

## Iowa Dependent Adult Abuse Reporting

Iowa has reporting rules on suspected dependent adult abuse. This includes physical injury, unreasonable confinement or punishment, sexual abuse, financial or other exploitation, denial of critical care, sexual exploitation by a caretaker, and personal degradation of adults age eighteen or older who cannot protect their own interests or meet essential needs without help.

### Who do I contact to report an incident in Iowa?

In Iowa, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) runs Dependent Adult Protective Services and a statewide hotline for suspected dependent adult abuse.

To report suspected dependent adult abuse in Iowa, call 800-362-2178, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. For suspected abuse in a licensed health facility or program, call the Iowa Department of Inspections, Appeals, and Licensing (DIAL) Complaint Hotline at 877-686-0027.

### How much time do I have to report an incident?

Mandatory reporters who, in the course of employment, examine, attend, counsel, or treat a dependent adult and reasonably believe the person has suffered abuse must make an oral report to HHS within twenty-four hours after the concern arises. A follow-up written report is optional under current guidance. **Iowa Code § 235B.3; Iowa Admin. Code r. 441-176.4(235B)**

### What is a “dependent adult” in Iowa?

A dependent adult is a person age eighteen or older who, because of a physical or mental condition, needs help from another person for care or protection and is unable to protect personal interests or to perform or obtain services needed to meet essential human needs such as food, shelter, clothing, health care, or financial management. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(4)**

### What conduct must be reported as dependent adult abuse in Iowa?

Dependent adult abuse covers several types of harm when a caretaker’s actions or failures cause harm to a dependent adult, or when a dependent adult’s own actions place health or safety at serious risk. Reportable abuse includes physical injury or assault, unreasonable confinement or punishment, sexual abuse, financial or other exploitation, denial of critical care, sexual exploitation by a caretaker, and personal degradation. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(5)**

### How does Iowa law define the main types of dependent adult abuse?

Physical injury, confinement, punishment, or assault of a dependent adult includes hitting, slapping, pushing, or other physical force that causes pain, bruises, cuts, or broken bones, tying or locking a person in a room or chair, or other harsh treatment that harms the person or causes strong fear. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(5)(a)(1)(a)**

Sexual abuse of a dependent adult includes rape, sexual assault, unwanted sexual touching, forced nudity, incest, or other sexual offenses under Iowa criminal law when committed with or against a dependent adult. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(5)(a)(1)(b); Iowa Code ch. 709; § 726.2**

Exploitation of a dependent adult means taking unfair advantage of the person or the person’s physical or financial resources for personal or financial gain without informed consent. Examples include stealing money or property, pressuring the person to sign checks or legal papers, misusing power of attorney, or using the person’s home, car, or benefits for someone else’s

benefit through undue influence, harassment, duress, deception, or false representation. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(5)(a)(1)(c)**

Denial of critical care by a caretaker happens when a caretaker does not provide minimum care needed to maintain the life or health of a dependent adult. This includes not providing enough food, clothing, safe shelter, necessary supervision, or needed physical or mental health care, or not providing equipment or services needed for basic safety and daily living, when the caretaker knows or should know about these needs. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(5)(a)(1)(d)**

Denial of critical care by the dependent adult's own actions covers serious self-neglect. This includes a dependent adult, because of physical or mental problems, failing to eat or drink adequately, failing to take essential medicines, refusing needed health care, failing to maintain safe housing or hygiene, or staying in unsafe situations, so that health or safety is threatened. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(5)(a)(2)**

Sexual exploitation by a caretaker occurs when a counselor, doctor, nurse, therapist, or other caretaker has sexual contact or sexual activity with a dependent adult during care or services, for sexual arousal, gratification, or other sexual purposes. This form of abuse occurs even if the dependent adult appears to agree, because the power imbalance and care relationship make true consent impossible. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(5)(a)(1)(e)**

Personal degradation is a willful act or statement by a caretaker that is intended to shame, degrade, humiliate, or harm the personal dignity of a dependent adult, or that a reasonable person would expect to have that effect. This includes mocking, verbal abuse, threats, racial or other slurs, or sharing harmful or embarrassing images or videos of the person, including through electronic devices or social media. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(5)(a)(1)(f)**

Certain decisions do not count as dependent adult abuse under Iowa law. Abuse does not include a dependent adult's or caretaker's decision, based on sincere religious beliefs, to refuse specific medical treatment, or a decision under valid advance directives or court orders to withhold or withdraw medical care for a person with a terminal condition or severe pain. **Iowa Code § 235B.2(5)(b)**

### **Who is a mandatory reporter in Iowa?**

Mandatory reporters of dependent adult abuse in community settings include staff of community mental health centers, peace officers, in-home homemaker or home health aides, outreach workers, health practitioners such as doctors, nurses, physician assistants, dentists, and similar licensed health professionals, staff or employees of community supervised apartment living arrangements, sheltered workshops, or work activity centers, social workers, certified psychologists, and licensed massage therapists. **Iowa Code § 235B.3(2)**

Mandatory reporters for dependent adult abuse in health facilities and programs include staff members and employees of hospitals, nursing facilities, elder group homes, assisted living programs, and adult day services programs, along with care review committee members for elder group homes. These reporters contact DIAL when abuse occurs in those settings. **Iowa Code § 235E.2(2)**

**Are Clergy mandatory reporters in Iowa?**

No. Clergy such as pastors, priests, and other religious leaders are not listed as mandatory reporters for dependent adult abuse in Iowa. **Iowa Code § 235B.3(2), (5)**

**Where can I find Iowa law on elder and dependent adult abuse?**

The main Iowa laws on dependent adult abuse appear in Iowa Code chapter 235B (Dependent Adult Abuse Services) and Iowa Code chapter 235E (Dependent Adult Abuse in Facilities and Programs).