



Adult Protective Services

What is adult protective services (APS)?

APS is a social services program focused on helping older adults and adults with disabilities by investigating allegations of abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and financial exploitation and by offering services and supports to promote safety, independence, and quality of life.

Who can receive APS services?

In Wisconsin, the definition of an older adult or adult with disabilities must meet both of these criteria:

- ✓ Adults ages 18–59 who have a physical or behavioral health condition that substantially impairs their ability to care for their own needs **or** adults who are 60 years of age or older
- ✓ Adults who live in the community, including long term care facilities

Who can make an APS report?

Anyone can make an APS report. The identity of the reporter and information reported is confidential and protected by law. Below are groups of people who report to APS.

- ✓ Family members
- ✓ Neighbors
- ✓ Friends
- ✓ Caregivers

How do you define abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and financial exploitation?

Below are some common definitions. For more information, go to the [Wisconsin APS website](#).

Physical and sexual abuse	Neglect	Self-neglect	Financial exploitation
<p>Physical abuse is an intentional act that results in physical pain, injury, or impairment. Abusers may inflict bruises, welts, cuts, punctures, fractures, burns, scratches, or other injuries. Sexual abuse is non-consensual sexual contact of any kind.</p>	<p>Neglect includes the refusal or failure to provide a person with life necessities, such as food, water, shelter, personal hygiene, medicine, physical or mental health care, comfort, personal safety, services, or adequate supervision.</p>	<p>Self-neglect occurs when the individual at risk fails to take care of their own basic needs and personal care, which results in significant danger to the person's physical or mental health.</p>	<p>Financial exploitation is the illegal or improper use of the funds, assets, or property of an individual, for example, stealing money or possessions, forging a person's signature, or coercing an individual into signing any legal document.</p>

Who are limited required reporters?

Wisconsin relies on voluntary reporting of abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and financial exploitation. However, there are certain professionals that are required by law to make reports of suspected abuse or neglect. These professionals are referred to as limited required reporters. These professionals are:

- ✓ Health care providers, as defined in Wis. Stat. § 155.01(7).
- ✓ Employees of any entity that is licensed, certified, approved by, or registered with the Department of Health Services (DHS).
- ✓ Social workers, professional counselors, or marriage and family therapists certified under Wis. Stat. ch. 457.



Why are limited required reporters required to report?

These professionals must report suspected abuse if they are seeing the individual in a professional capacity, and either of the following occurs:

1. The individual requests that the professional make a report, **or**
2. The professional has reasonable cause to believe either of the following situations exists:
 - ✓ The individual is at imminent risk of serious bodily harm, death, sexual assault, or significant property loss and is unable to make an informed judgment about whether to report the risk.
 - ✓ An individual other than the person being seen (for example, another person with the same caregiver) is at risk of serious bodily harm, death, sexual assault, or significant property loss.

The only time professionals are not required to report suspected abuse is if they determine that reporting is not in the best interest of the individual, and the reasons for that determination are well documented in the individual's file.

How do you make a report?

Note: If the suspected abuse is an emergency—a life-threatening situation or one involving immediate danger—call the police or 911 immediately.

1. Contact the respective local county or Tribal APS agency using the information below.
2. Provide as much information as possible, but please note that you can make this report anonymously if you so choose:
 - ✓ The individual's name, address, age/date of birth, or other identifying information
 - ✓ Why they are at risk for abuse, self-neglect, neglect, or financial exploitation
 - ✓ Descriptions of the situation, any important identifiers of the alleged abuser, or other concerns
 - ✓ If the individual is a Tribal member, contact the appropriate Tribal APS agency along with the county APS agency that collaborates with the Tribe on APS matters.

Why should you report?

Most older adults or younger adults with disabilities live independently without assistance. However, some face abuse or neglect and need trained professionals to advocate on their behalf. Others may simply be struggling with routine activities and benefit from in-home support services to maintain their health and independence. APS helps by assessing each individual's unique needs, then developing a service plan to maintain their safety, health, and independence.

What happens after I make a report?

APS will respond to the report of suspected abuse, neglect, self-neglect, or financial exploitation and connect the individual with support services if the individual wishes to receive them.

Every adult has the right to make their own decisions. APS provides services voluntarily, except in a limited set of circumstances. APS works with law enforcement, long-term care providers, financial institutions, and other community partners. Due to confidentiality, information cannot be shared.

What if I'm not sure?

Do you have a "feeling" about a situation but aren't sure of the details? APS professionals are trained to handle these situations. Based on your report, the agency will assess the situation and determine how best to respond.



Local agency
hours may vary.

- ✓ [To report abuse of an adult at risk](#) (age 18 to 59), call your county helpline.
- ✓ [To report abuse of an elder adult at risk](#) (age 60+), call your county helpline or the Elder Abuse Hotline at 833-586-0107.

If the suspected abuse is an emergency—a life-threatening situation or one involving immediate danger—call the police or 911 immediately.



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