



Scams Targeting Seniors

Con artists are preying on consumers who are 65 or older at a higher rate than other age groups, and in many cases getting away with fraud. Why are seniors targeted? Seniors are more likely to have a nest egg, own their own home, have good credit and were raised to be polite and trusting. Elderly individuals are more likely to fall for a scam especially when scammers falsely represent themselves as being affiliated with well known businesses in order to give credibility to their scams. Below are a few of the scams seniors need to be aware of and avoid:

Bogus Charities

These scammers pretend to be from a charity and use names that are similar to well respected organizations or include terms such as “firefighters” or “police” in their titles. They pressure seniors into donating because it is for an urgent cause or because you have donated in the past. Be especially cautious when there are natural or other disasters; fraudulent charities take advantage of those situations to trick people who want to help the victims.

Door to Door Solicitors

Salespeople knock on doors offering all types of merchandise or services, such as home repairs or magazine subscriptions. You may be asked for payment in full in cash or a check made payable to an individual rather than a company. Others will use a variety of tactics to slide into your home. Perhaps they would like to demonstrate how a product or service works, or they pretend to be a technician from your utility company and would like to test your furnace, water pressure or electricity. In reality, they are trying to get into your home to steal.

Fake Checks

You receive a realistic looking check or money order in the mail. The sender asks you to deposit it and wire-transfer most of the money back. The check may be sent to help you pay taxes or fees for something that you have won, or for you to use as a secret shopper. If you have something for sale, a con artist may give you a check made out for more than your asking price, and suggest you just return the amount over your sales price. These checks are fake, and you will be held responsible for any money wired or spent.



Fraudulent Telemarketers

Callers may try to intimidate the senior with a single high pressure call; or charm them through a series of friendly, personal calls. They often claim to be selling a product “today only” and ask for a purchase. You may be told that you have won a vacation, prize or free gift, but you need to pay for postage and handling or taxes before claiming. Others may claim to be from your bank, credit card company or a health care provider and say that there is a problem with your account. They ask for personal identifiable information and account numbers to correct the problem.

Free Lunches

Seniors receive an invitation for lunch or dinner at a restaurant as a way to pitch a product; usually investments or home safety products. The “invitations” are written in a way that target seniors who would be most likely to have the ability and the interest to purchase the product or investment. The host will pressure attendees to schedule in-home visits by creating a sense of urgency or fear that does not really exist.

Grandparent Scam

A grandparent receives a distressed phone call from someone who they believe is their grandchild or family member. The caller explains that they are travelling and have been arrested or involved in an auto accident and need the grandparent to wire money to post bail or pay for damages — usually amounting to a few thousand dollars. The scammers might say, "It's me, your favorite grandchild," to which the grandparent will guess the name of the grandchild it sounds the most like, and then the call proceeds from there. Sometimes callers identify themselves by the name of a particular family member. They may refer to other family members, increasing their credibility.

Home Contactor/Repairs or Tree-Trimmers

A salesperson may recommend expensive or unnecessary "emergency" repairs, overcharge for services, or charge for work not performed. Their estimate or contract does not have a physical address or a landline telephone number, or the business does not even provide an estimate or contract. They may ask for the full payment upfront and never return to do the work.

Magazine Subscription Scams

Older Americans are often the targets of magazine subscription scams. They may be offered "free" or "special" deals on particular magazines. These scammers may offer a subscription that is dollars a day and lasts for years, costing more than originally implied. Other seniors order magazines in order to have better luck winning a contest or sweepstake drawing.



Mortgage

A loan originator may convince seniors that a particular loan will be good for them. They may encourage the homeowner to repeatedly refinance and include the closing costs in the loan. Some salespeople may pressure senior homeowners into converting their home's equity into cash and buying investments or annuities that may not be in the consumer's best interest. Although reverse mortgages are not scams, unscrupulous salespeople may convince seniors that it is useful for them, when it is really more beneficial to the salesperson.



Phishing schemes

Seniors receive an email from someone claiming to represent a bank or other reputable financial institution. They are told that their financial information or credit card has been compromised and are asked to verify their information by clicking on a link that has been provided. The seniors are then asked for their personal information such as account numbers, PINs, social security numbers and more.

Prizes/Sweepstakes/Lotteries

By email, mail or telephone you are told that you have won a contest, sweepstakes or lottery. They may also claim to have an affiliation with a well known business that they do not really have. The letter or caller explains that you are required to pay upfront taxes or fees before claiming the prize. Wire transfer of the fees or taxes is preferred because, the sooner they get your money, the sooner they can overnight or send a courier to your home with your "prize." Many scammers ask for credit card or bank account numbers for verification of identity purposes.

Work at Home Schemes

These scammers will contact seniors with claims that they can supplement their income by working from home. Consumers are charged up-front for the materials or start up costs of their in home business. If the senior is assembling products from home, the "company" will find fault with your product and refuse to pay.



- √ If it sounds too good to be true, it is; and *remember*, there is no such thing as a free lunch.
- √ Never send cash, check, money order by overnight delivery, or wire transfer to anyone you do not know or to an unfamiliar company.
- √ Never give any personal identifiable information over the telephone, email or in person unless you have initiated the call and are absolutely certain with whom you are speaking.
- √ Never cash a check attached to a solicitation that you receive in the mail and wire money back.
- √ Do not let salespeople or strangers into your home; answer through a locked screen door.
- √ Do not be rushed into any purchases or repairs even when told it is an emergency or for sale "today only."
- √ Make sure you have a signed home improvement contract that includes all details including prices, materials, warranty and anything that was verbally agreed to and if your contract is the result of a home solicitation, it must have a 3-day right to cancel.
- √ Register your home and cellular telephones with the Do Not Call Registry by calling (888) 382-1222 or register online at www.donotcall.gov.
- √ Before donating to a charity, ask for information and check them out with the Ohio Attorney General's Help Center at 1-800-282-0515.

Additional Online Resources

AARP	www.aarp.org
Direct Marketing Association	www.the-dma.org/index.php
Fake Checks.org	www.fakechecks.org
Medicare	www.medicare.gov/
Social Security	www.ssa.gov/
Summit County Prosecutor Senior Citizen Safety	www.co.summit.oh.us/prosecutor/srcitsafe.htm
United States Postal Inspector	https://postalinspectors.uspis.gov

For more information on this or other consumer issues, or to file a complaint please contact the Office of Consumer Affairs at 330-643-2879 or visit our website at www.co.summit.oh.us/conaffairs.htm