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DHS highlights World Elder Abuse Prevention Day today, June 15, in Salem

The growing worldwide problem of unreported elder abuse and the personal stories of abused seniors in Oregon are being highlighted in honor of World Elder Abuse Prevention Day today, June 15, in the lobby of the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS), 500 Summer NE, Salem.

The National Center on Elder Abuse estimates as many as 3.5 million seniors age 65 and older nationwide have experienced abuse, but only one in five or six cases of abuse is reported.

“By 2030, seniors age 65 and older will make up nearly 20 percent of Oregon’s population,” says James D. Toews, DHS assistant director for seniors and people with disabilities. “As our population ages, this type of abuse is bound to increase unless we all become more aware of the signs of abuse and more willing to report or prevent it.”

DHS and local senior and disability services offices provide protective services and investigate reports of suspected abuse. They determine if abuse has occurred and work with law enforcement when a potential crime may have occurred. In 2007, about 18,000 calls alleging adult abuse and neglect were received, almost 13,000 allegations of abuse and neglect were investigated, and 4,200 cases were substantiated.

Oregon law defines elder abuse as physical injury that is not caused by accident, neglect that leads to harm, abandonment, intentional infliction of physical pain or injury, unwanted sexual contact or sexual contact to which an individual lacks the ability to consent, and threatening to take, or taking, money or property.

Signs of elder abuse include physical injuries, emotional or behavioral changes, a decline in self-care, and changes in financial status. For a complete list, see www.oregoneverydayheroes.org/Signs.html.

Anyone witnessing or suspecting abuse of seniors age 65 and older should call his or her local senior and disability services office (www.oregon.gov/DHS/spwpd/offices.shtml) or call the toll-free Abuse Helpine: 1-800-232-3020 for more information.