

Senior Identity Theft, P065411

A Senior's Guide to Guarding Against Identity Theft

How to safely seek accountants, financial advisers and elder care

By Identity Theft 911

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The elderly are especially vulnerable to identity theft. Often these crimes are committed by the very people senior citizens count on to protect them.

Financial services and day-to-day health are the two most common services sought out by seniors and their families. Both require the submission and processing of personal information, including Social Security numbers, account codes and background information on relatives. This data can be a gold mine for identity thieves.

Here's what you can do to guard against identity theft when hiring an accountant, financial adviser or elder care specialist:

Accountant/Financial Advisers

- Do not respond to unsolicited phone calls or emails that offer accounting or financial services. These may be scams, and the victim likely has been targeted because of their age group. Seniors are more at risk for telephone and telemarketing scams.
- Consider word of mouth. If a family member or trusted friend recommends an accountant or financial adviser *who they've done business with* then it is an option worth exploring. Make sure that the recommender has firsthand experience with the person or service.
- Snoop around. Once you've found a potential service provider, contact the Better Business Bureau for information. If they're a tax preparer, email the IRS Office of Professional Responsibility at opr@irs.gov with the full name of the individual or business and their address.
- Ask a lot of questions. Grill your potential accountant or financial adviser on how they plan to use and store your personal information. Ask what security measures are in place to keep your information safe. The quality of their response will help alert you to a less-than-reputable service provider.
- Scrutinize all records your accountant or financial adviser provides. Read the fine print. If this is too much, ask a family member or trusted friend or the family attorney to review the documents. Never sign blank or inaccurate documents.

Elder Care

- As with hiring an accountant, do not respond to unsolicited phone calls or emails. Investigate the provider with the Better Business Bureau, and ask a lot of questions. However, with health care, there are more specialized steps that can be taken, including:
- Consider using an agency. There are firms dedicated to finding the best fit for you or your aging family member's elder care provider. They can make recommendations on location, specific health concerns and other considerations. They also can act as a filter against disreputable or crooked providers.
- If you're hiring an individual, at-home specialist, ask personal questions. Why do you like working with the elderly? Also call personal and professional references. Vet their résumé as thoroughly as possible, and flag all suspicious or poorly worded answers.
- Review bills closely. Medical bills and insurance statements may contain signs that you are a victim of fraud or identity theft. Check the itemized costs and look for anything out of the ordinary. Some claims can be obvious—prescription eyeglasses for the blind, for example—others less so.
- Regularly check medical and pharmaceutical records. Keep a list of your doctors, pharmacies and other health care providers. Schedule a regular phone call to discuss status and anything that may affect billing or personal information.
- Discuss the privacy policy. All health care providers must follow HIPPA guidelines, but they also have a personal and business privacy policy that safeguards patient data against theft.