




HAMILTON POLICE SERVICE

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Hamilton Police Services Board
BOARD MEETING DATE:	August 1, 2024
SUBJECT:	2023 Year End Report – Crimes Against Seniors Unit
REPORT NUMBER:	24-069
SUBMITTED BY:	Frank Bergen, Chief of Police
SIGNATURE:	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hamilton Police Service Crimes Against Seniors Unit (CASU) was created in 2004 in response to the growing concern of Elder Abuse among Hamilton's aging and vulnerable population. The unit was the first of its kind in Ontario and continues to be a leader for its advocacy and investigative expertise. CASU Detectives are assigned to the Investigative Services Division (ISD). In September 2022, CASU was placed under the umbrella of the Financial Crimes Unit.

CASU currently consists of one Detective, one Detective-Constable and one Senior Support Officer. CASU is responsible for the investigation of crimes against persons who have been victimized primarily because of their age or vulnerability. More specifically, this includes persons 60 years of age and older or vulnerable adults (persons 18 years of age and older) who are or may be unable to care for themselves or is unable to protect themselves against harm or exploitation by reason of age, illness, trauma, disability or any other reason.

The unit works closely with community agencies to ensure that all reported cases are properly investigated, including:

- Neglect/Abuse
- Exploitation
- Financial Abuse
- Sexual Assaults in conjunction with the Sexual Assault Unit
- Fraud and Theft by Power of Attorney cases

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The CASU Detectives are trained in Major Case Management and related criminal investigative techniques, including the writing of Production Orders, Search Warrants and similar legal documents in the course of their duties.

The Seniors Support Officer deals with issues, concerns and challenges that affect the seniors' community with respect to the law by:

- Cooperation - working with community services / agencies to address seniors' quality of life concerns,
- Education - developing, delivering and implementing presentations on seniors' safety and security,
- Investigation - assisting in the investigations of criminal abuse and neglect of senior and / or vulnerable adults.

According to Statistics Canada's 2021 census, the population of those 65 and older in Hamilton comprises 18.3% of the overall population. The population of seniors in Hamilton has also grown at a rate faster than that of the general population. Between 2006 and 2021, the overall population of Hamilton grew by 13%. The population of those 65 and older in Hamilton grew by 38%.

City of Hamilton Population Growth Change

Year	City Population	City Population (Age 65 +)	Percentage of City (Age 65 +)
2006	504,560	75,400	14.9%
2011	519,950	81,575	15.7%
2016	536,915	92,910	17.3%
2021	569,353	104,290	18.3%

As the senior population continues to increase, so do the needs for preventative and reactive policing initiatives.

Community Relationships

The Hamilton Police Service believes strongly in fostering effective relationships with all of our community members. In 2023, members of CASU were engaged with the following community groups:

- Hamilton Council on Aging
- Catholic Family Services
- City of Hamilton Older Adults Working Group
- City of Hamilton Housing
- Regional Geriatric Program Advisory Group
- Thrive Group
- L.E.A.P.P.S (Law Enforcement Agencies/Partners Protecting Seniors)

Education and Awareness

CASU acknowledges that with the continued growth of an aging population, there is a need to educate and inform the community in regards to crimes affecting seniors. In 2023, CASU performed 24 community presentations. Some of the groups that participated in CASU presentations are as follows:

- Jamaican Foundation
- Dundas Community Services
- Afro Caribbean Canadian Association Seniors
- Twenty Place Retirement Community
- Garth Trails Retirement Community
- Sackville Hill Seniors Recreation Centre
- Grace Community Christian Reformed Church
- St. Patrick Catholic Women's League
- Canada Hearing Services
- Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire
- HPS Citizen's Police College

CASU members capitalized on local media to educate and inform the community. CASU members participated in media engagements with CHCH, The Hamilton Spectator, and Cable 14.

CASU members placed an emphasis on educating and increasing awareness of issues effecting seniors within the HPS and its law enforcement partners. CASU provided training to every HPS recruit class in 2023. CASU members also provided training to HPS

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Communications new dispatchers and call takers. CASU members additionally teach police officers on the Elder Abuse Course conducted by the Ontario Police College 2-3 times per academic year.

Caseload

In 2023, CASU investigated 465 cases, which was a 127% increase from 2022.

CASU investigations are generated by:

- Follow up reports taken by frontline officers
- Referral forms sent by outside agencies (Long Term Care Homes, Residential Homes, Care Facilities)
- Communication Branch Generated Incidents (E-mailed CAD reports)

Investigations referred by Uniform Patrol

Initially, a call for service is generated by the Communications Branch prompting a uniform patrol response to the concerning issue. When these calls involve seniors or vulnerable adults further follow up is often required. The responding uniform patrol officer will then complete a police report. The uniform patrol officer's supervisor will review the report and task it to the Detective Sergeant of CASU for case re-assignment. This is the primary source of calls created for Detectives and SSO to investigate.

