



*Improving the Lives of Older Adults and People with Disabilities  
Through Services, Research, and Education*

**Edwin Walker -- EJCC Remarks**  
**June 8, 2023**

As we all come together to unify communities and raise domestic and global recognition of our social justice movement; we wouldn't be where we are today – without our World Elder Abuse Awareness Day visionary, Dr. Elizabeth Podnieks, who conceived the idea. Thank you, Betty, for the beautiful tribute to all of her work.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is a call-to-action for society's individuals, organizations, and communities to educate each other on how to identify, address and prevent abuse so we can all do our part to support everyone as we age. It reminds us that elder abuse impacts all of us, and so -- it's important to find the right solutions to it.

We know that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be felt, despite the end of the public health emergency last month.

COVID-19 had an unprecedented impact on our communities, and our lives. Across the nation, we had to mobilize and bolster supports to people most in need, including many older Americans, and Americans with disabilities living independently, and in long term care institutions.

As Laura illuminated, research indicated that elder abuse was predicted to rise -- due to the rapid increase in our older population, -- however, during the pandemic we saw an unprecedented increase in elder abuse. Rates of elder abuse across the country grew at a rate far faster than research previously anticipated, with incidents of abuse doubling among the older population.<sup>i</sup>

Elder abuse grew as a result of: the many variations of fraud, schemes, and scams, and older people neglected and socially isolated, with limited access to the social supports that they rely upon.



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So, as the cohort of aging Americans steadily increases to over 20% of the total population, the incidence of abuse is predicted to continue to rise.

And, it is up to every single one of us, no matter the role we play in society to develop solutions to overcoming abuse; and to ensure that solid structures are in place; and that individuals are taking responsibility. Members of society must realize that elder abuse is NOT “a family matter” for which they should not get involved, or feel a responsibility to address.

As Americans, we believe in justice for all, and we must continue to work together to create critical social supports that keep us safe as we age, and prevent abuse from occurring in the first place. It is up to every single one of us; no matter the role -- that we play in society!

Although more research and data are needed, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) has supported key initiatives to further the elder justice agenda, including:

- Creating a federal home for APS,
- Releasing the first national guidelines for APS systems and practices, which are being adopted and implemented by many of you, and
- Awarding the first dedicated sets of grants to inform and enhance APS through our Elder Justice Innovation and Elder Justice State Grants programs, which have made substantial progress in:
  - Evaluating elder justice systems and determining outcomes, and
  - Providing over 4,000 direct complaint resolution and advocacy services to help people transition from institutional to community settings and using artificial intelligence to predict maltreatment.

As you’ve heard from Jessica Schubel with the Domestic Policy Council at the White House, and Acting Assistant Secretary for Aging, Alison Barkoff – Since Fiscal Year 2021, over \$400 million dollars has been invested in APS programs through COVID supplemental and regular appropriations.



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In addition to addressing core needs, states and territories used the funding for emergency housing, wrap-around services, technology, training, partnerships, staffing, reporting and outreach to empower clients in the aftermath of abuse.<sup>ii</sup>

This funding represented the largest-ever federal investment to support APS programs, and the first time the federal government has awarded "formula" grants to every state in the country.

This year, ACL continues to invest in enhancing, improving, and expanding the ability of APS to investigate allegations of abuse, neglect, and exploitation by awarding funding dedicated -- specifically to providing ongoing support for APS programs to improve and create better systems to address the problems of elder abuse.

Aligned with this agenda, the President's FY 2024 budget proposal includes a \$43 million increase to these formula grants.

This funding will support concerted efforts to respond to elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation, embrace guardianship reforms, promote independent decision-making and decision supports; and empower survivors of abuse and exploitation.

Also, ACL has many systems and tools that we can celebrate that will help move the needle forward such as the National Adult Maltreatment Reporting System (NAMRS); which we developed as the first comprehensive, national reporting system.

Policy makers, APS programs, and researchers rely upon this system to provide consistent, accurate national data on the exploitation and abuse of older adults and adults with disabilities, as reported to APS agencies. This data is used to evaluate and improve programs and services.



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To effect systemic improvements in maltreatment interventions, ACL works with and values our relationships with our partners in the field. In particular, it is important for us to coordinate with the National Adult Protective Services Association or NAPSAs.

They are responsible for providing APS programs a forum for sharing information, solving problems, and improving the quality of services

Our relationship with NAPSAs helps make the policies we develop, and the technical assistance we provide – better because we can directly incorporate feedback from our stakeholders.

The relationship we have developed makes it easier to fulfill our mission because we are constantly engaging with our stakeholders.

ACL not only wants to support our partners in the field, but work together with them in partnership. Our focus -- is listening to the field and raising up solutions.

And as many of you know, we have been engaged in gathering input for the development of the first-ever set of federal regulations for APS designed to advance Administration and stakeholder priorities, respond to stakeholder engagement, and advance person-centered principles, equity and uniformity of practice. We are excited and look forward to issuing a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking later this summer.

On behalf of the ACL team, I want to emphasize our deep and abiding commitment to advancing equity, racial justice, inclusion and equal opportunity in all we do, including ensuring that people from under-represented and under-served communities are at the table to inform our work, and by reducing new threats and new challenges of abuse, neglect and exploitation that ACL and its federal partners must address.



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Finally we should speak to and be reminded of the importance and significance of this body the Elder Justice Coordinating Committee just as we have in global forums and convenings of the United Nations where we have said:

*With one voice, we have joined our global colleagues – UN bodies, governments and civil societies -- around the world -- to encourage all sectors and people to join the movement toward elder justice. Through the Elder Justice Coordinating Committee in the US, we have coordinated the efforts and activities of federal agencies to improve systems, prevention and response.*

So, I'd like to echo the importance that some of our government partners have mentioned:

- First, an effective, all-of-government approach is essential, and
- Second, a call to action to develop solutions that will not only support older people, but strengthen our communities is also essential for the elder justice movement.

So, as we celebrate World Elder Abuse Awareness Day 2023, join us in recommitting to deliver all older Americans with a world free from abuse and neglect, and reaffirm the value and dignity of every person.

Let us stand united with the international community in upholding elder rights and honoring the contributions of all older people.

We all have a stake in ending elder abuse, so let's honor that by working together.

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<sup>i</sup> Chang, E. S., & Levy, B. R. (2021). High prevalence of elder abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic: risk and resilience factors. *The American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 29(11), 1152-1159.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://acl.gov/news-and-events/announcements/acl-awards-over-85-million-support-adult-protective-services-programs>