



## **BEWARE THE GRINCH:**

### **American Consumers At Risk Of Being Scammed During The Holidays**

**Key Findings From An AARP Survey Of Washington Adults  
Ages 18 And Older**

**Report Prepared by**

**Karla Pak, Ph.D.**

**Doug Shadel, Ph.D.**

**Jennifer Sauer, M.A.**

**November 2015**

Copyright 2015

AARP Research

601 E Street NW

Washington, DC 20049

[www.aarp.org/research/](http://www.aarp.org/research/)

Reprinting with Permission

<https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00115.008>

# Beware the Grinch:

## American Consumers At Risk Of Being Scammed During The Holidays

---

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2015, AARP conducted a survey of Washington adults ages 18 and older who indicate they intend to shop for gifts and services as part of a holiday celebration during the months of October, November, and December. The survey explored how much they knew about avoiding holiday scams, which behaviors they engage in that might put them at risk and whether they experienced any stressful life events that could make it difficult to resist swindlers in the marketplace. This survey was completed by 807 Washington adults ages 18 and older and has a sampling error of  $\pm 3.5$  percent.

Data from this survey shows that most (67%) Washington holiday shoppers failed a short quiz on how to stay safe from holiday scams, by answering four or fewer of seven questions correctly. In addition, many report engaging in behaviors that put them at risk of falling for various holiday scams such as donating to suspect charities without confirming important details, purchasing gift cards from potentially risky locations, using debit cards that offer less consumer protections, using unsecured public Wi-Fi, or shipping and receiving packages without signatures. And more than two-thirds (67%) of consumers indicate they have had at least one stressful life event occur in the past six months, which makes it more difficult to spot and resist holiday scams.

### 1. Charitable Giving

**The Threat:** Consumers are bombarded with requests to give to charity during the holidays and while most charities are legitimate, there are fundraisers out there that keep most of the money they raise for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

This AARP survey found:

- ✓ Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Washington holiday shoppers who donated to a charity or fundraiser in the past 12 months did so without asking what percentage of their donation went to the fundraiser and the charity itself;
- ✓ Six-in-ten (60%) of those who donated to a charity or fundraiser in the past 12 months did so without verifying that they were legally authorized to raise money in their state;
- ✓ Almost none (4%) of Washington holiday shoppers could name the agency, the Secretary of State in Washington, where they could verify that a fundraiser or charity is legally authorized to raise money in their state and many shoppers name an incorrect source;
- ✓ Nearly half (49%) indicate they do *not* know that professional fundraisers are allowed to keep most of the money they raise for charity as long as they don't lie about how much they keep;
- ✓ Nearly one-third (31%) of all respondents don't know (19%) or are not sure (12%) that in most states, professional fundraisers must be registered with the government and report how much money they raise and how much money goes to the charity.

---

<sup>1</sup> Charity Navigator, 10 Charities Overpaying their For-Profit Fundraisers, <http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=topten.detail&listid=28#.VJiTLerSUM>

## 2. Debit Cards

**The Threat:** Consumer protections for debit cards are weaker than protections for credit cards.<sup>2</sup> With a lost or stolen credit card, the consumer is liable for only up to \$50 of fraudulent use. Typically, in the case of a lost or stolen debit card, the financial losses can be more significant.

This AARP survey found:

- ✓ Most (74%) of adult holiday shoppers in Washington say they will purchase some or all of their holiday gifts using a debit card during this holiday season

## 3. Public Wi-Fi

**The Threat:** Technologically savvy con artists can intercept information that is transmitted using a public Wi-Fi connection. Online security experts warn that consumers should never use public Wi-Fi to access accounts with financial or other sensitive information.

This AARP survey found:

- ✓ Among holiday shoppers who will use public Wi-Fi (53% of internet users), many will use it to log in to sites with sensitive financial information:
  - 44 percent say they will use public Wi-Fi to make a purchase online;
  - 25 percent say they will use public Wi-Fi to log-in to their bank accounts;
  - 16 percent say they will use public Wi-Fi to log in to credit card accounts.
- ✓ Four-in-ten either incorrectly think it is true (24%) or say they are not sure (17%) if it is safe to access websites with sensitive information, such as banking or credit cards, while using a public Wi-Fi network, as long as the website is secured with https.

