



# 5 Tips to Help Senior Clients Avoid Scams

More than 2 million people in the United States file fraud complaints each year, many of them in the senior population. As an SRES® designee, it is important to be aware of current scams targeting the 55+ community so you can help advocate for them if a need arises. Here are some tips that can help you identify a scam before falling victim:

## **Verify the organization. Call them back:**

Scammers want to build trust fast—preferably in a matter of seconds. They will often pretend to be from a government agency or another well-known organization such as Apple, Medicare, Amazon, or local utilities companies. These imposter scammers often have specific, personal details that make them seem legitimate. Be sure to remind your clients to never give out their credit card or social security details over the phone unless they are the one who initiated the call.

### **SCAM SAFETY TIP**

If someone contacts your client from an organization they trust, remind them to verify that they are who they claim to be. They can hang up or stop replying, then contact them using information on the organization's website.

## **Be skeptical of urgent problems or sudden prizes:**

If you hear of a senior citizen getting a call about a sudden problem (a missed bill, back tax, family health emergency) that until now, they hadn't known about, be alert.

Seniors should be reminded to be skeptical of any unexpected prizes like a sweepstakes or all-inclusive vacation. Oftentimes, scammers will use these scenarios and ask for a "small fee" to claim winnings.

### **SCAM SAFETY TIP**

Be aware of people who present you or your clients with a problem or a prize. Never give out personal details or credit card info over email or over the phone during an unexpected, incoming call.

## **Avoid oversharing personal details online:**

Scammers are experts at extracting info. Sometimes they will research their targets beforehand. They might call and know names, hometowns, family members or home purchase prices. This kind of information is available online, and is easy for them to access. Having this information also makes it easy for them to win your trust and get more details from you. After purchasing a home, your clients personal details may be more readily available online. Remind your clients to be alert and avoid sharing personal details.

### **SCAM SAFETY TIP**

Keep social media accounts private. Never give someone who contacts you remote access to your computer or device.

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# 5 Tips to Avoid Getting Scammed

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## BONUS TIP

To opt-out of marketing calls and easily recognize scams, consider registering your number with the National Do Not Call Registry at [donotcall.gov](https://www.donotcall.gov). Within a month of submission, all legitimate businesses should stop calling you. Scammers will still use your number, but you will know that the calls you receive are not legitimate.

### Remember, there's always time to double check:

As an SRES® designee, you are likely to be in touch with the 55+ community regularly. If you hear of someone pressuring a client to make an immediate payment, caution them to be suspicious. Scammers expect victims to act fast, before anyone can realize they are illegitimate, so they threaten with losses. Tell your clients that if they feel nervous, time-pressured, or afraid of losing benefits during a phone call, it may be a scam.

#### SCAM SAFETY TIP

Even if something is urgent, there is always time for you to verify details online.

#### Pay with credit card:

Scammers often request specific forms of payment. Anytime someone asks to be paid quickly via wire transfer, gift card or mailed cash, be wary. Most legitimate organizations offer a variety of safe, traceable payment options and let you decide the best form of payment.

#### SCAM SAFETY TIP

While working with senior clients, remind them to only use protected, traceable methods of payment. Using a credit card means seniors can dispute payments “after the fact” if a product is not delivered as advertised.



SRES® designees are often the first line of defense for their older clients. The SRES® Council aims to arm SRES® designees with information to safeguard clients from falling victim to common senior 2022 scams. Consider using the next two pages (in addition to the Consumer One Sheet in this edition) as supplemental material to forward to your clients.

# 6

# COMMON SCAMS in 2022

In the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic changed our culture and economy, resulting in a growing number of new scams, many of which target citizens 55 years and older. Here are 6 common scams to be aware of so you can protect yourself:



## COVID-19 Testing Scams

Reputable medical researchers and government agencies are gathering information about the virus and may reach out and ask you questions about if you've contracted COVID and how it's impacted your health, especially if you've recently tested positive. Real poll-takers and researchers will ask about symptoms, but **will not** ask for sensitive information, personal details, or payment. If someone contacts you and asks you to send personal details like SSN for "contact-tracing," hang up immediately. When purchasing at-home COVID-19 tests, be sure you are buying from a legitimate, FDA-approved source. Many scammers are attempting to sell fake tests online for a profit. Analyze your purchases carefully before buying. Do an online search including the product's name and the words "scam," or "complaint" and see what you find.



## Vaccine Scams

Whether you are getting vaccinated or receiving a booster, it's important to avoid COVID-19 scams. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) offers some suggestions to keep you safe from COVID vaccine scams. If you are asked to pay for a COVID vaccine or to get on a waiting list, it may be a scam. Medicare pays for the COVID-19 vaccine in full and most pharmacies are offering free COVID vaccines to all who call and schedule an appointment.

Companies who are less-than-trustworthy are likely to advertise COVID vaccines through social media, email, phone calls and other unknown-unsolicited sources. Schedule your shot with a trusted medical office or pharmacy or verify the legitimacy of your vaccine provider online before getting vaccinated. Steer clear of marketers that offer to mail doses of the vaccine to you directly. To help citizens avoid falling victim to a COVID vaccine scam the FBI and other government agencies have put together a [list of common COVID-19 scams](https://oig.hhs.gov/coronavirus/vaccine-scams2020.pdf) accessible at <https://oig.hhs.gov/coronavirus/vaccine-scams2020.pdf>.



