

Vulnerable Adults and Adult Protection

DESCRIPTION

A vulnerable adult is any person 18 years of age or older who receives services from a licensed health care facility, or home care or personal care assistance provider in Minnesota, or who requires assistance with his or her own care. Mistreatment of a vulnerable adult can include physical, emotional or sexual, abuse; failure to provide necessary food, shelter, clothing, health care or supervision; and financial exploitation.¹ When a vulnerable adult is first mistreated, they are often unable or unlikely to report it because of a physical or mental limitation.² Repeated abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult can be indicative of an unsafe living situation, poor caregiver oversight, and/or physical or mental decline of the vulnerable adult and can result in the vulnerable adult being unable to continue to live independently or even death. Minnesota counties receive reports of suspected maltreatment of vulnerable adults from the Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center (MAARC), a statewide common entry point for reports from mandated reporters and the public.

HOW WE ARE DOING

Ramsey County's Social Services Department is the lead investigative agency for all reports alleging a vulnerable adult resident has been maltreated. If the alleged perpetrator is a licensed provider or employee of a facility or service/program the Minnesota Department of Health or Minnesota Department of Human Services will get involved. Reports are investigated, resulting in a determination of substantiated, inconclusive or false report. In 2016, Ramsey County received 3,015 reports of alleged vulnerable adult abuse. Of these, 718 resulted in a county investigation, with nine of those being referred for emergency protective services and may also receive follow-up services e.g., transitional care, assisted living, case management or referrals to community resources. In 2016, 94 percent of vulnerable adults with a substantiated or inconclusive maltreatment allegation did not experience a subsequent allegation within six months; in 2017 this number rose slightly to 94.4 percent.³ In part due to Minnesota mandatory reporting laws of licensed professionals, law enforcement, educators, doctors, nurses and social workers make a report any time they have reason to believe abuse or neglect has occurred,⁴ more reports are received every year than are ultimately determined to warrant an investigation.

BENCHMARK INDICATOR

Minnesota Department of Human Services: Increase the percent of vulnerable adults with a substantiated or inconclusive maltreatment allegation who do not experience a subsequent substantiated or inconclusive maltreatment allegation within six months.⁵

Target: 80 percent (the minimum level of acceptable performance)

95 percent (high performance standard)

RISK FACTORS

People who are socially isolated and those with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse; nearly half of people with dementia have experienced abuse or neglect. When compared to those adults who have not been mistreated, the elderly who have been abused have a 300 percent higher risk of death. It is estimated that only about 4 percent of all adult

Information to note

- In 2017, 94.4% of vulnerable adults with a substantiated or inconclusive maltreatment allegation in Ramsey County did not experience a subsequent substantiated or inconclusive maltreatment allegation within six months.
- People who are socially isolated or have disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse. It is estimated that only about 4% of all adult abuse cases nationally are ever reported.

¹ Vulnerable adult protection and elder abuse. Minnesota Department of Human Services. <https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/seniors/services/adult-protection/>. Accessed August 17, 2018.

² Adult Protection. Ramsey County. <https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/assistance-support/protection-crisis-resources/adult-protection>. Accessed August 8, 2018.

³ Personal communication, Research and Evaluation Unit, Health and Wellness Administrative Division, Ramsey County. August 2018.

⁴ 2017 Minnesota Statutes 626.577 Reporting of Maltreatment of Vulnerable Adults. <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/626.577>. Accessed August 17, 2018.

⁵ Performance Reports. Minnesota Department of Human Services. https://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET_DYNAMIC_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=DHS-290219. Accessed August 17, 2018.

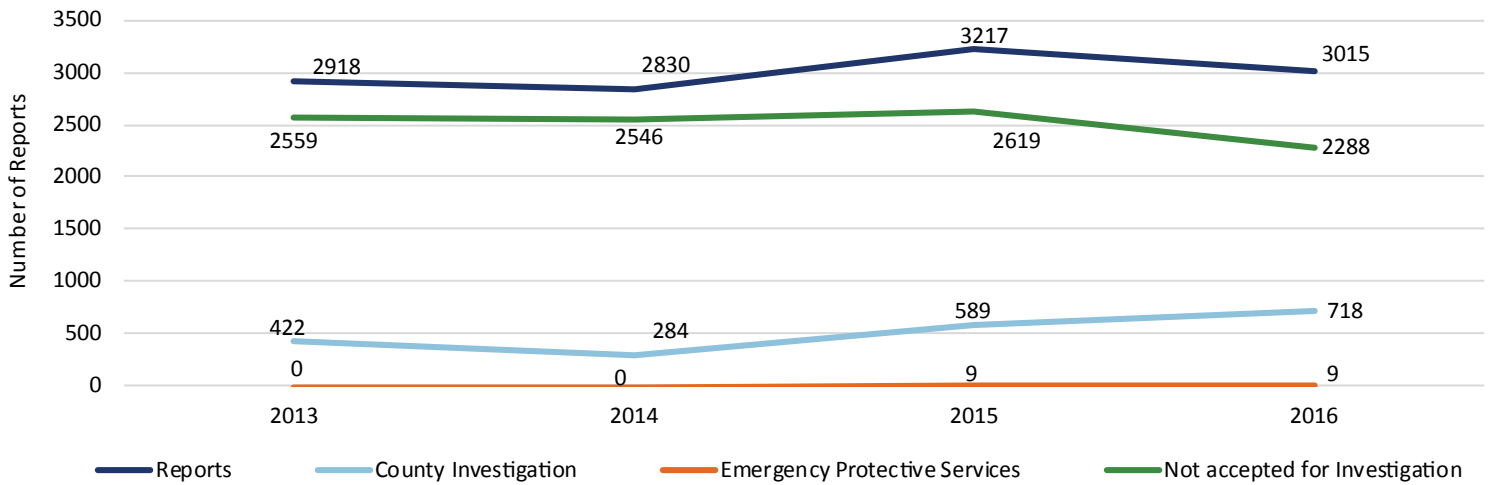
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abuse cases nationally are ever reported; as most abuse is perpetrated by a family member or caregiver, the victim often feels shame, embarrassment or fear that an investigation will lead to further abuse.⁶ In addition to the caregiver's inability to manage stress, other risk factors for elder abuse include: depression or other socio-emotional stressors, substance abuse, the intensity and complexity of the elderly person's illness, a history of domestic violence in the home, and the elder's own tendency toward verbal or physical aggression.⁷

WHAT RAMSEY COUNTY GOVERNMENT IS DOING

Ramsey County Social Services Department assesses needs and provides emergency and continuing services to safeguard the welfare of vulnerable adults. Examples of adult protection activities include assisting the vulnerable adult with moving, applying for social or financial services or initiating proceedings related to guardianship or conservatorship. Specifically, to address financial abuse and self-neglect, the county provides increased oversight and quality assurance for staff working with vulnerable adults, as well as training about self-neglect.

Adult Protection Reports by Disposition, Ramsey County



Source: Ramsey County Social Services Department.

⁶ Raise Awareness. National Center on Elder Abuse. <https://ncea.acl.gov/makeadifference/raiseawareness-weaad.html>. Accessed August 16, 2018.

⁷ Robinson L, Saisan J, Segal J. Elder abuse and neglect: spotting the warning signs and getting help. HelpGuide.org. 2018. <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/elder-abuse-and-neglect.htm>. Updated April 2018. Accessed August 8, 2018.