## 4. Shipping Packages

**The Threat:** Fraud experts report that many thieves troll neighborhoods, especially during the holiday season, looking for packages to steal from front porches.<sup>3</sup>

This AARP survey found:

- ✓ Just a little under one-in-five (17%) of Washington holiday shoppers say they always require a signature when shipping packages to home addresses and more than four-in-ten (41%) say they never require a signature when shipping packages to home addresses
- ✓ Most (77%) holiday shoppers in Washington say that in the last 12 months, either “some” or “all of the time”, packages have been shipped to their house without requiring a signature.
- ✓ Nearly half (45%) holiday shoppers incorrectly answer or say they don’t know that package delivery companies are NOT responsible for losses resulting from packages left at your door that get stolen.

<sup>2</sup> Huffman, M., Six Truths About Credit and Debit Cards, 2015, <http://www.consumeraffairs.com/news/six-truths-about-credit-and-debit-cards-092415.html>

<sup>3</sup> The Travelers Companies Inc., How to Protect Yourself from Package Theft and ID Fraud, <https://www.travelers.com/prepare-prevent/home/identity-theft/holiday-theft.aspx>

## 5. Purchasing Gift Cards

**The Threat:** Fraud experts report that during the holiday season, some thieves hit store gift racks, secretly write down or scan the numbers off the cards, then check online or call the toll-free number to see if someone has activated them.<sup>4</sup> As soon as the card is active, the scammer drains the funds.

This AARP survey found:

- ✓ More than four-in-ten (43%) Washington holiday shoppers do not realize that gift cards purchased from a gift card rack at a grocery store are NOT as safe from hackers or thieves as gift cards purchased from an online retailer.
- ✓ Almost two-thirds (64%) of those who plan to buy gift cards, say they *will* indeed buy them from a rack at a big box store, pharmacy or grocery store this holiday season.

## Stressful Life Events

Research has shown that when individuals have experienced stressful life events, they are more susceptible to scams.<sup>5</sup> More than two-thirds (67%) of holiday shoppers in this survey say they have experienced at least one life stress event in the past six months, with almost four-in-ten (39%) of them indicating they have experienced two or more.

## Avoiding Holiday Scams:<sup>6</sup>

There are many things consumers can do to prevent being a victim of a scam during holiday shopping months:

- ✓ **Ask and check:** Before donating to a charity, make sure they are registered with the Secretary of State and ask how much of the money goes to the charitable fundraiser and how much goes to the charitable purpose.
- ✓ **Surf safely:** Do not use public Wi-Fi to check sensitive financial information, or to make purchases using your credit card.
- ✓ **Sign off:** Require a signature on all package deliveries. You can also write specific instructions for the delivery company on where to leave your package, and don't forget you can always have your package delivered to you at work.
- ✓ **Take credit:** use a credit card instead of your debit card when making holiday purchases
- ✓ **Skip the rack:** Only purchase gift cards from reputable sources. Better yet, get them directly from the store they're from—and preferably directly from the store cashier—and ask them to scan the card to ensure it has the correct balance.
- ✓ **Don't stress:** Pay special attention to your health and wellbeing when making important purchasing decisions. Research shows that people experiencing life stressors such as an illness, loneliness or financial difficulties are less able to spot and avoid scams.

