

2019 Annual Report



Mission: *To ensure no older person is left to suffer, alone and in silence, at the hands of those who exploit them.*

In 2019, the Elderwatch program transitioned from the AARP Foundation to AARP due to a consolidation of fraud resources within AARP. This move was purely an organizational restructuring and has not changed the nature of the ElderWatch program. The new contract between AARP and the Colorado Attorney General's Office was executed on April 30, 2019 (with no lag in programming).

Toll-free Senior Assistance Helpline

A telephone helpline providing information to Colorado's seniors, and to those that provide care, advice, or protection to prevent the financial exploitation of seniors and provide assistance to seniors who have been the victims of financial exploitation.

AARP ElderWatch continued to operate the successful volunteer-based inbound consumer assistance center. In 2019, we had 7 volunteers donate 1,248 hours as part of the inbound helpline. This is equivalent to \$31,737 according to the Independent Sector's Value of Volunteer Time (\$25.43/hour).

- 3,463 calls were transferred and triaged to the AARP ElderWatch call center from the Attorney General's Consumer Complaint line in 2019.
- In 2019, 65 percent of callers were female and 35 percent were male. The average age of a caller was 73.
- In 2019, the top 10 categories of complaints were as follows:
 1. Imposter Government
 2. Sweepstakes/Prize/Lottery
 3. Computer virus/Tech support
 4. Home Repair
 5. Phishing
 6. Online Dating/Romance
 7. Identity Theft
 8. Non-Stranger Exploitation
 9. Insurance/Medicare
 10. Fraudulent Sales
- Staff and volunteers maintain numerous community relationships with external stakeholders to increase the ElderWatch program's visibility. The program continues to have strong relationships with senior service agencies, Senior Medicare Patrol, Denver Regional Council of Governments, law enforcement, district attorney offices, the Better Business Bureaus of Colorado, Colorado Legal Services, Colorado Bureau of Investigation, Colorado Division of Securities, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Trade Commission, U.S. Commodities Futures Trading Commission, U.S. Postal Inspection Service and U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

I enjoy speaking with people and using my knowledge to assist them when possible.

–Jennifer Ostrom, volunteer

Senior Citizen Consumer Alerts

The dissemination of consumer alerts and other information regarding the financial exploitation of seniors through an electronic network (telephone and broadcast e-mail) connecting media outlets, law enforcement agencies, district attorneys, adult protection or social services agencies, nursing homes, assisted living or independent living facilities, senior centers, and other private, governmental or non-profit partners engaged in caring for, advising, or protecting seniors.

AARP ElderWatch has continued the dissemination of the “Smart Tips” consumer protection information in the following ways:

- “Smart Tips” posters are distributed via our e-mail distribution list, USPS mailings, AARP Colorado, social media and occasionally through other agencies such as Meals on Wheels and homeowners associations.
- The consumer alerts are distributed to media, law enforcement, district attorney offices, consumers, senior centers, assisted living facilities, low-income senior housing, realtors, senior advocates, financial professionals and state and local government agencies.
- Total distribution of “Smart Tips” via email, presentations, community events and USPS is over 9,000. We have a relationship with 162 brick-and-mortar community partners and subscribed individuals across Colorado who every month hang this poster in their high traffic areas to ensure all community members are fully aware of the latest frauds and scams.
- 2019 topics included: general “red flags” of scams, potential tax scams, charitable giving, auto repair scams, computer support scams, tips for hiring a contractor, holiday scams, identity theft protection steps, Medicare fraud, romance scams, government grant scam offers and door-to-door scams.
- Through work with the AARP Colorado office, ElderWatch utilized their social media channels to share the monthly alerts with their 20,000+ followers.
- ElderWatch continues to partner closely with the Colorado Attorney General’s Consumer Fraud Unit to provide content for newsletters, social media posts, radio interviews and other consumer alerts.
- ElderWatch volunteers and staff are occasionally featured in local and national media to help warn consumers how to recognize, refuse and report fraud and scams. Staff was the guest on DRCOG’s NoCoPay radio on three occasions to talk about ID theft, Census scams and general scams targeting older adults in the Denver metro area.
- Over 500 postcards about recognizing a phone scam were distributed to Meals on Wheels recipients in the Denver Metro area.
- ElderWatch continues to disseminate information through a newly re-vamped and more concise website that is hosted on aarp.org.
- The @AARPFightsFraud Twitter account has over 300 followers and is most often used as part of Twitter chats with partner organizations across Colorado.
- AARP ElderWatch’s Facebook page is one of the major ways that information is shared about trending frauds and scams to Coloradans and other followers. Through consistent updates/alerts and paid advertising via Facebook, the presence of our fraud fighting efforts has increased to over 3,700 followers.

