



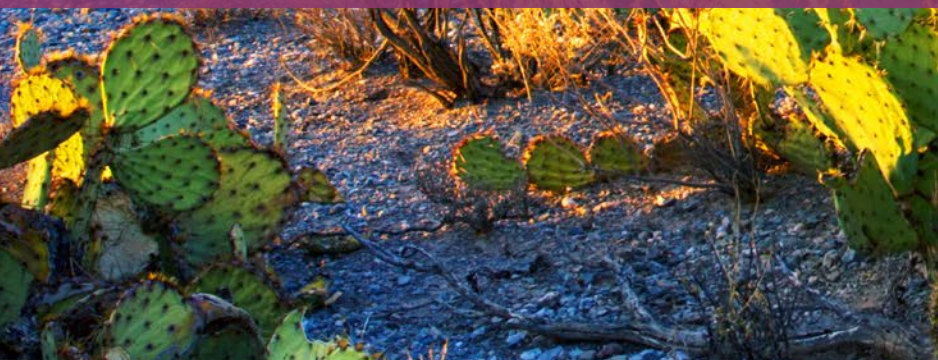
DEPARTMENT OF
ECONOMIC SECURITY

Your Partner For A Stronger Arizona



Division of Aging and Adult Services
Adult Protective Services

Year in Review Report



State
Fiscal Year
2024

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APS-1038A REPENG (12/24)

Introduction and Background

Adult Protective Services (APS) Year in Review

APS is proud to release the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024 *APS Year in Review Report*. This report provides background information on APS and its functions as well as a summary of APS's major accomplishments and initiatives.

APS Mission and Vision

In 2024, APS updated its vision, mission, and values to reflect its primary purpose and better align with the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) mission and vision. Throughout APS, all actions are aimed at achieving this mission, for the betterment of vulnerable adults across the state.

Arizona's Growing Population

The Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity projects that by 2030, Arizona's population will exceed 8.3 million people, with 1.75 million (approximately 21%) over the age of 65.¹ While older adults or individuals with disabilities are not inherently vulnerable, they may be more likely to have physical or mental challenges that can make them vulnerable to abuse, neglect (including self-neglect), and/or exploitation (maltreatment). As Arizona's population continues to grow and age, APS anticipates an increase in the volume of vulnerable adult abuse, neglect/self-neglect, and/or exploitation.

APS Laws and Regulations

Federal Regulation

The Administration for Community Living (ACL) released the first federal regulations to govern APS policies, procedures, and practices on May 8, 2024. These rules were largely informed by the ACL Voluntary Consensus Guidelines for State APS Systems and included input from APS programs throughout the nation and other stakeholders.

DES Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision: A thriving Arizona.

Mission: To strengthen individuals, families, and communities for a better quality of life.

Values:

- **Integrity:** We are honest and transparent and are accountable for our actions and their impacts.
- **People First:** We prioritize our staff and the people we serve to achieve the best and most equitable outcomes.
- **Respect:** We demonstrate compassion, treat all people with dignity and kindness and embrace diversity.

APS Mission and Vision

Mission: To protect Arizona's vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

Vision: Health, safety, and dignity for all vulnerable adults in Arizona.

¹ *Population Projections* | Office of Economic Opportunity. (n.d). <https://oeo.az.gov/population/projections>

Although effective on June 7, 2024, all state programs have four years to come into compliance with the rules in order to receive Federal Elder Justice Act funding. Historically, APS programs have been governed by each state's statutes with only state and local funding, resulting in an array of differing definitions, processes, and services.²

Highlights of the final rule include the following:

- Requires APS programs to submit a state plan and a performance report to ACL.
- Establishes definitions of common APS terms, such as abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, sexual abuse, and self-neglect. While Arizona has statutory definitions of these terms, the final rule requires only an assurance that a state's definitions as a whole meet the minimum standards of the regulatory definitions. States are not required to adopt each of the individual regulatory definitions exactly as written.
- Confirms the need to coordinate investigations of vulnerable adult maltreatment and/or self-neglect with other government agencies, law enforcement, tribal authorities, emergency management systems, and banks/financial institutions.
- Requires establishment of standardized policies and procedures to avoid both actual and perceived conflicts of interest for APS and prohibits dual relationships.

The final rule also adds the following requirements for APS programs:

- Incorporate principles of person-directed services and planning, and reliance upon least restrictive alternatives.
- Provide APS clients with an explanation of their rights.
- Share specific information with the individual who reports abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- Collect and maintain program performance data about the APS investigation and response for five years.

Arizona Laws

Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.), Title 46, Chapter 4 establishes APS and provides its duties and responsibilities. Specifically, A.R.S. § 46-452 tasks APS with receiving reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, determining if a vulnerable adult is in need of protective services, and offering appropriate services.

Further, A.R.S. § 46-459 establishes the [APS Registry](#). Perpetrators of substantiated abuse, neglect or exploitation allegations are placed on the APS Registry for 25 years. The registry includes the perpetrator's name, date of birth, and information about the incident. The registry does not list the victim's or the reporter's names. The APS registry is publicly available and allows individuals and employers to search for perpetrators. This can be a valuable tool for employers who hire individuals working directly with vulnerable people.

A.R.S. § 46-459(G) requires DES to check the registry when hiring any individual who provides direct services to children or vulnerable adults in specific settings. Additionally, A.R.S. § 36-411 requires that certain types of facilities providing care to vulnerable adults check the registry for current and prospective employees. This was signed into law in April 2024 and is discussed further below.

² *Adult Protective Services functions and grants programs*. (2024, May 8). Federal Register. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/05/08/2024-07654/adult-protective-services-functions-and-grants-programs>

A.R.S. § 46-451 provides many of the specific definitions/terms that shape APS's work.