## Amazon Shopping Scams

With the rise of COVID and the effort to stay germ-free, seniors have joined the Internet commerce world at unprecedented rates. According to the NPD Group, Americans aged 65+ spent 49% more money shopping online last year. Buying online means avoiding crowds and contagions, but it also makes shoppers more susceptible to scams. Internet shopping fraud is on the rise.

Scammers will often contact shoppers with an email, text, or phone call and pretend to be from Amazon. They will insist your account was hacked or that there is a problem with your recent order. Sometimes they say they owe you a refund or that they are calling to help you activate a gift card. No matter the approach, their goal always is the same: **to get your information and your money.**

If you receive an email, text, or phone call from an online vendor that seems suspicious—especially if it requests remote access or asks for passwords, account numbers, or credit card info—do not reply. Instead, call the phone number listed on Amazon's official website.

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# 6 COMMON SCAMS in 2022



## Government Agency Stand-ins

Scammers love to pose as Social Security Representatives. Because older citizens often depend on Social Security benefits, getting a call about suspending payments or a social security number (SSN) is concerning. If you do receive a high-pressure or threatening call claiming a Social security issue, it is very likely a scam.

Government agencies such as the SSA and the IRS will not call requesting immediate payment, ask for credit or debit card numbers over the phone, or threaten to involve law enforcement groups. The SSA also states that although they use text, email and social media to build **awareness** about their programs, they will never request personal or financial information through those methods. Unsolicited calls from the government about COVID-relief programs or stimulus payments likely fake. Here are some tips from both the IRS and the SSA to help protect you from these scams:

1. If you receive a call claiming to be from Social Security and requesting personal information: hang up and call the Social Security office yourself at 1-800-772-1213
2. Don't send a payment via wire transfer, retail gift card, internet currency, or mailed cash
3. Don't provide your SSN to incoming callers
4. Report suspicious calls and emails to the **Office of Inspector General** at <https://oig.ssa.gov/>.
5. Spread awareness by telling your friends and family



## The Grandparent Scam

The Grandparent Scam has been around for years, but with COVID-19 on the rise, this scam has spread. A con artist claiming to be a grandchild calls a senior and explains a fake emergency (they are in the hospital with the virus or that their job shut down unexpectedly), and makes an urgent plea for funds. Often the scammer will request a “money wire immediately.” They will often get the unsuspecting senior to keep the incident private by adding “I’m so embarrassed. Please don’t tell Mom and Dad.”

Sometimes scammers research the victim’s family first to make the call more believable. Family members’ names, ages, addresses, and even travel plans can be found online, so scammers have correct details. Protect yourself by checking in with another family member and only sending money through traceable methods.



## The Real Estate Scam

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the housing market has been hot in many parts of the United States. If you are a senior who owns a home, you’ve likely received a phone call from a company offering to buy your property quickly. Keep in mind, real estate transactions are public record. This means information including a copy of the deed, mortgage information, the property’s sale price, and personal information of the new owners is listed online and accessible to scammers.

If you are looking to sell a property in need of work or a property located out of state, be aware that some companies take advantage of these situations by contacting you and offering to buy the home for a significantly reduced price. Before accepting an offer, it’s always smart to research the company and work with an SRES® professional who can help you navigate the sale and make sure your home is sold at market value.



# Have You Been Scammed?

Here's what your SRES® designee recommends you do next:

## Dos and Don'ts After a Scam

### DO

#### Report the fraud

Let people who can help you know about the scam. Reporting the deception can stop more individuals from being victimized. Start by contacting your bank and the **Federal Trade Commission** at <https://reportfraud.ftc.gov/#/>. You may also want to report losses to local police or your **State Consumer Protection Office** at <https://www.usa.gov/state-consumer>.

#### Work with your bank to recover lost funds

Contact your financial service provider to let them know what happened. Although there is no guarantee, they are often able to help recover your funds if you get in touch quickly.

#### Change passwords and ignore unknown calls

After a scam, change your passwords, replace any compromised credit cards, and block calls from unknown numbers to avoid getting scammed again.

### DON'T

#### Be embarrassed

Fraudsters are convincing, and millions of people fall victim to their tactics every year. Although it is unsettling to be taken in by a scam, don't let those uncomfortable feelings stop you from taking action.

#### Stay silent

Talking to family and friends that you trust about your experience can help you move on. Remember—they encounter scams too. Sharing your story can raise awareness and keep your loved ones safe.

#### Stop using all devices

Getting scammed can shake you up, but don't let it shut you down. Devices are still safe and useful if you take precautions.

In the United States, several government agencies investigate complaints. Report your experience to one of the following:

**Medicare-related fraud:** U.S. Department of Health  
800-HHS-TIPS • (800-447-8477) • [oig.hhs.gov/fraud/report-fraud](https://oig.hhs.gov/fraud/report-fraud)

**IRS impersonators:** Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA).  
800-366-4484 • [treasury.gov/tigta/reportcrime\\_misconduct.shtml](https://treasury.gov/tigta/reportcrime_misconduct.shtml)

**Social Security scams:** Social Security Administration  
1-800-269-0271 • <https://oig.ssa.gov/>

**General scams:** The Federal Trade Commission  
877-FTC-HELP (382-4357) • [ftccomplaintassistant.gov](https://ftccomplaintassistant.gov)

Count on an SRES® to guide you through the process of buying or selling your home, making the transaction less stressful and more successful.

The Seniors Real Estate Specialist® (SRES®) designation is awarded by the SRES® Council, a subsidiary of the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR).

To learn more about SRES® and access various consumer resources, please visit [seniorsresource.realtor](https://seniorsresource.realtor).

