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## Designated responders: Protecting the most vulnerable

Across Interior Health thousands of people receive quality health-care services each day. But did you know that, under the Adult Guardianship Act, Interior Health is also a designated agency responsible for investigating cases of suspected adult abuse, including neglect and self-neglect?

Anyone within Interior Health who has concerns regarding the abuse of a vulnerable and incapable adult can call 1-844-870-4754 or email [ihadultguardianship@interiorhealth.ca](mailto:ihadultguardianship@interiorhealth.ca). Interior Health monitors the phone line and email address and receives about four to six calls each week from the public. Volumes often spike around the holidays, when family are typically visiting and may notice signs of self-neglect.

The identity of the reporter is kept confidential.

Challenging, and at times heart-breaking, the investigations are undertaken by Interior Health staff who have special training. They are called designated responders.

For the most part, designated responders are social workers, although in some areas, such as rural communities that do not have social workers, the designated responder may be a mental health clinician or a long-term care worker. They work closely with other Interior Health staff, physicians, and agencies such as the RCMP.

While the call-line and email address keep designated responders busy, they are not the source of most reports. More often, Interior Health is notified by health-care workers who make home visits, or physicians with concerns about their patients.

Vulnerable and incapable adult abuse is defined by asking the following:

- 1) Is there evidence that the adult is abused, neglected or self-neglecting?
- 2) Is the adult unable to seek or refuse support and assistance due to:
  - a) Physical restraint;
  - b) A physical handicap that limits their ability to seek help; or
  - c) An illness, disease, injury or other condition that affects their ability to make decisions about the abuse or neglect.

A new online reporting system called “Re:act” being implemented for Interior Health designated responders this month will further help track reports, investigations and follow-up actions.

Abuse and neglect can be difficult to detect. Learn about the signs that a vulnerable and incapable adult is being victimized or neglected – visit [www.interiorhealth.ca](http://www.interiorhealth.ca) > Adults & Seniors > Adult Abuse & Neglect.

Always call 9-1-1 if the situation is an emergency and you require immediate help.