Investigation Process

APS provides protective services to vulnerable adults. Generally, this process requires investigation of abuse, neglect, and exploitation and the provisioning/referral of various services to meet the needs of the vulnerable adult. Investigations are conducted by APS Professionals with a diverse skill set (See Appendix A).

Central Intake Unit (CIU)

The APS investigation starts with a report to the CIU. CIU is responsible for receiving and processing reports of abuse, neglect, including self-neglect, and/or exploitation of a vulnerable adult. Anyone can make a report by phone, online, or through the mail (see textbox for information on how to file an APS report). However, some individuals in specific professions are *required by law* to make a report if they suspect abuse, neglect (including self-neglect), or or exploitation. These professionals are often referred to as “mandated reporters” and include medical and financial personnel. To learn more about mandated reporters, visit the [APS website](#).³

CIU Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) are specially trained to gather and discuss information about allegations from reporters and to review any prior written intakes to understand if the report meets criteria for an APS investigation. To meet the criteria, a report must involve someone who may be a vulnerable adult and allege abuse, neglect (including self-neglect), or exploitation that occurred or is occurring within the State of Arizona.⁴

If a report meets the criteria for investigation, the CSR must also assign it a priority score based on the risk to the vulnerable adult. The assigned priority score determines how quickly an APS investigator must assess the vulnerable adult. The timeliness of APS's response is established in the Arizona Administrative Code:⁵

- Priority 1: APS must initiate assessment within one business day following a report of a qualifying problem with an imminent and substantial risk of life-threatening harm;
- Priority 2: APS must initiate assessment within two business days following a report of a qualifying problem with aggravating circumstances; and
- Priority 3: APS must initiate assessment within five business days following a report of a qualifying problem with no aggravating circumstances.

3 Duty to report abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable adults; duty to make medical records available; violation; classification, Arizona Revised Statutes § 46-454.

<https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/46/00454.htm>

4 APS has agreements with the Ak-Chin Indian Community, the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, and the Salt River-Pima Indian Tribes to provide assistance within those communities. APS also has agreement with the Arizona State Hospital to investigate allegations occurring within the hospital. APS does not investigate in prison settings.

5 Investigation, Arizona Administrative Code, Title 6, Chapter 8 (Department of Economic Security - Division of Aging and Adult Services) §206 (1996). http://apps.azsos.gov/public_services/Title_06/6-08.pdf

How to File a Report

By phone:

- Monday - Friday:
7:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
- Saturday, Sunday and state holidays:
10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

1-877-SOS-ADULT (1-877-767-2385)

Online:

The [online](#) reporting form is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

For life threatening emergencies, call 911 immediately.

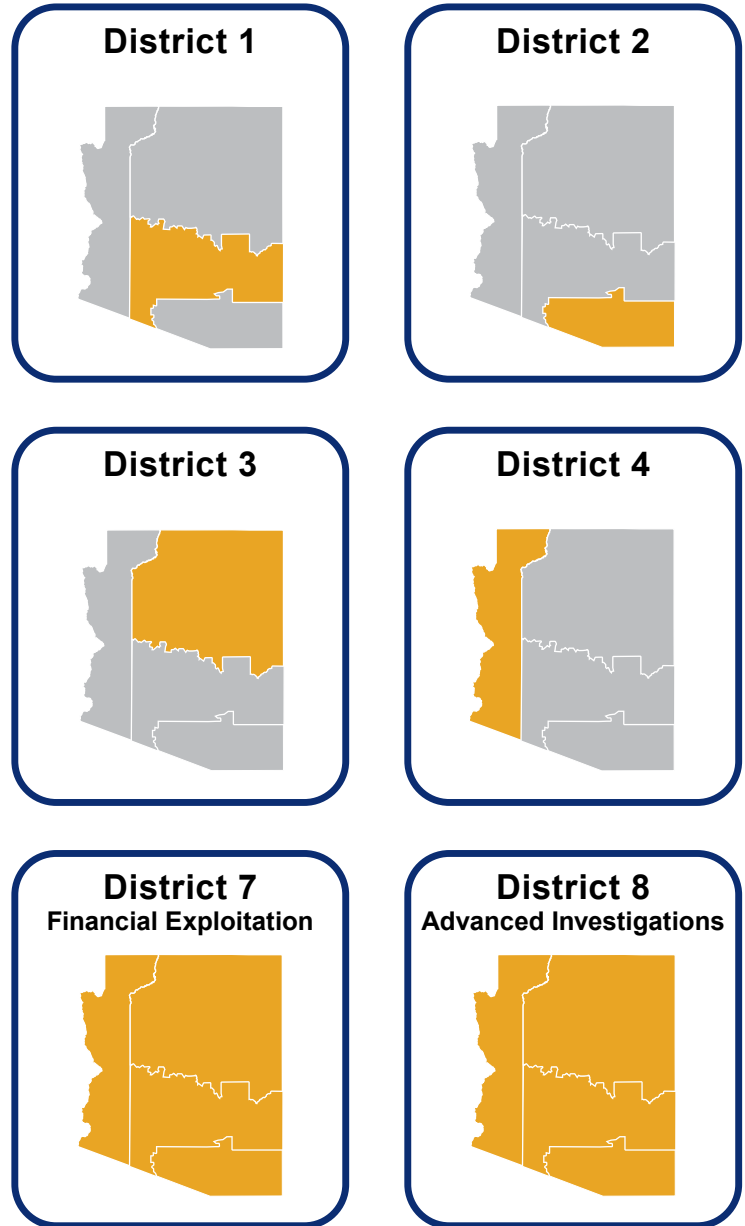
If a report does not meet the criteria for APS investigation but might meet another agency or program’s criteria, the CSR may cross-report the allegation to that agency. For example, a report concerning child abuse would be cross-reported to the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS). A report concerning a possible crime may be cross-reported to law enforcement. The CSR may also provide the reporter with information relevant to the situation, such as identifying community resources or programs that provide rental assistance for someone facing eviction.