<sup>4</sup> Zimmerman, A., As Shoplifters Use High-Tech Scams, Retail Losses Rise, *The Wall Street Journal*, 2006 <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB116174264881702894>

<sup>5</sup>Shadel, D., Pak, K., Sauer, J., *Caught in the Scammer's Net: Risk Factors that may lead to becoming an internet fraud victim*, AARP Foundation, 2014, <http://www.aarp.org/research/topics/economics/info-2014/internet-fraud-victimization-attitudes-behavior-national.html>

<sup>6</sup> For more ways to protect yourself from scams or fraud, visit AARP's Fraud Watch Network at <http://www.aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/fraud-watch-network/>

## DETAILED SURVEY FINDINGS

The holiday season is an exciting time to celebrate with family and friends. But it can also be a stressful time when distracted consumers pour billions of dollars into the economy. Approximately 19 percent of all retail spending occurs during the busy holiday shopping season.<sup>7</sup> And donors to charity give about twice as much money in December as they do in any other month.<sup>8</sup> With generous Washingtonans opening their wallets during the holiday season, a growing number of scammers lurk in the shadows waiting to get their share of the spending pie.

In October 2015, AARP conducted a survey 807 Washington consumers ages 18 and older who shop for gifts and services as part of a holiday celebration during the months of October, November and December. The survey explored how much respondents knew about avoiding holiday scams, the types of behaviors they engage in that might put them at risk for being scammed, and whether holiday shoppers experienced any stressful life events that could make it difficult to resist swindlers in the marketplace.

### WASHINGTON Holiday Shoppers Fail Scam Quiz

Holiday shoppers were asked seven true or false questions about staying safe from holiday scams. The average score of the 800 respondents was 3.8 correct out of 7 questions. In fact, most (67%) failed the quiz, answering 4 or fewer of the 7 questions correctly.

**Survey Quiz:**  
**Knowledge of Potential Scams and Scam Prevention**  
(n=807 Washington Holiday Shoppers age 18+)

Number of Quiz Questions Correct	# of Respondents	% of Respondents
0	20	2.4%
1	43	5.3%
2	102	12.6%
3	171	21.2%
4	203	25.2%
5	157	19.4%
6	85	10.6%
7	26	3.3%

- ✓ Nearly one-third (31%) Washington holiday shoppers do not know that the following statement is true: *“In most states, professional fundraisers must be registered with the government and report how much they raise and how much goes to a charitable purpose.”*
- ✓ Four-in-ten (41%) do not know that the following statement is false: *“It is safe to access websites with sensitive information, such as banking or credit cards, while using a public Wi-Fi network, as long as the website is secured by https.”* Even if a website is secured by the https, if you are using a public Wi-Fi network, the information transmitted from your computer to the website can be intercepted before it reaches the website and therefore your information can still be compromised.

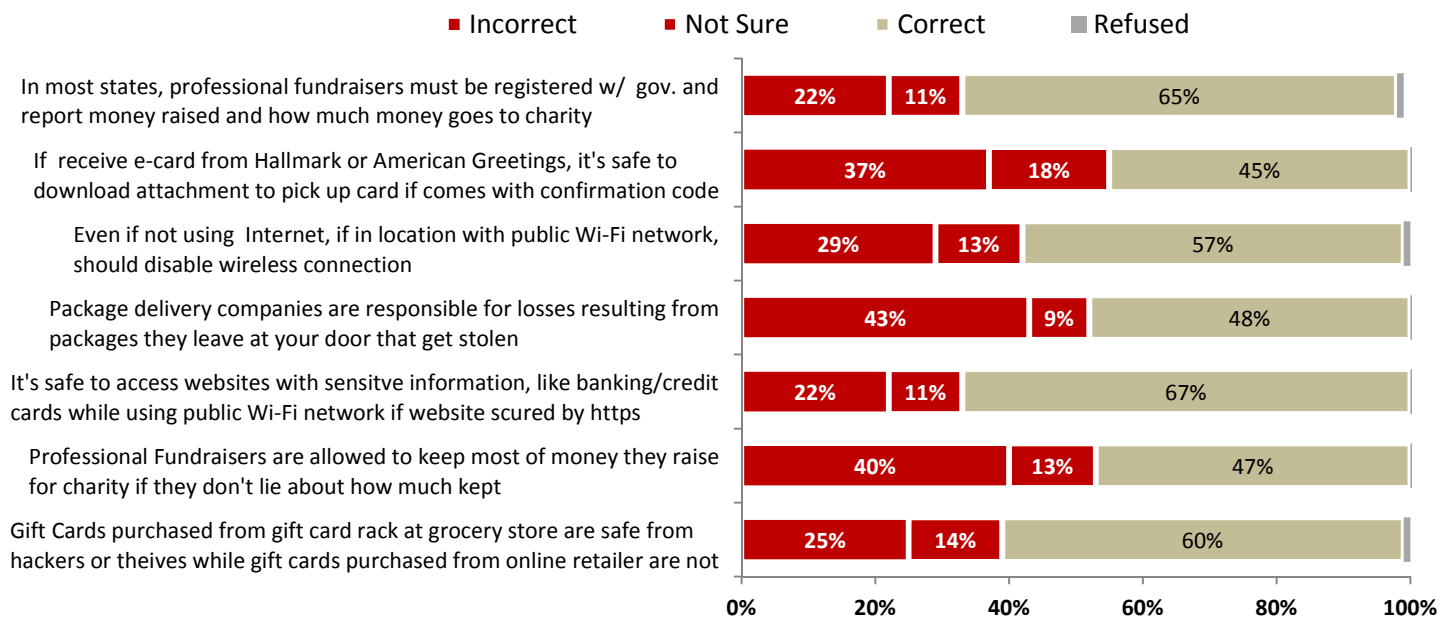
<sup>7</sup> Statistics and Facts on the Christmas Season in the U.S. <http://www.statista.com/topics/991/us-christmas-season/>