General Consumer Protection Education

General consumer education and training materials will be developed and disseminated to seniors and to any individual or group charged with the care, advice, or protection of seniors.

The production of fraud prevention materials and presentations is crucial to the success of AARP ElderWatch and the prevention of financial exploitation of older Coloradans. We accomplish this not only through the “Smart Tips” posters and consumer protection alerts referenced previously, but also through community outreach events throughout the state, including presentations and information fairs.

In 2019, through presentations, community outreach, inbound and outbound* calls, our volunteers and staff worked with 413,606 older consumers (**although the outbound calls are supported by other grants, through leveraging resources we are able to reach more older adults. One volunteer donated 162 (FINRA) hours in the outbound call center and warned consumers about investment fraud and health product scams.*)

- In 2019, in conjunction with the Colorado Attorney General’s office, ElderWatch hosted four tele-town hall calls. Topics were: Medicare Fraud, Identity Theft, and (2) general frauds and scams of the season. During these events we called 284,096 older Coloradans. 2,137 participants stayed on the call for over 20 minutes, and 172,004 voice messages were left for those who were not home. The Attorney General’s office had representatives for three of the calls including Attorney General Phil Weiser who participated in two of the four calls.
- Through community events, including senior fairs and shredding events, we reached over 3,600 with consumer protection resources. We visited communities all over Colorado including: Evergreen, Trinidad, Durango, Grand Junction, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Greeley, Salida, Estes Park, to name a few.
- As part of Colorado Consumer Protection Month, ElderWatch hosted 4 “Scam Proof Your Life” events in Grand Junction, Ft. Collins, Colorado Springs and Lakewood. Each event generated an audience of over 100 attendees. Over 600 people total attended the 3-hour events in November 2019. As part of the event ElderWatch sought the expertise of federal, state and local agencies to generate attendance and serve as panelists. Partner agencies included: Colorado AG’s Office, AARP Colorado, FBI, Senior Medicare Patrol, US Census Bureau, SEC, Mesa Co District Attorney, Mesa Co Adult Protective Services, Mesa Co Sheriff, BBB of Northern Colorado, Larimer Co Sheriff, Colorado Springs Police Dept., BBB of Southern Colorado, KKTU, BBB of Denver Boulder, Jefferson Co District Attorney, Social Security Administration and DORA Division of Securities.



- Four AARP ElderWatch Field Fraud Fighter volunteers donated 29 hours of service to work safety fairs, senior events and deliver presentations (equivalent to \$737.47 according to the Independent Sector’s Value of Volunteer Time)
- Staff and volunteers delivered: “Top 5 Scams in Colorado”, “Play it Safe: Recognize, Refuse and Report”, “Identity Theft”, “Outsmarting Investment Fraud”, “Avoiding End-of-Life Scams”, “Scam Proof Your Life” and other consumer protection presentations to over 1,200 attendees at over 40 different locations.
- Partnered with the numerous District Attorneys’ office throughout the state and supported their Senior Law Days.
- 1,901 older consumers had their personal and financial documents shredded in Colorado Springs, Denver, Fort Collins, Durango and Greeley through the annual Fight Fraud – Shred Instead events. 61 volunteers donated 183 hours (equivalent to \$4,654 according to the Independent Sector’s Value of Volunteer Time). According to postcard surveys from participants:
 - Fifty-eight percent of shredding participants indicated that this was their first year.
 - Eighteen percent indicated they had been a victim of identity theft in the past.
 - Eighteen percent indicated they had been the victim of a scam other than identity theft within the past five years.
 - Ninety-six percent of participants ranked their satisfaction level as 9 or 10 out of 10.
 - Comments from participants on the surveys included:
 - *“Please continue to do these Fight Fraud-Shred Instead events! Awesome event. Very well organized!”*
 - *“I’m retired and 89 years old. I don’t have a lot that needs shredding, but I’m grateful to know this is available.”*
 - *“Thank you for the opportunity to safely get rid of documents that are no longer needed.”*



Database

A database to track the frequency and types of fraud perpetrated against senior citizens will be maintained.

The AARP ElderWatch database system continues to be used to track relevant calls that come into the ElderWatch hotline.

- The database is used to collect demographic data and fraud data to get an accurate snapshot of the instances of fraud in Colorado.