In SFY 2024, CIU received more than 69,000 total communications into its call center. Of those communications, 49%, or more than 33,000 calls, became reports of vulnerable adult maltreatment. APS investigated 42,440 allegations of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation.⁶

Investigations

Once CIU determines that a report meets the criteria and assigns a priority, the case is generally routed to APS Investigations based on the location of the alleged victim (see graphic). Some types of cases may be routed to a unit that specializes in a particular type of case or circumstance. Specifically:

- District 7 (Financial Exploitation Unit) handles cases concerning the financial exploitation of a vulnerable adult. If a case includes multiple allegations, the Financial Exploitation Unit may also collaborate with other APS investigators to lend specialized expertise. Financial Exploitation investigators leverage skills in accounting, auditing, bookkeeping, and financial crimes to understand complex schemes and provide appropriate assistance to vulnerable adults. In SFY 2024, District 7 investigated approximately 3,490 cases of financial exploitation.
- District 8 (Advanced Investigations Unit) handles particularly complex or potentially criminal cases that require specialized expertise and collaboration with the Arizona Attorney General’s Office (AGO). These investigators often have seniority within APS and specialized experience in law enforcement.



⁶ The total number of allegations always exceeds the number of reports as many reports have more than one allegation.

Once the APS investigator is assigned to the case, they must conduct multiple tasks relevant to the alleged victim, the allegations, and the alleged perpetrator. These steps may vary based on the specific needs of the case, but generally include:

- Locating and interviewing the alleged victim, alleged perpetrator, other case participants, and possible witnesses.
- Visiting with the alleged victim and conducting assessments to determine the alleged victim's decision-making ability, needs, safety, and risk.
- Emergency interventions such as bringing over a food box, assisting with keeping a utility on, or the involvement of emergency services.
- Collaborating or cross-reporting to other entities that may have jurisdiction, or may be able to partner to help/investigate some element of the case. Sometimes, this includes law enforcement, tribal social services, the federal government, or other state agencies such as the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) or the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS).
- Working with the alleged victim to determine what would improve their circumstances and making a plan to help. Sometimes this plan may include services offered by Area Agencies on Aging or other community agencies. APS may also work with the alleged victim's friends or family to help secure the necessary resources. The resources and services appropriate for a given case depends on a myriad of factors including the alleged victim's preferences, needs, and/or abilities.

A key part of any APS Investigation is requesting and reviewing various records associated with an APS case. These records may be medical, law enforcement, financial, or other records. The APS Records Unit is responsible for requesting these documents to facilitate a high-quality, timely investigation. In SFY 2024, APS requested approximately 18,800 records to complete investigations.

External individuals and organizations may also request case records from APS, which are processed by the same unit. Because APS information is generally confidential by law, the APS records team must carefully review all requests and determine what information can be released. In SFY 2024, APS fulfilled approximately 1,250 requests for case records.

Once the investigator has conducted all relevant steps, they must make a final determination for the case. Final determinations include:⁷

- Substantiated - APS moves to substantiate an allegation of abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation when the victim was vulnerable at the time of the maltreatment and evidence shows the maltreatment occurred. Substantiation of an allegation means that the perpetrator's name is added to the APS Registry. APS cannot substantiate an allegation when it cannot identify an actual perpetrator or the case is a matter of self-neglect.
- Verified - There are some situations in which evidence demonstrates that abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation occurred, but APS cannot substantiate the allegation and place the perpetrator on the APS registry. Specifically:
 - APS cannot identify a perpetrator. In these situations, APS has evidence the allegation occurred, but the individual who committed the act(s) is unknown. This happens

⁷ APS does utilize other final determination types pertaining to situations where APS lacks jurisdiction or the alleged victim is not actually vulnerable.

frequently in financial exploitation/scam cases in which the perpetrator exploited the victim electronically and/or resides internationally.

- The perpetrator is also a vulnerable adult. In some situations, the individual who commits abuse or neglect is a vulnerable adult themselves. For example, you may have two individuals living together, both with cognitive impairments. APS does not substantiate the allegations in these circumstances as there is no value in placing the other vulnerable adult on the APS Registry.
- The allegation is self-neglect. Although APS investigates reports of self-neglect, the purpose of these investigations is to assist the individual who is self-neglecting. For example, APS may receive a report of an individual with a physical or mental disability who is living in a home with no air conditioning during the Arizona summer and is unable to manage their finances and pay their bills. In this situation, APS is able to confirm that the individual is self-neglecting, but there is no value in placing this individual on the registry.
- Unsubstantiated - If an investigator determines that the alleged victim was not vulnerable or evidence does not support the conclusion that the abuse, neglect, or exploitation occurred, APS will not substantiate the allegation(s). As mentioned above, APS cannot substantiate an allegation when it cannot identify an actual perpetrator or the case is a matter of self-neglect.

Upon moving to close a case, the investigator generally makes a final visit to the alleged victim to inform them of the case outcome and confirm that the alleged victim is safe.

Case Review Unit

If the investigator closes the case as verified or unsubstantiated, it is reviewed by the Case Review Unit prior to closure. The Case Review Unit reviews all cases that are not substantiated to ensure that all investigatory steps have been completed appropriately. In SFY 2024, the Case Review Unit reviewed and closed 35,000 cases.

Substantiation and Appeals

If the investigator determines that there is a preponderance of evidence that the allegation(s) occurred and should be substantiated, the case is submitted to the APS Appeals Team for the alleged perpetrator's name to be placed on the APS Registry. This team reviews all elements of the case to confirm that there is sufficient evidence to confirm the abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation and works to provide alleged perpetrators with their due process rights.

