when they’re misunderstood or unappreciated, they can crack the support beams that hold up our communities. These cracks put immigrant families and ethnic minority populations at higher risk of elder abuse and, at the same time, decrease the number and quality of protections.

Diversity in the structure and make-up of the family unit is another variable that can complicate the detection and prevention of elder abuse. For example, when an older person wishes to be referred to by a culturally designated term, perhaps to signal kinship or social status, a caregiver’s failure to do so may be taken as a sign of disrespect and result in emotional or psychological harm. Cultural insensitivity, if allowed to persist, can descend into elder abuse, though it may not be recognized as a problem by the wider community.

In other words, the familiar relationships and supportive connections that keep small problems from becoming bigger ones are often weak or missing among older immigrants and members of ethnic minority groups.

When abusive situations escalate, interventions are critical. Unfortunately, interventions tend to be less accessible to, or culturally inappropriate for, minority groups. Some immigrants may be uncomfortable engaging authorities, especially if Immigrations and Custom Enforcement (ICE) raids or other border security measures have recently ramped up. Attitudes about pain and suffering also vary greatly by culture and religion and can be either catalysts or barriers to seeking help. In many cases, older people are reluctant to report abuse for fear of bringing shame on their families and cultures, which they may feel are already undervalued.

Knowing where stronger supports are needed and where existing connections must be reinforced is an essential first step toward defending communities against elder abuse. This requires developing adaptable, person-centered, and culturally responsive systems of care. Support groups—for older people, families, and caregivers—may need to consider dietary preferences, flexible scheduling, or language translation assistance to accommodate all people. Authorities, including Adult Protective Services officials and long-term care ombudsmen, must be trained to recognize and respond to abusive situations in ethnically and culturally appropriate ways. This may entail working to mend strained family or community ties. Likewise, local, state, and federal laws must be written to protect older people of all backgrounds, and they must account for the wide range of physical, cultural, spiritual, and other needs in society.

● Highlight collective measures that can be taken to prevent and address elder abuse to stimulate public thinking about civic action and continued engagement with the issue.

When differences are valued, they function like stable joints, secure brackets, and solid screws. They bring together cultures and strengthen connections across generations. Inclusive and integrated societies are better able to weather difficulties that may come with age, from memory loss and reduced mobility to changing family roles and financial strain. Embracing ethnic and cultural diversity not only increases community vitality, it also protects all people against elder abuse and helps us live up to our national ideal of justice for all.

● Reiterating the tested value of *Justice* throughout the piece reaffirms for audiences why this issue matters to us all.