<sup>8</sup> MacLaughlin, S., Charitable Giving Report: How Nonprofit Fundraising Performed in 2014, 2015 p. 6. <https://www.blackbaud.com/files/corpmar/cgr/how-nonprofit-fundraising-performed-in-2014.pdf>

- ✓ More than four-in-ten (43%) holiday shoppers do NOT recognize that the following statement is false: *“Gift cards purchased from a gift card rack at a grocery store are safe from hackers or thieves while gift cards purchased from an online retailer are not.”* Some con artists will take the bar code information from gift cards on grocery store racks, and after the gift cards are purchased, they will use the money to treat themselves to a gift, leaving the gift card recipient with an empty gift card.<sup>9</sup> While many individuals can accumulate ‘rewards’-type points from stores as an incentive to buy gift cards off grocery store racks, they should be cautious when doing so.
- ✓ Half (51%) do NOT know that the following statement is true: *“Even if you are not using the Internet, if you’re in a location with a public Wi-Fi network, you should disable your wireless connection.”*
- ✓ Nearly half (49%) do NOT know that the following statement is true: *“Professional fundraisers are allowed to keep most of the money they raise for charity as long as they don’t lie about how much they keep.”* Professional fundraisers are not required by law to give a certain amount of money to the charity in whose name they are raising money.<sup>10</sup> Not understanding this can leave consumers vulnerable to not verifying the percentage given to the charity and possibly giving much of their hard-earned money to a deceptive fundraiser, rather than the charitable cause itself.
- ✓ Nearly half (45%) do NOT understand that the following statement is false: *“Package delivery companies are responsible for losses resulting from packages they leave at your door that get stolen.”*
- ✓ Lastly, more than six-in-ten (62%) Washington holiday shoppers do NOT know that the following statement is false: *“If you receive an e-card from Hallmark or American Greetings, you’ll know it’s safe to download the attachment to pick up your card as long as it comes with a confirmation code.”*

## HOLIDAY SHOPPING AND FRAUD SAFETY QUIZ

(n=807 Washington Holiday Shoppers age 18+)



<sup>9</sup> Scambusters.org, New Gift Card Scams: 8 Tips to Protect Yourself, <http://www.scambusters.org/giftcard.html>

<sup>10</sup> States cannot mandate that a certain percentage of the funds raised go to the organization's charitable activities, because fundraising appeals are protected free speech (Schaumburg v. Citizens for a Better Environment, 444 U.S. 620 [1980], Secretary of State of Md. v. Joseph H. Munson Co., 467 U.S.947 [1984], and Riley v. National Federation of Blind of N.C., Inc., 487 U.S.781 [1988]).