Support Areas

Multi-Disciplinary Team

The APS Multi-Disciplinary team provides investigators with a range of supports that help improve investigations and client outcomes. Created in September 2023, the Multi-Disciplinary Team includes:

- A registered nurse who is available to consult with investigators and review vulnerable adult medical evaluations, and
- The APS Care Coordination Team which is responsible for coordinating with community assistance programs to identify and leverage resources for vulnerable adults.

Quality Assurance Unit

The Quality Assurance Unit reviews information for each component of a case, from intake to closure, and has reviewed over 12,000 investigation reports and CIU communications. Each is reviewed to ensure that investigations are of the highest quality in service to vulnerable adults in Arizona. In order to promote consistent decision-making across the State, the Quality Assurance Unit also facilitates a bi-annual scenario review involving APS Professionals throughout the program. These individuals meet to review cases and ensure they all arrive at the same decisions. The Quality Assurance Unit also conducts monthly surveys with alleged victims to capture their voice, improve outcomes, and enhance the investigation process.

Safety Officers

The safety of staff is essential to APS's ability to carry out its mission. CSRs and investigators can only effectively perform their work when they feel safe and equipped to do so. APS Safety Officers are responsible for helping to ensure staff safety by:

- Advising on the creation of policy and special projects to help keep staff safe.
- Accompanying investigators in the field when necessary.
- Consulting on APS cases in which there is a particular safety concern for employees in their contact with an individual involved in the case. For example, if the CIU CSR notes that a caller mentioned weapons in the home or a history of violent behavior, the Safety Officer would be notified and would discuss the situation with the assigned investigator prior to initial contact. Likewise, if an individual involved in a case exhibits aggressive behavior to the investigator, the investigator may contact the Safety Officer for guidance on next steps.
- Researching individuals associated with particular cases to learn if there is a specific safety concern to the investigator.
- Training investigators on safety awareness and how to handle potentially unsafe situations.
- Collaborating with law enforcement partners when their assistance is necessary on a given case.

In SFY 2024, the APS Safety Officer conducted approximately 4,000 safety consultations with investigators.

Training Unit

New APS investigators require extensive training to develop and hone their skills. This is facilitated by the APS Training Unit which provides the *New Investigator Training and Onboarding (NITO)* program. NITO is an eight-week long training program which includes instructor-led content, scenarios, shadowing, and coaching. In SFY 2024, nearly 60 investigators were trained through NITO. The Training Unit also provides CIU CSRs with initial training to prepare them for their roles. In SFY 2024, six CIU CSRs received this training.

The Training Unit also provides investigators with additional ad hoc training, as necessary.

Legislative Initiatives and Enhancements

Enhanced Protections for Vulnerable Adults

Through collaboration with stakeholders and system partners, the Arizona Legislature passed [HB2764](#). Signed by the Governor in April 2024, this new law enhances safety, transparency, and accountability within the system responsible for caring for vulnerable adults. Notable highlights from the bill include:

- Establishes a Vulnerable Adult System Study Committee that includes members from multiple state agencies, local governments, community organizations, professional organizations, and others. This committee is tasked with:
 - Developing and implementing a coordinated delivery system that ensures the health and safety of vulnerable adults.
 - Researching best practices related to APS at the state, municipal, and community levels and making appropriate recommendations on how the vulnerable adult system can ensure vulnerable adults receive required services.
 - Reviewing and recommending changes to the statutes and rules that govern vulnerable adult services.
- Provides that APS has specific access to law enforcement records. In some cases, these records are essential to investigating and substantiating allegations of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- Allows APS to file for an order of protection or an injunction against harassment, as a third party on behalf of a vulnerable adult, to prevent an alleged perpetrator from having access to the vulnerable adult.
- Requires owners of residential care institutions, nursing care institutions and home health agencies to check for prospective and current employees on the APS Registry and prohibits the hiring of employees who appear on the Registry.

Supported Decision-Making Agreements

A.R.S. § 14-5722 became effective on October 30, 2023. The law established “Supported Decision-Making” which allows individuals who desire assistance in making decisions about housing, education, lifestyle, or managing finances and property, to enter into an agreement with a person of their choosing. A supported decision-making agreement is a less restrictive alternative to guardianship; the agreement retains the rights of the vulnerable adult and can be terminated by either party at any time.

APS incorporated these agreements into the various case planning and service options for the vulnerable adult. Mandatory training for all APS staff was completed in October 2023. It presented information describing what the agreements contain, how a supporter in a supported decision-making agreement differs from a power of attorney and a guardian, and how APS may offer that option when working with the vulnerable adult. When a vulnerable adult has a supported decision-making agreement, APS may include the supporter or potential supporter in case planning with the vulnerable adult’s consent. Investigators cannot be supporters, be witnesses to the agreement, or create a supported decision-making agreement.

State Fiscal Year 2024 Highlights and Accomplishments

APS is proud of its numerous SFY 2024 highlights and accomplishments. SFY 2024 has been marked by continued improvement in both investigation quality and timeliness. Additionally, APS has implemented multiple special projects and initiatives that have driven improvements in these areas and strengthened the system of supports for vulnerable adults and the community's understanding of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. These accomplishments have led to real improvements in the lives of vulnerable adults throughout the State.

