

The Top Scams Affecting Senior Citizens Right Now and How Bankers Can Help

Older adults are attractive targets for financial exploitation because they tend to possess more wealth than other potential targets – wealth that in many instances has been accumulated over their lifetime through hard work and conscientious saving. A decline in mental faculties for some seniors also makes them more vulnerable to fraud. Residents of assisted living and nursing facilities may be targets of predators who take advantage of victims' memory loss or their fear of a failing memory.

Seniors are often targeted through the internet, mail, phone, in-home visits, and free offers specifically tailored to large groups of seniors. Though they are always changing, we'll discuss the most common elder scams happening now. As bankers, you can help your older customers be on the alert.

Medicare & Health Insurance Scams

It is difficult to imagine that someone could prey on those who need medical assistance, but unfortunately, Medicare fraud is all too common. Perpetrators may pose as a Medicare representative to get personal information, or they will provide bogus services at makeshift mobile clinics, then use the information to bill Medicare and pocket the money. Some even make false offers for free medical supplies or checkups that require the victim to provide their Medicare information and credit card number for supposed "shipping and handling" fees.

Consumers also report phony "Free" back, neck or knee brace offers. Scammer claims to be a Medicare or medical supply representative or health insurance company. If interest is shown, they will ask for sensitive information such as Medicare Numbers or Social Security Numbers.

Another of the latest Medicare scams to pop up is where scammers are emailing, calling, and even knocking on doors, claiming to be from Medicare and offering all sorts of pandemic-related services if you "verify" your Medicare ID number. Among the offers is to send new cards they claim contain microchips. Some posers have been asking for payment to move beneficiaries up in line for the COVID-19 vaccine.

COVID-19 scams

Speaking of COVID-19, many who have already received their vaccine posted selfies on social media showing off their vaccination card. Scammers immediately pounced. Often appearing in the pics was the information on the card showing full name, birth date and information about where the shot was received. That gives scammers valuable data for identity theft, breaking into bank accounts, applying for credit cards, and more.

Another COVID-19 related scam centers around a FEMA program that will pay up to \$9000 for funeral expenses if a loved one was lost to the disease. While this is a legitimate program, and citizens can reach out to FEMA to apply for these benefits, unfortunately, FEMA reports that scammers are contacting people and pretending to offer to register them for assistance. To avoid those scams, here are some tips:

- FEMA will not contact anyone until they call or apply for assistance.
- The government won't ask for payment to get this benefit.
- Nobody should give out deceased loved one's personal or financial information to anyone who has contacted them out of the blue.

Zoom phishing emails

According to the Better Business Bureau, thousands of fake Zoom-related internet domains were registered for in the early months of the pandemic, just so con-artists could send out emails that look like they're from the popular videoconferencing website.

How this con works is that folks receive an email, text, or social media message with the Zoom logo, telling them to click on a link because their account is suspended, or they missed a meeting. Clicking can expose you to the risk of an upload of malware (malicious software) onto their computer, where personal information could become available to use for identity theft, or search for passwords to hack into other accounts.

Telemarketing/Phone Scams

Seniors were raised in an era that valued politeness and good manners, but this makes them more vulnerable to fraud. Often, they are less likely to hang up the phone or simply say “no” to criminals pretending to be telemarketers or representatives of a company. There are many different types of telemarketing scams. Three examples include:

1. The pigeon drop - The con artist tells the individual that he/she has found a large sum of money and is willing to split it if the person will make a “good faith” payment by withdrawing funds from his/her bank account.
2. The fake accident ploy - The con artist gets the victim to wire or send money on the pretext that the person’s child or another relative is in the hospital and needs the money.
3. Charity scams - Money is solicited for fake charities. People should avoid answering calls from unknown numbers and be aware of Caller ID Spoofing technology to mask their true phone number from showing.

Internet Fraud

If you’ve ever seen a pop-up window telling you that your computer has a virus, then you’ve come close to this type of fraud. Pop-up browser windows simulating virus-scanning software will fool victims into either downloading a fake anti-virus program (at a substantial cost) or an actual virus that will open up personal information to scammers. Scammers are also sending fake text messages alleging there is big trouble with your internet account, a credit card, bank account or shopping order on Amazon or other popular retailers. The urgent-sounding text message may even have a real-looking logo. They want people to click on links and provide personal info.

Similar issues are popping up via ads on social media Phony retail sites are using photos lifted from real online stores to make their fake store look legitimate. They run ads where a click directs to their fake site, where if an order is place with payment info, the goods are never received, or are a sub-par, cheaper knock-off version, often shipped direct from overseas.

Conclusion

Remember, scams are always changing. This year’s pandemic fraud will be replaced by a new and creative scheme next year. Visit www.shcpfoundation.org to learn how you can work with Endorsed Vendor, CRA Partners and the Senior Housing Crime Prevention Foundation to protect seniors and earn CRA credit.