

Financial abuse of the elderly

With advancing years, we can become more and more dependent on others to help us manage our personal and financial affairs. Sadly, this increasing vulnerability can put us at greater risk of financial abuse – and often from the people we trust most: relatives and caregivers.

Financial abuse most commonly takes the form of misuse of, or theft from, bank accounts, so banks and other banking service providers have a stake in ensuring their customers are protected from such risks. But individuals, too, have a responsibility to protect themselves – and their loved ones – from the possibility of financial abuse.

How can I protect myself from financial abuse?

As you grow older, it may be a good idea to appoint an enduring power of attorney to act on your behalf in the event you become incapacitated in the future. The existence of an enduring power of attorney will not stop you from acting on your own behalf. Usually it will only be used should you become unable to act for yourself.

Remember to keep your debit and credit cards in a safe place and try to make sure that no one can access your PIN. More information on protecting your cards and PINs is available in our quick guide, *Looking after your credit and debit cards and PINs* available at www.bankomb.org.nz/Publications/Quick-guides.

As a practical measure, you could also consider rearranging your accounts so that you only keep limited funds to cover day to day expenses in an easy access account, with more substantial funds in a different account that cannot be accessed by EFTPOS or ATM. Then, if you become incapacitated, even for a short time, and have no option but to rely on someone else's help (for example to buy groceries), you can limit any possible loss from your account.

How to contact us

What if I feel under pressure to hand over funds to a family member or caregiver?

If you are feeling unduly pressured to give someone else access to your accounts, contact your local bank branch and let them know. Your bank will be able to give advice on how best to protect yourself and your assets. It will also alert your bank to question any unusual activity on your accounts.

What if I suspect an elderly friend or relative is the subject of financial abuse?

Without a power of attorney, a bank is very restricted in what it can do about a concern raised by a third party. However, drawing such a concern to the bank's attention will at least put it on notice that its customer may be vulnerable and that accounts need to be monitored for unusual activity.

Where can I go for more information?

There are a number of organisations that can help with issues affecting the older person:

- The Office for Senior Citizens www.osc.govt.nz
- Age Concern www.ageconcern.org.nz
- The Retirement Commission www.sorted.org.nz

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