

Scams and Fraud

(England)

April 2024

Age UK is committed to ensuring that the Government, local agencies, the police, banks, regulators, and other service providers (including technology and telecommunication companies) take appropriate action to prevent fraud and scams, and provide proper support for older victims.

Fraud, usually recognised as criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain, is the most prevalent crime in England and Wales, estimated to comprise 48% of all crimes against individuals.ⁱ UK Finance estimated that more than £1.2 billion was stolen by criminals through fraud in 2022 – about £2,300 every minute.ⁱⁱ However, fewer than one in seven fraud offences are reported to the police or Action Fraud so actual figures are likely higher.ⁱⁱⁱ

Our modern digitalised world has transformed fraud into a profitable illegal revenue stream for organised criminals. All too often, the perpetrators never face justice. The usual response to fraud in the UK concentrates on the financial harm caused, with little to no attention given to the devastating broader impacts or on bringing the fraudsters to justice.

Although fraud represents nearly half of all crimes against individuals in England and Wales, only 1% of police personnel and resources are devoted to tackling it.^{iv} Moreover, the Government's multi-agency approach is spread across departments, agencies and working groups, leading to a lack of leadership and patchy and inconsistent messaging. In recognition of the threat, the Government has reclassified fraud as a threat to national security and published a Fraud Strategy. However, there are gaps in the strategy, which may reduce its practical impact. For example, it allocates only 400 new police officers to combating the crime, which fails to substantially boost resources.

While the new Authorised Push Payment (APP) code for banks should improve outcomes for victims, measures to reduce the role played by social media and tech companies in facilitating fraud and scams are voluntary and do not go far enough. Currently, 78% of all APP fraud cases start online and 18% on telecommunication platforms^v. It is clear that an approach involving all sectors – financial services, tech, social media, and telcos – is needed to tackle this serious problem.

Targeting older people

Scams affect people of all ages and from all backgrounds but present a particularly troubling threat to our older population, often resulting in substantial financial loss and severe effects on confidence, trust, and well-being, which can have life-changing consequences.

Older people may be targeted with specific tactics because of their age, and some may be particularly vulnerable due to ill health, dementia, social isolation, or a recent trauma. Age UK research found that 41% have been victims of fraud, with most victims experiencing anger (58%), becoming less trusting in people in general (34%), feeling anxious (25%) and not safe

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(17%).^{vi} Other research has shown that pensioners are most likely to report being a victim of a scam that has a 'major' impact on their economic circumstances (38%)^{vii}. More significant efforts must be made to protect older people from experiencing fraud in the first place.

Public Policy Proposals

- The Government should compel tech firms and telecommunication service providers to act on their commitments under their respective charters and the Online Safety Act by ensuring they compensate scam victims if fraud originates on their platform.
- To provide leadership and accountability, the Government should appoint a Minister of Economic Crime to coordinate work across all relevant agencies tackling fraud.
- Including fraud as a Strategic Policing Requirement within serious organised crime is a positive step forward, but the Government should assign resourcing and funding commensurate to the scale of the problem.
- The Government should ensure the national information campaign has the resources and status necessary to raise awareness of the complex nature of fraud, how to stay safe and ensure that criminal accountability is the focus instead of blaming victims.
- The Payment Systems Regulator should fully implement its plans to require firms to reimburse APP fraud victims as soon as possible, and work with other regulators to ensure responsible organisations in other sectors are made liable for reimbursing some of the costs.
- Local authority Trading Standards teams should be allocated sufficient funding to carry out their essential functions, including tackling doorstep crime.
- There must be better links between health and social care services, safeguarding boards, and the police to ensure successful identification, protection, and support for older victims.

Want to find out more?

Age UK has agreed policy positions on a wide range of public policy issues. Our policies cover money, health and care, housing and communities, and equalities issues. See <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policy-positions/> for more information.

ⁱ Office for National Statistics (2024), Crime in England and Wales, year ending September 2023.

ⁱⁱ https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/system/files/2023-05/Annual%20Fraud%20Report%202023_0.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Office for National Statistics (2024), Crime in England and Wales, year ending September 2023.

^{iv} <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/34609/documents/190751/default/>

^v https://www.ukfinance.org.uk/system/files/2023-05/Annual%20Fraud%20Report%202023_0.pdf

^{vi} Age UK polling of a nationally represented sample of 10,000 UK Adults aged 50+. 21st July to 11th August 2023.

^{vii} <https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-view-from-the-ground-September-2023.pdf>