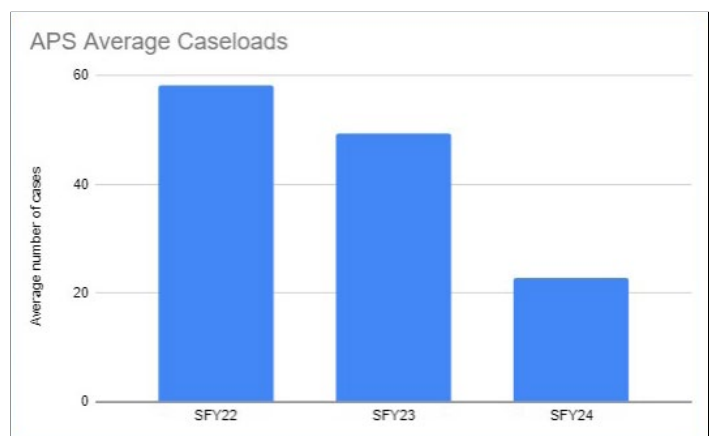
Investigation Quality

The quality of an APS investigation is central to APS's mission of protecting vulnerable adults throughout the state. Because APS work involves both investigative and social work components, the quality of an investigation can impact the degree to which a perpetrator is held accountable as well as the health, safety, and independence of vulnerable adults. APS measures its investigation quality using a variety of metrics.

Investigator Caseload Improvements

To complete a thorough investigation that holds perpetrators accountable while also helping to ensure the well-being of vulnerable adults requires investigators to have reasonable caseloads that afford them time to perform crucial tasks effectively. As reported by the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA), "effective caseload management is essential at every administrative level" and "victims depend on a prompt and effective APS response." NAPSA further explains that when APS investigators carry too many cases, there may be waitlists and reports that "stressed workers may start taking shortcuts by omitting home visits, relying on phone contacts with victims rather than face-to-face interviews, accepting suspicious explanations of how injuries occurred, omitting important information in case records and closing cases prematurely."⁸ These types of practices may increase risk to vulnerable adults. Traditionally, NAPSA has recommended a caseload ratio of 25 cases per investigator. However, more recently, each APS program has been encouraged to develop its own caseload standard based on research and analysis.

Understanding the importance of maintaining a reasonable caseload size, APS has made great strides in reducing the average number of cases each investigator has at one time. In SFY 2022, the average caseload size per investigator was 58. In SFY 2024, the average caseload significantly decreased to 23 cases per investigator (see table). This was through a combination of hiring and retaining more investigators, and through many of the special projects described below.

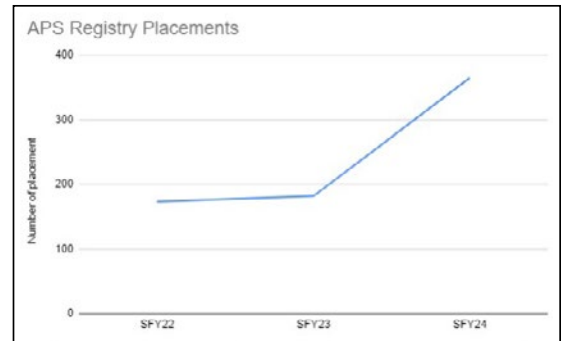


⁸ Otto, Joanne M. (n.d.). *Adult Protective Services Caseload Management* [Online forum post]. [napsa-now.org. https://www.napsa-now.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TA-Brief-Caseload-Management-FINAL.pdf](https://www.napsa-now.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/TA-Brief-Caseload-Management-FINAL.pdf)

In addition to reducing the overall average caseload ratios, APS also implemented a data-focused equalization strategy so that APS offices experiencing particularly higher case volumes can receive assistance from offices with lighter caseloads. In addition, APS uses this data to regularly review ZIP codes assigned to each unit in order to re-evaluate growth trends per geographical area. This process helps to ensure no single office becomes overwhelmed with cases.

Increased Registry Placement Rates

In SFY 2024, APS emphasized improvement in Registry placement rates with the goal of preventing vulnerable adults from being victimized by those who have been found, through an APS investigation and due process, to have abused, neglected, or exploited a vulnerable adult (see chart).



Investigation Timeliness

A timely APS investigation provides vulnerable adults with closure and could prevent alleged perpetrators from reoffending. Additionally, a timely investigation allows investigators to more effectively manage their work. It is generally understood that the more efficiently an investigation can be conducted, the better it is for APS, the vulnerable adult, and the community as a whole.

Response Time

Through reducing caseloads and enhanced training, APS has consistently decreased the amount of time it takes to respond to a report. When APS is outside the responding timeframe, it is often because APS was not provided enough information to readily locate the vulnerable adult, there was a safety concern that required the investigator to discuss the matter with a Safety Officer or law enforcement, or APS is actively collaborating with law enforcement or another entity and is strategizing the best course of action in that specific case.

As discussed above, APS maintains its own response-time standards, between one to five business days, to help ensure that investigators are timely in their initial response. This initial response is critical to the investigation as it is typically when the investigator conducts necessary assessments to determine the vulnerable adult's safety. It is also when the investigator begins to develop a case plan, often in consultation with the vulnerable adult.

From SFY 2022 to SFY 2024, APS consistently increased the percentage of cases in which APS responded within the priority time frames (See chart).

From SFY 2022 to SFY 2024, APS has experienced a nearly 37% decrease in initial response times. In SFY 2024, across priority types, APS responded in a median of 1.5 business days (see chart). While APS considers response time to include the time from report assignment to actual, in-person contact with the adult victim, it is important to note that the Final Federal Rule for APS programs considers a response to include a range of actions taken by the program.

These may include actions like contacting emergency services or law enforcement.



Special Projects and Initiatives

Success through Specialization

Much of the progress described above was achieved through specialization. Beginning in 2022, APS embarked on a transformational organizational change. Understanding the complexity of an APS investigation and the specialized skills necessary to achieve success, APS identified opportunities to enhance the quality and timeliness of its work through the creation of specialized teams. These teams leverage technical expertise and experience to create efficiencies across the APS system. Arizona APS's use of specialized teams has been nationally recognized by federal agencies and national best practice organizations.

