

After long lives spent working, paying taxes, and raising families, elderly Americans deserve nothing but our respect and support. In a shocking number of cases, however, they are instead being treated as targets for exploitation and abuse. As the size of the elderly community continues to expand, elder abuse may well be reaching epidemic proportions.

The Administration on Aging (AOA) defines elder abuse as “any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult.” Legally, the problem is addressed on the state level, with all fifty states offering some form of elder abuse prevention law. While stipulations may vary among these state laws, elder abuse can be broadly defined to include the following: physical abuse; sexual abuse; neglect; exploitation; emotional abuse; abandonment; and self-neglect.

The first step in addressing this growing problem is, of course, detection. In our interactions with the elderly, we should always be on the lookout for warning signs including bruises or physical marks, unexplained withdrawal, changes in alertness, unusual depression, marks around breasts and/or genitals, sudden changes in financial status, bedsores, any signs of belittling, verbal abuse, threats or other uses of power against an elderly person, and/or indications of a strained or tense relationship with a caregiver.

Should any of these warning signs be observed, it is important to take action immediately. If you suspect that an elderly person is in imminent danger, call 911. Otherwise, contact Adult Protective Services (APS) at 1-800-677-1116.

While physical neglect and abuse remain major concerns, there are other forms of elder abuse that do great damage as well. Foremost among these is financial exploitation. Seniors are vulnerable to exploitation from all directions, ranging from the professional scammer to trusted loved ones within their own family. In the year 2010 alone it was estimated that elderly Americans had lost \$2.9 billion to various forms of exploitation, up 12% from just two years prior. It’s no surprise that Max Rothman from the Alliance on Aging identifies such financial exploitation as a “hidden crisis” in our country today.

One of the most important steps we can take to address elder abuse in all its forms, and to slow its growth over time, is to pursue legal action. At Kristensen-Weisberg we pride ourselves on our work in this area. As trial lawyers, we have experience and expertise in a range of areas. For obvious reasons, however, elder abuse stands out as a particularly offensive transgression. We have dedicated ourselves accordingly, placing considerable emphasis on this area of the law. The **elder abuse lawyers** at Kristensen-Weisberg are relentless in their pursuit of those who harm and exploit vulnerable seniors.

In the state of California, prosecution of elder abuse is conducted under the Elder Abuse and Dependent Adult Civil Protection Act. This law stipulates that aggrieved parties are entitled to compensation for any damages suffered as a result of elder abuse. If the abuse is determined to have occurred under conditions of malice, fraud, or oppression, victims and their families may be

eligible to receive punitive damages as well. Recent years have seen a spike in large settlements in elder abuse cases. In 2009 a Ventura County jury awarded \$7.75 (\$2.75 million in damages; \$5 million in punitives) to the family of a 71-year-old stroke victim. Another case that same year awarded over \$1.3 million to the family of an 82-year-old Alzheimer's patient.

As **elder abuse lawyers in Los Angeles**, all of our work is conducted on a contingency basis. We receive no fees unless and until you gain a settlement or court ruling in your favor. If you have knowledge or suspicion of elder abuse, we encourage you to contact us immediately at [klg@kristensenlaw.com](mailto:klg@kristensenlaw.com) or at (310) 507-7924 for a free consultation. Together we can review the facts of your case and explore whether our firm is the right fit for you.

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