- We have provided information to law enforcement about certain types of complaints and have compiled numerous reports to assist them in their investigations.
- With our database we are able to provide law enforcement with specific complaint details about scams that might assist them.
- We provide media and other interested parties with statistical data, and sometimes connect them with sources, to help further the message of prevention and reporting of fraud.

Investor education and prevention of investment fraud and exploitation

AARP, through the ElderWatch program, shall design and implement education and training initiatives focusing on investment fraud and exploitation directed at seniors in Colorado. Education and training efforts may include initiatives directed to law enforcement agencies, financial institutions, investment professionals, and other individuals or groups likely to interact with seniors on investment matters. AARP ElderWatch should attempt to work with appropriate individuals within the Colorado Attorney General's Office and other appropriate agencies in designing and implementing these initiatives.

AARP ElderWatch continued its collaboration with the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) Investor Education Foundation and the Denver regional office of the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to educate people 50+ about investment scams.

- With the financial support of the FINRA Investor Education Foundation, we partnered with securities regulators to bring presentations on investment fraud to 250 consumers and professionals.
- AARP continued a grant-funded project with the FINRA Investor Education Foundation to increase investment fraud outreach to 50+ adults through outbound phone call outreach. Outbound calls were conducted via: 1) manual outbound dialing by volunteers; 2) five telephone town hall calls providing a tele-bases community presentation with information aligned with the FINRA Foundation's Outsmarting Investment Fraud messaging; and 3) robo calls providing the Outsmarting Investment Fraud script specifically to four states with large populations of older adults and individuals interested in education on financial fraud. At the end of 2019, the program completed 231,122 engagements. One call-to-action from the outbound calls is to report fraud to the ElderWatch helpline.

Identification of Effective Preventive Strategies

A set of best practices, "blueprints," or model programs to prevent financial exploitation of the elderly will be developed, periodically updated, and disseminated.

Over the past 18 years AARP ElderWatch has gained the reputation as being one of the best places to turn for information on financial exploitation of the elderly, not only in Colorado but throughout the country. Consumer groups, media, state and local agencies turn to us for up-to-date information on fraud trends and how they are affecting our residents. ElderWatch staff participates in task forces to share our expertise in helping older Coloradans recognize, refuse and report fraud.

Five years ago, the AARP fraud office volunteered to assist AARP's Fraud Watch Network program in providing a peer-to-peer reporting mechanism for the organization's national consumer protection program. The helpline, which utilizes best practices gleaned from the ElderWatch program, provides older consumers from all around the country with the opportunity to tell their story or report a scam to a peer. This work brought in an additional 18,264 calls to 28 volunteers and has helped our volunteers gain national recognition for their expertise and service to the 50+ population. This expansion, with all the learnings from ElderWatch, helped AARP grow into a well-respected and recognized thought leader when it comes to serving the vulnerable 50+ protect themselves from fraud and exploitation.

Financial Literacy

The financial literacy initiative of the ElderWatch grant began in August 2019. Since its inception, the program has focused on three areas: background research and focus groups about older adult financial literacy, presentations within the community, and the development of a comprehensive older adult financial literacy curriculum to be taught in a classroom-style setting for people of all financial knowledge levels. Background research and focus groups were completed in November 2019. Presentations began in November 2019 and are scheduled into 2020. Financial literacy classes begin in February 2020 with pilot classes in the Denver metro area. Expansion will begin in April 2020.

The following are a few of the accomplishments of the financial literacy program since August 2019:

- 10 volunteers trained and recruited to give financial literacy presentations and teach classes.
- 38 participants from across the state of Colorado and surrounding areas for the Currency of Fraud webinar.
- 600 attendees at Currency of Fraud presentations across the state of Colorado.
- Established community partnerships with the Denver Inner City Parish, Colorado Banker's Association, The Federal Reserve (Kansas City Branch) and the Denver Public Library.
- Denver financial assistance resource guide, social media strategy, quick ways to save, budgeting and saving worksheets all completed and used within community programming.

Looking Ahead to 2020

As we look to 2020, the ElderWatch program anticipates engaging new partners and new strategies to further our mission. A few plans we have on the docket:

- Implementation of the financial literacy component to the ElderWatch program, to help educate older adults about earning, saving and keeping their money.
- An increase in large scale events focusing on identity theft as a main theme.
- Continued partnership with the AG's office on successful webinars and tele-town halls to reach individuals who might not attend in-person events.
- Further coordination on messaging for outreach with the statewide network of partners who work in the field of aging.
- New research to inform future outreach.