

**Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency  
Area Agency on Aging III-C**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Area Agency on Aging III-C Joins Nationwide Campaign  
to Help Prevent Financial Exploitation of Older Adults**

*Holiday Campaign Encourages Families to Spend Time Discussing Strategies to  
Address Financial Exploitation With Older Family Members*

**Coldwater, MI** – As financial exploitation targeting older adults continues to become more prevalent in the United States, the Area Agency on Aging has joined a nationwide campaign to encourage older adults and their families to address the issue and to get informed about the warning signs and resources available to help prevent abuse. Research shows that as many as 5 million older adults are victims of elder abuse each year and financial exploitation costs seniors an estimated \$3 billion annually.

As part of its 10th Annual Home for the Holidays campaign, the Eldercare Locator, a public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging that is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A), is encouraging older adults, caregivers and their families to use their time together this holiday season to discuss and get informed about strategies to prevent financial exploitation. The National Center on Elder Abuse partnered with the Eldercare Locator to produce a [consumer guide](#) that is now available to help inform this discussion with seniors during the holiday season. Area Agency on Aging III-C is supporting the campaign by raising awareness for the issue and encouraging families to take steps to prevent financial exploitation this holiday season.

“This holiday season is an ideal time for families to get together and discuss these issues with their older family members,” said Belinda Whitely, Program Specialist with the Aging Agency. “We strongly encourage Branch and St. Joseph County families to take some time to learn about the warning signs so that they can ask the right questions and take the right precautions to ensure that the finances of older adult family members are safe.”

There are several signs of financial exploitation for families to look out for, including financial activity that is inconsistent with an older adults past financial history; confusion about recent financial arrangements; changes to key documents that have not been authorized; a caregiver or beneficiary who refuses to use designated funds for necessary care and treatment of an older adult; and an older adult who feels threatened by a caregiver or another individual who is seeking to control their finances.

“Financial exploitation is a threat to the health, safety, dignity and independence of vulnerable older adults,” said Kathy Greenlee, Administrator, Administration for Community Living and Assistant Secretary for Aging. “This holiday season, we encourage families to spend some time asking older family members some basic questions to ensure that their finances are in good hands and that if there are signs of abuse, that the right steps are taken to stop it.”

“Unfortunately, financial exploitation is often committed by a person you know and trust, which makes it even more difficult,” said Sandy Markwood, CEO, N4A. “There are steps older adults and their families can take and resources available to help identify and remedy this serious problem. To ensure your safety and the safety and security of your finances, it is critical for you to assess your financial situation on a regular basis. We are seeing more and more financial abuse across the country which is why this holiday season, we hope families will check in with their older relatives to be sure that their finances are in good order and in good hands.”

Families that are concerned about financial exploitation should report the issue to state agencies that deal with protecting the safety and well-being of older adults. The campaign, which encourages older adults and their families to plan and be cautious, released tips to help prevent financial exploitation, some of which include:

- Get an estate plan in place. Talk with an attorney about creating a durable power of attorney for asset management; a living will; a revocable, or living, trust; and health care advance directives.
- Learn how to avoid fraud and scams at [www.stopfraud.gov/protect.html](http://www.stopfraud.gov/protect.html).
- Consult with a trusted person before making any large purchases or investments.
- Do not provide personal information (i.e. Social Security number, credit card, ATM PIN number) over the phone unless you placed the call and know with whom you are speaking.
- If you hire someone to help you in your home, ensure that they have been properly screened with criminal background checks completed. Ask for certifications when appropriate.

“Financial exploitation can be prevented if people know the right questions to ask and where to turn for help,” said Mary Twomey, MSW, Co-Director, National Center on Elder

Abuse. “Although it is a sensitive issue and one that can be difficult to broach, it is critical for families to address it, and there are many useful resources available to guide them through the process.”

To download a copy of the financial exploitation brochure, visit: <http://www.n4a.org/pdf/protectyourpocketbook.pdf>.

### **About Eldercare Locator**

The Eldercare Locator is the first step to finding resources for older adults in any U.S. community and a free national service of the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) that is administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (N4A). Contact the Eldercare Locator at 800.677.1116 or [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov). November 2012 marks the 20th Anniversary of the Eldercare Locator, which has received more than 2.3 million calls since it launched in 1992 and assisted millions of older adults and caregivers connect with local aging resources.

### **About National Center on Elder Abuse**

The U.S. Administration on Aging designated the Program in Geriatrics at the University of California, Irvine as the National Center on Elder Abuse in September 2011. Led by Laura Mosqueda, MD and Mary Twomey, MSW, the center is a clearinghouse for practical information supporting federal, state and local efforts to prevent, identify and effectively respond to elder abuse, neglect and exploitation. It is the national authority on elder abuse in the U.S. [www.ncea.aoa.gov](http://www.ncea.aoa.gov)

### **About the Area Agency on Aging III-C**

The Branch-St. Joseph Area Agency on Aging is a non-profit organization designated by the Michigan Office of Services to the Aging, to serve older adults, people with disabilities and caregivers in Branch and St. Joseph Counties and is part of the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency, your local health department. To learn more about the Area Agency on Aging III-C and the services it provides, please call 517-278-2538 extension 130, or visit our website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org) and click on the Area Agency on Aging button.

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