Referral Forms

Changes to the Long-Term Care Homes Act (LTCHA) in 2010 made reporting to police mandatory (Long-Term Care Homes Act, O.Reg. 79/10, s.98) for any alleged, suspected or witnessed incident of abuse or neglect of a resident. In response to these legislative changes, CASU developed a standardized referral form for all Long-Term Care Home Facilities within the City of Hamilton. In late 2022, Coplogic was utilized and an online form was created which allows the LTC home employee a portal to enter information and receive an HPS occurrence number. In 2022, 43 referrals were received from Long Term Care Homes. In 2023, **129** referrals were received from Long Term Care Homes. These referrals increased from 2022 numbers by **200%**.

Emailed CAD (Computer Automated Dispatch) Reports

Any police call involving a senior or vulnerable person is automatically flagged and sent to the CASU inbox for review. Officers in CASU (including the Senior Support Officer) will review all the flagged incidents daily, to ensure that no victim or investigative lead has been

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neglected. In 2022, a total of 857 calls were reviewed. In 2023, a total number of 777 CAD calls were reviewed. Some calls are successfully dealt with by dispatchers, while others require a uniform patrol response and further follow up by CASU or the SSO office.

Trends Currently Faced by CASU:

Grandparent Scams

Grandparent scams use urgency and the manipulation of emotions to extort money from victims. In these scams, fraudsters cold-call seniors on landline phones, claiming to be a grandchild, family member, law enforcement officer or lawyer calling on behalf of their loved one. They will say that the person's loved one was involved in an emergency situation, such as a collision, charged by law enforcement, legal peril, being sick or injured, etc. They demand the senior provide payment immediately for supposed bail, legal fees, fines or other amounts "owed" to stop the family member from going to jail or to get them released from custody.

The fraudsters isolate the victims by informing them that there is a court-imposed gag order, and they're forbidden from discussing the matter. The victims are directed to attend their financial institution to withdraw the requested amount in cash. The fraudsters will then send someone to pick it up from the victim's home or have the victim send the money via courier services. There have also been reports of victims paying with cryptocurrency.

From 2020 to 2022, HPS received **84** reports of the grandparent scam with a reported financial loss of **\$548,937.00**.

In 2023, HPS received an additional **43** reports of the grandparent scam with a reported financial loss of **\$227,577.00**. The total financial loss up to the end of 2023 was reported at **\$776,514**. Numerous media releases and media segments were conducted to educate the public. HPS has worked closely with our law enforcement partners, both provincially and federally.

Grandparent Scam Stats

Year	Total # of Occurrences	Total \$ Loss	Total \$ Attempts (No loss)
2020	2	\$19,000.00	
2021	8	\$35,337.00	\$150,500.00
2022	74	\$494,600.00	\$345,600.00
2023	43	\$227,577.00	\$136,300.00
TOTALS	127	\$776,514.00	\$632,400.00

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PROJECT SHARP

In February of 2023, due to the continuation and increased victimization of Hamilton senior citizens and others across the province and country, Project Sharp was formed to collectively investigate and gather intelligence working towards apprehending the suspects and eliminating the victimization suffered by vulnerable seniors. The goal is to locate all involved criminals and control centers responsible for committing the emergency scam known as the grandparent scam. In April of 2024, as a result of the Project Sharp investigation, 14 individuals were arrested and 56 charges were laid. Since the conclusion of the project, the city of Hamilton has had a significant decrease in reported Grandparent scams.

Project Sharp JFO led by the OPP and involved support from the Sûreté Du Québec, **Hamilton Police Service**, Halton Regional Police Service, York Regional Police, Toronto Police Service, Peel Regional Police, Durham Regional Police Service, Ottawa Police Service, Service de Police de la Ville de Montréal, Service de Police de Laval, and Criminal Intelligence Service Ontario. Additional assistance was provided by United States Homeland Security Investigations, Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada (FINTRAC) and the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre.

CASU Charges

In 2023, CASU members laid a total of **21** criminal charges. The predominant number of charges laid are a result of fraud investigations by CASU. The SSO's focus is primarily on quality of life and preventative initiatives. Additionally, the SSO and CASU Detectives often will resolve many issues by other means that satisfy all parties, such as education, crime prevention initiatives and networking with community partners. With seniors, the criminal justice system is not always the most effective option. Furthermore, in criminal investigations where family members have been identified as the suspects, senior victims are reluctant to support charges against their own family and prefer alternative resolutions.

Of all the crimes that senior's face the most often reported to the police are financial exploitation, frauds and thefts. These types of investigations are complex, time consuming and challenging. These investigations require multiple interviews, evidence collection including video surveillance, and detailed warrants of financial records.

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Conclusion

The Hamilton Police Service Crimes against Seniors Unit will continue to be a leader in the Province for its advocacy and investigative expertise dealing with persons 60+ and vulnerable adults. CASU Investigators will continue to strive to adapt and work on innovative methods to educate both the public and police, and investigate the crimes affecting Seniors and Vulnerable Adults.

FB/M.Schulenberg

- c: Ryan Diodati, Deputy Chief – Operations
- Marty Schulenberg, Superintendent – Investigative Services Division
- Andrea Torrie, Inspector – Investigative Services Division

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