

Fact Sheet: Protection of Vulnerable Adults

Those receiving care in licensed long-term care facilities or from a certified supported living provider

Residential Care Services (RCS) is a division within the Aging and Disability Services Administration (ADSA). In addition to provider/facility licensure and/or certification, RCS also receives and investigates reports of abuse (physical, mental, sexual, and exploitation of person), abandonment, neglect, self-neglect, and financial exploitation of vulnerable adults receiving services from those programs. Primary authority regarding the abuse of vulnerable adults is found in Chapter 74.34 RCW.

For information about a specific care setting or service, please refer to the [ADSA Fact Sheets](#).

Mandated Reporters

By law, certain people must report suspected abuse and neglect. Mandated reporters include: DSHS employees; individual providers contracted to provide services to a DSHS client; county coroners or medical examiners; employees of a facility licensed by DSHS, including assisted living facilities, adult family homes, nursing homes, residential habilitation centers, and soldiers' homes; social workers; health care providers as defined in [Chapter 18.130 RCW](#); Christian Science practitioners; employees of a social service, welfare, mental health, adult day health, adult day care, home health, home care, or hospice agency; law enforcement officers; and professional school personnel. [RCW 74.34.035](#) tells mandated reporters what, when, and to whom to report.

In 2012, RCS received over 37,000 reported concerns about suspected abuse, neglect, self-neglect, financial exploitation and abandonment of vulnerable adults, as well as concerns about quality of life or quality of care. This includes reports from community members, family members, and the general public (permissive reporters) as well as self-reports from licensed facilities and certified providers. The majority of these are privately owned businesses.

Visit us online at www.adsa.dshs.wa.gov for information about licensed long-term care settings and recognizing and reporting abuse and neglect.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

Calls about suspected abuse or neglect in these programs go to the RCS's Complaint Resolution Unit (CRU) at 1-800-562-6078. This hotline is set up to receive both mandated and permissive reports, so anyone can call. Calls are processed on a daily basis, and the information is reviewed and prioritized for investigation. Complainants are contacted for additional information.

In addition to the CRU Hotline, DSHS has also established a toll-free number for the general public for reporting suspected abuse. Callers are routed to the appropriate DSHS entity based on where the alleged victim resides. 1-866-ENDHARM (363-4276) or TTY (1-800-737-7931)

When RCS receives an allegation of abuse, neglect, or misappropriation of resident funds, investigation response times range from two working days to 90 working days. Concerns that are serious or pose life-threatening harm to a resident are investigated more quickly than issues that are of lower risk. Professional nurses review all of the complaints received by RCS to determine how quickly the complaint needs to be investigated.

RCS staff conduct on-site investigations. If an investigation shows that the facility has failed to provide safe quality care to residents, RCS actions can range from work with the facility (to correct problems and ensure against repetition) to citation, fine, or stop placement. When appropriate, RCS can forward information to other agencies such as local law enforcement.

The facility is responsible to ensure safe and quality care for each resident. RCS holds the facility responsible throughout the complaint investigation process.

Federal and state laws, including state law at Chapter 74.34 Revised Code of Washington (RCW), include requirements for reporting and preventing vulnerable adult abandonment, abuse, neglect, exploitation, or financial exploitation. The department investigates individuals alleged to have abandoned, abused, neglected, exploited, or financially exploited a vulnerable adult.

Resident & Client Protection Program

In 1996, a unit within the department began investigating individuals associated with nursing homes alleged to have abandoned, abused, neglected, exploited, or financially exploited vulnerable adults. In 2006, a separate unit began investigating similar individuals in the Certified Community Residential Services and Support program.

The Resident and Client Protection Program (RCPP) unit conducts investigations of individuals alleged to have abandoned, abused, neglected, exploited and financially exploited a resident or client in the following programs:

- Nursing homes,
- Assisted living facilities;
- Adult family homes;
- Intermediate care facilities for persons with intellectual disabilities, and
- Certified community residential services and support.

The provider is required under licensure and/or certification requirements to keep the vulnerable adults under their care safe. The field units investigate whether the provider (or facility) has kept residents safe in accordance with the law. The RCPP investigates to see if it is more likely than not that an named individual working in those licensed and/or certified programs has abused or neglected those vulnerable adults.

Department investigations of individuals include allegations of rape, physical or verbal assault, neglect, and financial exploitation as well as cases of a more subtle nature such as resident intimidation, humiliation or harassment.

To date, over 634 investigations have been completed, resulting in findings against 112 individuals. RCPP is able to make an administrative finding where criminal convictions or licensing and/or certification actions can not be taken or are not appropriate. The names of those individuals are placed on a department list.

Nursing homes can not employ any individual found to have abandoned, abused, neglected, exploited or financially exploited a vulnerable adult. Other department licensed/certified programs can not hire these same individuals if they might have unsupervised access to vulnerable adults.