

April 23, 2020

Dear Faith Community Leaders, Friends, Colleagues, and Supporters,

There is so much we don't know about Covid-19. But one thing we do know: it disproportionately affects older adults, especially older adults in communities of color.

The result is a level of social isolation not seen in living memory. Older adults are home and isolated from friends, family members, faith leaders, and fellow congregants. Nursing homes, long-term care facilities, and hospitals have been forced to limit visitors.

Amid this social isolation, a quiet, unseen tragedy is unfolding for the approximately 1 in 10 older adults who experience physical, emotional, sexual, financial, and spiritual abuse. While physical distancing will slow the virus, isolation is also a risk factor and a weapon of abuse. Like the pandemic itself, abuse is a matter of life and death: older victims are three times more likely to die prematurely than those who are not abused.

Older adults are most likely to be abused by someone they know and often trust, such as family or a caregiver. "Sheltering in place" with someone who is abusive is at best dangerous and at worst a death sentence. When family, ombudsman, and others cannot visit facilities, neglect and abuse of residents may increase. And the worsening economic crisis may increase financial exploitation as family members and others take advantage of increasingly isolated older adults and stranger scams offer fake cures. Opportunities to reach out for help decrease as isolation and abuse increase.

For 89% of older adults, faith is a source of strength and resilience, and faith communities are an essential social network. Faith is especially vibrant in communities of color. Even now, older adults are receiving meals, calls, groceries, prayers, spiritual support, and letters from their faith communities.

Many older adults who experience abuse turn first for help to those they trust: friends, family, and, often, faith leaders or someone in their faith community. Now, while it is harder than ever to reach out for help, we need extraordinary, community-based efforts to help these older adults reach services. That's why **we are calling on faith communities and faithful people everywhere to increase their efforts to connect with and support older survivors of abuse. We need your help now more than ever.**

Here are some action steps to consider.

1. Break the silence about elder abuse - in your congregation's newsletters, in corporate prayers, and in other communications.
2. Now that many services are virtual, make sure that the [national domestic violence hotline](https://www.nvdc.org/hotline) (800-799-7233/800-787-3224 TTY) is readily available on your congregation's website. Include the number in the footer of newsletters, in your email signature, and on Facebook. This 24/7 hotline offers free, confidential support with language access for non-English speaking individuals.
3. Explore [these resources](#) and work with the experts in your community, including your local domestic and sexual violence agencies, adult protective services, long-term-care ombudsman, and Area Agencies on Aging. The national [Elder Care Locator](#) (800-677-1116) is another resource to find services.
4. Reach out regularly to older family members, friends, and congregants. Remember the "[red flags](#)" of elder abuse, ask questions privately, and refer to services.
5. Help older adults who are experiencing abuse access these resources when they cannot reach out on their own.

More than ever in this time of national emergency, **faith leaders and faith communities have a critical role to play in helping to keep older adults who are experiencing abuse safer.** In partnership with local services, faithful people can and should be beacons of hope and bridges to safety for older victims of abuse.

For more information, please check out these [helpful resources](#). You can also contact Rev. Dr. Anne Marie Hunter (amhunter@interfaithpartners.org) at Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse or Bonnie Brandl, MSW (bbrandl@ncall.us) at the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL).



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Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership
Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse



Bonnie Brandl, Director
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This letter was endorsed by the following national organizations:

[Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse](#)

[National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life](#)

[Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Gender Based Violence](#)

[Casa de Esperanza](#)

[Elder Justice Coalition](#)

[FaithTrust Institute](#)

[Futures Without Violence](#)

[HEART](#)

[Jewish Women International](#)

[Justice in Aging](#)

[National Adult Protective Services Association](#)

[National Association of Local Long-Term Care Ombudsman](#)

[National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#)

[National Center on Elder Abuse](#)

[National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care](#)

[National Indigenous Women's Resource Center](#)

[National Long-Term Care Ombudsman Resource Center](#)

[National Network to End Domestic Violence](#)

[National Resource Center for Reaching Victims](#)

[Peaceful Families Project](#)

[Resource Sharing Project](#)

[Ujima Inc: The National Center on Violence Against Women in the Black Community](#)

[Weill Cornell Medicine's NYC Elder Abuse Center](#)

[The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Center for Elder Justice at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale](#)