Advanced Investigations

The Advanced Investigations Unit was created in spring 2024 to provide investigative services for cases requiring a higher skill set due to their complexity, potential criminality, and/or critical incidents. Specialized advanced investigators work directly with the AGO's Criminal Division to maximize collaboration and transparency efforts, aiming to increase accountability rates of alleged perpetrators.

Arizona APS is the first in the nation to develop a specialized unit for complex cases and may be used as a model by other states that want to adopt a similar framework.

Care Coordination

While APS is most known for its role in investigating cases of abuse, neglect and exploitation perpetrated by another person, self-neglect cases can also be as devastating to the health and well-being of a vulnerable adult. Identifying and referring to necessary resources for self-neglecting vulnerable adults can be especially challenging and time-consuming as available resources vary throughout the state. Long wait times for particular services could delay a vulnerable adult receiving the critical assistance they need to live in safety.

Common Care Coordination Assistance

- Biohazard cleanup
- Housing assistance
- Food assistance
- Pest control
- Utility assistance

Recognizing the challenge this can cause for vulnerable adults and investigators, APS launched the Care Coordination team in August 2023. This dedicated group of APS Professionals is devoted to identifying all of the resources available to vulnerable adults, identifying service gaps, and referring to the appropriate resources and services. To achieve this, the Care Coordination team maintains a centralized dashboard including over 800 resources, across 60+ categories.

Utilizing this approach, if an investigator identifies a vulnerable adult who is self-neglecting and has an unmet need, the investigator is able to refer that vulnerable adult's need to the Care Coordination team. The team then works to provide appropriate referrals to resources and services.

As an example of this approach, an APS investigator visited a vulnerable adult in the winter of 2023 as part of an investigation. The adult had stage 4 cancer and mobility issues. The investigator determined that a wheelchair would be beneficial to the adult's self-sufficiency and mental health, so the investigator referred the case to the Care Coordination team. The team identified an organization that same day that could provide a wheelchair, and the following day, a brand-new wheelchair with a gel seat pad (to conform to the body and prevent skin breakdown) was delivered. With the wheelchair, the vulnerable adult was able to board the bus, retrieve mail, and attend medical appointments.

By the end of SFY 2024, the Care Coordination team assisted a total of 136 clients. To learn more about this team, see [here](#).

DAAS APS Reservation Transportation System (DARTS)

While conducting an investigation, APS investigators must travel throughout the state interviewing alleged victims, perpetrators and other case participants, collecting evidence, and ensuring the provision of services for vulnerable adults. In SFY 2024, Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS) implemented DARTS to maximize the use of limited vehicles and ensure fleet availability, allowing investigators to easily reserve vehicles and report vehicle maintenance needs, damage, or other issues.

Language Resources

The United States Census Bureau reports that a language other than English is spoken in approximately 26% of Arizona households.⁹ APS provides the same protective services to all vulnerable adults, regardless of their spoken language. Providing this service requires APS to partner with organizations that provide written and spoken translation services. In SFY 2024, APS expanded its use of translation partners and developed a streamlined service toolkit for investigators to use when they require interpreters.

Not a Vulnerable Adult Finding

Sometimes, APS receives a report of vulnerable adult maltreatment. However, when APS visits the victim, they find that the adult is actually not vulnerable. This is most often the case in situations where an individual has been the victim of a financial scam and happens to have a physical impairment or be an older adult. The investigation finds that their physical or mental capacity did not impact their ability to protect themselves from the allegations, or that they do not have a physical or mental impairment. Rather, they were scammed in the same manner that anyone could be. Since these individuals are not vulnerable adults, they typically resent APS's involvement in their lives.

In late 2023, APS created a pathway for investigators to expedite the efficient disposition of these cases. If, during the initial phase of an APS investigation, the investigator concludes the individual reported as a victim is not at all vulnerable, the investigator can submit the case for a review by APS leadership. APS Managers from across the state review and discuss the case to determine if it can be closed as "Not a Vulnerable Adult." Understanding the immense significance of halting investigative work, APS only allows the "Not a Vulnerable Adult" finding to be used when there is no relationship between a victim's mental and/or physical impairment and the allegation, the individual understands and has taken steps to correct the situation, and the individual does not wish for an APS investigation to proceed.

Examples of Not a Vulnerable Adult Finding

Mary's neighbor reported that Mary was financially exploited. Mary is 75 with high blood pressure. She recently saw several fraudulent charges on her credit card statement. The APS Investigator visited Mary who explained her frustration with the situation and explained that she has already spoken to her credit card company and had her card cancelled and reissued. She also froze her credit report with all three credit monitoring bureaus.

Jeff's sister reported that Jeff was financially exploited. Jeff is 45 and recently broke his ribs. Jeff attempted to purchase a puppy online for his children. He sent a deposit online but later found out that the posting was a scam. When the investigator visited Jeff, he showed the posting and explained how embarrassed he was to have fallen for such a scam. He said he will take his children to the county animal shelter to select a pet in the next several weeks.

