

# The Attorney General Protects Senior Citizens



**By Greg Abbott**  
Attorney General of Texas

May is Older Americans Month. Serving and protecting senior citizens is a top priority of my administration, and I would like to take this opportunity to describe the types of services our agency provides to seniors.

One of our most important missions is to protect seniors in nursing homes. We do this in two ways. Our Elder Law and Public Health Division handles civil prosecutions of long-term care facilities when the Department of Human Services finds that residents are abused, neglected, or endangered.

In addition, our Medicaid Fraud Control Unit investigates criminal abuse and neglect in nursing homes that receive Medicaid funding. The Unit's investigations are referred to state or federal criminal prosecutors for legal action.

Our Consumer Protection Division investigates and aggressively prosecutes companies that use deceptive business practices – especially if they target the elderly. Of particular concern are sweepstakes and telemarketers, retirement-oriented investments, home improvement businesses and the pricing practices of pharmaceutical companies.

While our office can sometimes obtain restitution for consumers through civil lawsuits, in the worst cases of outright fraud, the perpetrators generally spend or lose most of the money they have taken. For this reason, we place high value on consumer education. We are stepping up our efforts to warn consumers before they are victimized.

When new scams surface, timely warning can mean the difference between a handful and hundreds of victims. For this reason, we have created Senior Alerts that can be issued on very short notice. The alerts are available on our Web site and as e-mails. Hard copies are also available by phone.

We encourage individuals, law enforcement, senior centers and communities to sign up for e-mail notification of Senior Alerts. Recent alerts have warned senior Texans about home repair rip-offs, bogus foreign lotteries, and a fraudulent offer involving free motorized wheelchairs.

Wheelchair scam victims were told that if they divulged their Social Security numbers along with their Medicare and Medicaid information, they would receive the wheelchairs free of charge. In one case, the scam artists fraudulently billed the government for over \$12,000, and the person who was scammed ended up having to pay \$1,200 back to the government.

In the area of crime prevention, the Attorney General's Office participates in

a community policing organization called TRIAD. Nationally, TRIAD is composed of the National Sheriff's Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the American Association for Retired Persons (AARP).

On the local level, TRIAD unites seniors with local law enforcement agencies. Each local TRIAD is administered by a volunteer council called Seniors and Law Enforcement Together (SALT). The SALT council decides what services and programs the TRIAD will offer. It also recruits new members and monitors the program's effectiveness.

Our office facilitates the formation of local TRIADs in Texas, and provides them with speakers and educational materials as needed. At this time, there are 112 TRIADs in Texas. I intend to continue supporting this program and every other effort within my office to protect senior Texans. I hope you will join us during Older Americans Month in doubling our efforts to honor and care for the senior citizens to whom we owe so much.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER PROTECTING SENIOR TEXANS

File a complaint about a nursing home:

**Department of Human Services**  
**(800) 458-9858**  
**[www.dhs.state.tx.us](http://www.dhs.state.tx.us)**

For more information on senior issues or for hard copies of Senior Alerts:

**Office of the Attorney General**  
**(800) 252-8011**

Sign up online to receive  
Senior Alert E-mails:

**[www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us)**

Report abuse or neglect of a  
resident in a Medicaid-funded facility:

**Medicaid Fraud Control Unit**  
**Office of the Attorney General**  
**Telephone: (512) 463-2011**  
**Fax: (512) 320-0974**  
**E-mail: [mfcu@oag.state.tx.us](mailto:mfcu@oag.state.tx.us)**

For Nursing Home Ombudsman  
assistance and benefits counseling:

**Texas Department of Aging**  
**Area Agencies on Aging**  
**(800) 252-9240**  
**[www.tdoa.state.tx.us](http://www.tdoa.state.tx.us)**



**ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS**  
**GREG ABBOTT**

Information on this and other topics is available on the  
Attorney General's Web site at [www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us).