

# **SCAMS and How They Can Hurt You**

## **HOW TO PREVENT BEING SCAMMED**

Scamming is a global problem in today's world. Sadly, seniors are the prime target for scams which include identity theft and fraud. One study estimated that scammers steal on average \$2.9 billion a year from seniors. That's enough to buy a sports team, a summer home in Italy and a private island or two.

There exists an army of fraudsters who, with today's technology, find it simple to identify and target seniors. Why? Because they know that many have savings and are less familiar with technology. Scammers use telephones, the internet (through e-mail, Facebook, and other messaging sites) as well as personal visits.

Don't let scammers benefit from your dollars: here are some of the common scams you may experience as well as some pointers as to how you can avoid them.

## **SOME COMMON SCAMS**

### **1. Medical**

Seniors rely, increasingly, on medical assistance and fraudsters are out to benefit from that need. They may pose as medical insurance representatives asking for confirmation of information over the phone. Others may offer free medical supplies or checkups that require the senior to provide personal information which may include a request for credit cards to cover "shipping and handling."

### **2. Tax Fraud**

While stolen Social Insurance Numbers can be used for a host of crimes, one common way scammers use them is to claim any tax refunds for themselves. Hackers can steal that information by creating false websites that look like the real thing and convince their victim to enter their information over the phone. A good rule is NEVER to provide your Social Insurance Number to anyone and never carry it with you. If in doubt remember, Revenue Canada will never call looking for this information (they already have it) and they can be contacted to check things out.

### **3. Identity Theft**

This common form of fraud involves stealing personal information in order to illegally use someone's identity. Once again, the phone and the internet are the common tools of contact.

### **4. Funeral Theft**

In today's world, no one is safe from predatory criminals: not even grieving spouses and family members. Scammers read obituaries and attend funerals to learn more about the

deceased's surviving family with the object of contacting family members claiming that their loved one has left an outstanding debt which needs to be settled as soon as possible to avoid possible legal proceedings.

### **5.Fake Virus Scanners**

If you've ever seen a pop-up window telling you that your computer has a virus then you're probably being scammed. These pop-ups are fake alerts and can be quite frightening. A loud voice will tell you not to turn off the computer but to call a number IMMEDIATELY. These are fake alerts and if you respond the scammer has access to your system and can access your private information.

### **6.Investment Schemes**

Many seniors are targets for con artists with offers of phony investments offering huge returns. Investment scams may take the form of pyramid schemes and/or offers of different financial products for sale.

### **7. Overdue Utilities**

Scammers, masquerading as utility workers, may call or even show up in person to trick seniors into paying bills that don't exist. They may wear utility workers' uniforms and can even manipulate numbers to show your utility company's caller ID. These fraudsters often threaten to turn off your utility service within an hour unless they get immediate payment. Or they may tell you that they had an appointment to check a connection or so on. This gives them access to your home to set up a possible future burglary.

### **8.Telemarketing Schemes**

Seniors were raised in an era that valued courtesy and good manners. Sadly, this makes them even more vulnerable to fraud. Remember if it seems too good to be true, it probably isn't.

### **9.The Pigeon Drop**

One of the oldest tricks in the book can be done on the phone, in person, or online. Someone pretending that they've found a large sum of money says that they're willing to split it with the senior if she or he will make a "good faith" deposit. Usually, a second scammer is involved who claims to be a banker, a lawyer, or some other trustworthy individual.

### **10. Charity Scams**

This is a trick guaranteed to play on the victim's heartstrings and may come into play more frequently after natural disasters. A scammer will call pretending to be from a charity or a relief organization to ask for a donation by either bank or credit card. Once they have access to that information, they can deplete the account or exhaust the credit limit.

### **11.A Family Member in Need**

This is one of the cruelest scams. The con artist convinces the senior to help a family member who has had an accident, may be in hospital, or stranded in a foreign country needing money for a ticket, a visa. The scammer may have already hacked into the relative's e-mail or

Facebook account so can provide what sounds like reasonable information. Once again, the senior will be asked to transfer a sum of money.

## **12.The Grandparent Scam**

Here a criminal, faking a young person's voice and claiming to be the senior's grandchild will, possibly through tears, beg for money for some reason or another.

### **FRAUD TIPS**

Anyone can be the target of a fraud, no matter what their age, but the sad fact is that seniors are the number one target of the criminals out there.

**First, check out whether this is a scam. Whether it's online or over the phone, here are some things to look out for.**

The scammer may say:

- "You need to act NOW, or the offer will expire."
- "You've won a free prize, but you need to pay for shipping and handling (or other) fees."
- "You need to wire money or pay a debt with a gift card".
- "You need to handle payments, or deposit funds for another person, or forward money to someone else".

OR they may make unsolicited contact and the senior will be contacted out of the blue with offers of prizes, vacations and so on, all requiring some form of advance financing.

### **WATCH OUT FOR FAKE WEBSITES**

- These may pop-up in a new browser window
- Will not display the secure lock by the web address at the top of the page.
- Will look a little different from normal.
- Will have bad reviews or no reviews at all ... "CHECK IT OUT ON GOOGLE OR OTHER SEARCH ENGINES"
- May have typos or bad English.

### **SO, WHAT TO DO**

- Take time to research whether companies, offers and unexpected debts are legitimate. Don't be afraid to reach out for help to a family member or a friend.
- If a caller tells you to "act immediately" and won't allow you time to do some background checking, they're probably a con artist.

- Be wary of unsolicited e-mails and phone calls from companies and people. A good rule of thumb is to ignore communications that you don't recognize. Find out how to block unknown calls on your phone.
- If something seems strange about a phone call, don't be afraid to HANG UP.
- Be careful of unusual email or messages from family members. If a message contains a lot of typos or odd language, it may well be a hacker. Check out the source.
- Make sure that websites are secure before entering private information. Most browsers have systems that provide website verification. It's worth checking out.
- Remember the old adage:

"IF SOMETHING SOUNDS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, IT PROBABY IS."

**For more information and if you have questions /concerns with regard to Scams, you can contact:**

**CANADIAN ANTI-FRAUD CENTRE**

**WEB SITE: [antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca](http://antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca)**

**TELEPHONE: 1-888-495-8501**