



## Looking Out for Our Seniors – Safely

***By City Attorney Mara W. Elliott***

We are several months into the unprecedented global COVID-19 pandemic, and our world continues to change quickly. As businesses reopen and stay-at-home orders are being lifted, we can't forget that our senior citizens remain largely isolated.

Normally we would be able to visit our elderly loved ones regularly and observe their living conditions, but for many of us, that hasn't been possible since March. Seniors are most susceptible to the coronavirus, and most group living facilities remain closed to the public.

It's up to us to continue to look out for our elders not only to make sure they are being protected and their basic needs are being met, but also to provide emotional support and comfort during these trying times.

Here are some tips for supporting our seniors remotely:

- Schedule regular phone calls where you can see one another using apps like Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom, or the like. Confirm that those who reside in a nursing home, assisted living facility, or memory care facility, are being fed and cared for properly. Ask them what they miss most about their pre-pandemic lives. Maybe it's a need you can fill.
- Make sure that they have a four-week supply of any over-the-counter medicine and prescriptions available as well as adequate medical supplies (oxygen, saline solution, bandages, etc.) and backup materials.
- Arrange for grocery or meal delivery, and laundry services if needed. Make available an emergency supply of food and water.
- Help develop a care plan that summarizes their health conditions, medications, care providers, and preferences. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, care plans can reduce emergency room visits and hospitalizations, and improve overall medical management for people with a chronic health condition, resulting in better quality of life.
- For those with dementia, send a card or letter, small gifts or mementos, or other things that they can read and touch, that will help trigger memories. Also, ask care staff about COVID-19 safety protocols and how they are maintaining daily routines and structured activities to support patients with dementia.
- Be vigilant about potential scams targeting elder adults. During phone calls and virtual visits, ask if they have received about any unusual phone calls, letters, or emails asking for money or offering something of value that seems to be too good to be true.

Seniors are increasingly vulnerable to financial scams due to cognitive changes that affect people as they age. Their judgment can be compromised by loneliness and social isolation, making them even more susceptible to fraud.

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Some of the scams now emerging involve online offers of COVID-19 preventative medicines or treatments, fraudulent requests for personal information from people pretending to be coronavirus contact tracers working for health departments, and bogus calls allegedly from the U.S. Census, asking for personal and financial information.

Please contact my Office's Affirmative Civil Enforcement Unit at (619) 533-5618 or [CityAttorney@sandiego.gov](mailto:CityAttorney@sandiego.gov) if you suspect someone is trying to scam you, a friend, or relative.

If you suspect an elder adult is being mistreated by a caregiver or family member, please contact my Office's Domestic Violence and Sex Crimes Unit at 619-533-5544, or the San Diego Family Justice Center at 619-533-6000.

If you know of an elder adult who lives in a substandard independent living facility where conditions are unsanitary or dangerous, please contact our Nuisance Abatement Unit at 619-533-5655 or [CityAttorney@sandiego.gov](mailto:CityAttorney@sandiego.gov).

Lastly, if your loved one is demonstrating suicidal behavior or showing other signs of acute mental distress, and you know or suspect they have access to a firearm, call the police to request a Gun Violence Restraining Order. Our Office will file the court order to have the weapon removed from the home, eliminating opportunities to harm themselves or someone else.

The San Diego City Attorney's Office is working hard to keep you safe. Please contact our office if we can be helpful.

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