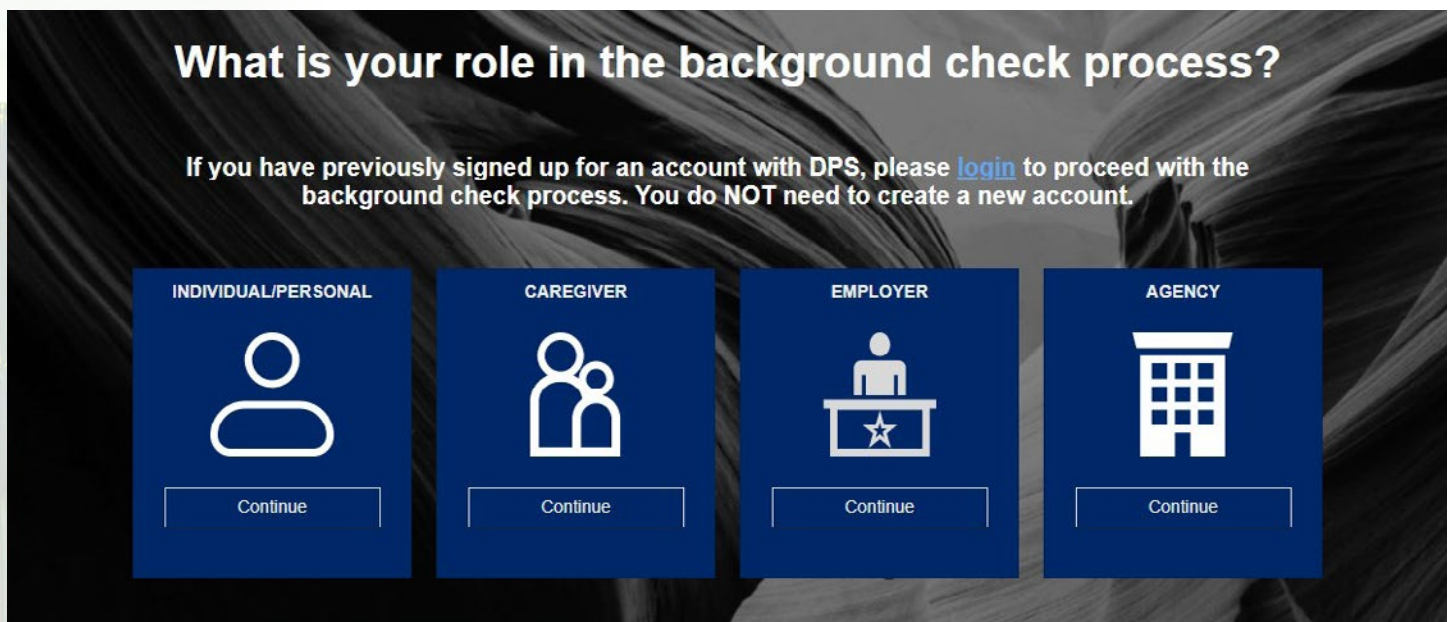
9 U.S. Census Bureau: (2022). *Arizona*. <https://data.census.gov/profile/Arizona?g=040XX00US04>

For non-vulnerable individuals, an APS investigation can be viewed as intrusive and frustrating. By facilitating the speedy closure of these cases, APS minimizes the burden on these Arizonans. Further, APS is able to increase availability to clients who are most in need of protective services.

System Collaboration and Community Outreach

Centralized Background Checks (CBC) Web Portal

In spring 2024, APS, in collaboration with DCS and the Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS), launched the Arizona CBC web portal. The portal allows employers who are hiring for direct service positions working with (or providing care for) children or vulnerable adults to request employee background checks from the DCS Central Registry and the APS Registry, and to view status updates from DPS on Fingerprint Clearance Cards. This project provides a more efficient employee vetting process and increases the safety of these vulnerable populations. For more information, quick setup guides, and video tutorials, see <https://des.az.gov/cbc>.



New Agreement With The Ak-Chin Indian Community

APS regularly partners with Native American communities and tribal governments to provide protective services and leverage resources for the benefit of vulnerable adults residing on tribal land. While APS does not have jurisdiction to investigate or provide protective services within Native American communities, it can do so if it is specifically invited to assist by the tribal government. To this end, APS has historically had agreements with the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. On May 30, 2024, APS and the Ak-Chin Indian Community Council entered into a new agreement, giving APS permission to investigate allegations of abuse, neglect, exploitation, and/or self-neglect that occur on the Community's land to non-Community members who either reside on Community land permanently or temporarily.

Partnering with Taxing Authorities

APS created new processes around partnering with taxing authorities. APS now refers relevant investigations to both the Arizona Department of Revenue and the Internal Revenue Service, which may result in a taxing authority pursuing criminal tax evasion investigations. These taxing authority investigations may take up to two years, but if the suspect is shown to have taken funds/assets from a victim, a court order can be obtained to order restitution to the victim. For example, APS investigated a case in which a victim's daughter held power of attorney and took control of the victim's savings and investments accounts, totaling over \$600,000. The daughter used the funds to remodel her own home in another state. This case was cross-reported to the IRS, Arizona Department of Revenue, and multiple other state authorities. As of July 2024, approximately 20 cases have been referred to taxing authorities.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) Conference

On June 14, 2024, over 200 professionals from across the state who specialize in the fields of aging and caregiving gathered for the Sixth Annual WEAAD Conference. This year's WEAAD Conference focused on how to "Be the One" to see, stop, and prevent elder abuse in all its forms.

APS is a pivotal partner in the planning of the WEAAD conference. The conference held sessions on topics such as recognizing elder abuse in Alzheimer's and Dementia patients, caregiver support, financial and benefit scams, creating sustainable systems of elder care, and the roles of the community health worker in preventing elder abuse. Governor Katie Hobbs provided the conference's opening remarks, and Arizona Attorney General Kris Mayes was a keynote speaker and provided status updates on the Task Force Against Senior Abuse.



Speak Up AZ! Campaign

Through a partnership with the Office of Governor Katie Hobbs, AHCCCS, ADHS, and the AGO, APS launched the Speak Up AZ! campaign. Although the campaign began in SFY 2023, it ran throughout SFY 2024 and continues to build awareness on the prevalence of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable adults. The campaign included several commercials that ran across the state as well as billboards, radio spots, and online advertising. The SpeakUpAZ.org website includes information on identifying the warning signs of abuse, neglect, and exploitation and provides contact information for various helpful resources, including information on the APS hotline.



When shown Speak Up AZ! ads in a post-campaign survey, nearly three-fourths of respondents recalled having seen the ads, with highest recall among males (80%), Hispanics/Latinos (80%), and rural counties (78%). TV, streaming, and social media sites were the most commonly recalled places to have seen an ad.



Since 1979, the Telly Awards have honored excellence in video and television across the globe, with 2024 marking the 45th Telly Award season. Receiving over 13,000 entries globally from six continents and all 50 states, Telly Award winners represent work from some of the most respected advertising agencies, television stations, production companies and publishers from around the world. The Speak Up AZ! campaign won a Gold Telly Award for Social Impact, recognizing the video's effectiveness in addressing important societal issues, as well as a Silver Award for the Health & Safety category, highlighting its contribution to promoting health and safety awareness.

APS 101 & Mandated Reporter Training

Over the past year, the DAAS Community Outreach team has conducted numerous events and training sessions to educate community members, professional groups, and mandated reporters about APS, the signs of abuse, neglect, and exploitation, and the responsibilities of mandated reporters. These training sessions have reached over 1,100 professionals across the state, helping to increase awareness and education of APS in our communities. In SFY 2024, the team gave 75 presentations to over 2,900 individuals.

Improving Safety for Vulnerable Adults

Every APS case is different, requiring a unique investigation and response from APS. However, in each case, APS generally has dual goals of conducting an investigation to hold a perpetrator accountable and providing necessary interventions to help the vulnerable adult achieve safety. Below are examples of cases in which APS's actions achieved tangible outcomes for vulnerable adults and the public safety of Arizonans.

Additions to the APS Registry

When an investigation results in a case being substantiated, the perpetrator's name, date of birth, and offense description are added to the APS Registry. Potential employers use the [APS Registry](#) to avoid the hiring of perpetrators of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of vulnerable adults to positions that care for vulnerable adults. The following examples illustrate the many investigations into abuse, neglect, and exploitation conducted by APS that resulted in Registry placements:

- APS investigated a report of abuse and neglect of an 84-year-old woman with advanced dementia and acute kidney failure when she was found wandering, behaving erratically, and taken to the hospital. Upon investigation, APS learned that the woman's son had been financially exploiting and abusing her by improperly withdrawing money from her bank account and confining her to the home. APS substantiated these allegations and a guardian was appointed to protect the woman's assets and find a memory care facility to meet her needs. The alleged perpetrator was the woman's son, and APS substantiated on allegations of abuse and financial exploitation.
- APS received several reports of neglect and exploitation of resources by an unlicensed group home manager. When the APS investigator arrived at the house, they found that five vulnerable adults, who were unable to care for themselves, were home alone with the perpetrator's minor child. The investigators found that the vulnerable adults had not been provided food or proper hygiene care. APS initiated efforts to coordinate new care facilities for each. APS substantiated on multiple allegations of neglect and one of exploitation of resources.
- APS investigated a report of neglect of a 23-year-old male diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy who required complete assistance. During the investigation, APS found three family members, two of whom were also being paid to care for him, had neglected the victim. As a result of the neglect, the vulnerable adult suffered multiple severe pressure sores, causing significant daily pain and requiring extensive medical treatment. A temporary guardian was appointed. At the close of the investigation, the adult was living in a group home and his health was improving. APS substantiated allegations of abuse and neglect.
- APS received a report of sexual abuse and exploitation of a 42-year-old female vulnerable adult who had autism spectrum disorder, suffered from various physical and cognitive disorders, and required assistance with some daily activities. The vulnerable adult received support from a victim advocate and stayed at a domestic violence shelter until moving in with other family members who were able to become her representative payee. Coordination with law enforcement resulted in the alleged perpetrator's arrest. He pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to prison and is required to register as a sex offender upon release, in addition to being placed on the APS Registry.

Intervention and Assistance

When APS conducts investigations, it also works to improve the circumstances of vulnerable adults and achieve safety goals. The following examples illustrate this important work accomplished in SFY 2024:

- APS received a report of neglect and emotional abuse of a 72-year-old female who was suffering from dementia and was found wandering through her neighborhood and taken to the emergency department. She was ultimately hospitalized when it was determined that she had trouble remembering to chew her food before swallowing, and had a urinary tract infection. The vulnerable adult stayed in the hospital until she was approved by the Arizona Long Term Care System for long-term care. With collaboration from a hospital social worker, a facility was identified, and the vulnerable adult was admitted to a memory care unit.
- APS received a report alleging that a 69-year-old veteran was self-neglecting by “drinking himself to death.” Upon arrival at the home, the investigator found the vulnerable adult required immediate medical intervention. The vulnerable adult told the investigator that he had not eaten in 12 days, was drinking heavily every day and hoped to die. The investigator called a crisis response agency which initiated an involuntary commitment, and the vulnerable adult was transported to a hospital. The investigator provided his spouse information about filing for an emergency guardianship, which was obtained to ensure the vulnerable adult received ongoing care. Although the vulnerable adult continued to struggle with mental health issues, his condition significantly improved, and he was fully participating in mental health treatment. The vulnerable adult expressed that he was grateful to be alive.
- APS received a report of self-neglect of a 69-year-old-male with cognitive and physical vulnerabilities. The investigator responded the same day to the vulnerable adult’s home and found the air conditioning unit had been broken since December 2023. The vulnerable adult declined to temporarily leave his home while the investigator looked for a resource and said he was safe with ceiling fans and had cold water. The investigator made phone contact with an out-of-state relative who agreed to have the air conditioning unit fixed. The investigator followed up to confirm the vulnerable adult’s home was cool and comfortable.

Resources

To report abuse, exploitation, or neglect, the reporter can use the APS Hotline (1-877-SOS-ADULT) or fill out an [online intake form](#). The hotline is staffed Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and Saturdays, Sundays, and state holidays from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Data that illustrates some of APS's work this past year can be found at: <https://des.az.gov/APSDData>

More information can be found on the APS website at: <https://des.az.gov/aps>

Appendix A - APS Investigation Process