## 5 Holiday Scam Risk Factors

During the holidays, when consumers are spending a lot of money and donating to charitable causes, there are scammers trying to trick or swindle the consumers. This survey explored five areas where consumers should be alert during the holiday season:

- ✓ Donating money to charity or to professional fundraisers.
- ✓ Paying with Debit Cards
- ✓ Using Public Wi-Fi to access accounts with financial information
- ✓ Shipping packages to home addresses and not requiring a signature
- ✓ Purchasing Gift Cards from the rack at a big box store, pharmacy or grocery store

### 1. Charitable Giving

With almost a third of charitable giving occurring during the holiday season (typically October through December) it is not surprising to hear about con artists and dishonest charities taking advantage of generous donors at this time.<sup>11</sup> When asked about charitable solicitations, most (78%) Washington holiday shoppers in this survey say they received at least one request by phone, email or in person to donate to a charity in the 12 months prior to taking this survey. Among those who received a charitable giving request (n=627), the majority (71%) of them indicate they gave to at least one of the charities making a request. And of those who *made* a charitable donation in response to a request (n=444), most (64%) of them gave at least once *without* checking to find out how much money went to the fundraiser and how much went to the charity itself.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, six-in-ten (60%) gave at least once without verifying if the charity or fundraiser was legally authorized to raise funds in their state.

While most charities and fundraisers are legitimate, there are no regulations for how much money a professional fundraiser must pass along to a charity or non-profit.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, there are fundraisers who keep anywhere between 85 to 90 percent of the money they raise for themselves but in the name of charity.<sup>14</sup> When asked how they could verify that a fundraiser or charity is legally authorized to raise money in your state, very few (4%) shoppers were able to identify the government agency they should turn to – the Secretary of State in Washington. Nearly one-third (29%) report they *did not know* and many other respondents gave an incorrect answer.

Consumer experts recommend that people have a charitable giving plan where they determine which charities they will donate to each year and how much money they will donate.<sup>15</sup> This can help them budget charitable giving and allow a refusal script in response to unexpected charitable solicitations. It is suggested that consumers can take any solicitations received and consider them when making their charitable giving plan for the following year. This survey found that over one-quarter (26%) of Washington holiday shoppers say they have a charitable giving plan, with over half of them (55%) saying they stick to their charitable giving plan *completely*. However, that leaves most (83%) holiday shoppers overall indicating they do not have a personal charitable giving plan (72%) or with a plan that they do not follow (11%).

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. MacLaughlin, S. 2014

<sup>12</sup> 646 respondents reported receiving a charitable giving request. 488 respondents indicated that they gave to at least one charity; 488/646=78% of respondents

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Scambusters.org

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Charity Navigator

<sup>15</sup> Federal Trade Commission, Before Giving to a Charity, 2012, <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/pdf-0068-charity-fraud.pdf>

## 2. Debit Cards

When asked about how they will pay for holiday gifts, the most common method listed was cash, with most (72%) Washington holiday shoppers saying they will pay for all or some of their gifts with cash this season. Nearly three-quarters (74%) say they will purchase some or all of their gifts with a debit card, and six-in-ten (59%) say they will use a credit card. Just over one-quarter (29%) of holiday shoppers will use an internet payment service like PayPal or Google Wallet and about one-quarter will use a personal check (24%) to purchase some of their gifts this holiday season.

Because consumer protections for debit cards are weaker than for credit cards, consumer experts recommend limiting use of debit cards and using credit cards instead.<sup>16</sup> With a lost or stolen credit card, the consumer is liable for only up to \$50 of fraudulent use. In the case of a lost or stolen debit card, the financial losses are can be much more significant to the consumer.

### Frequency Of Using Select Payment Methods To Purchase Holiday Gifts

(n=807 Washington Holiday Shoppers age 18+)

Payment Method	All/Some Gifts	None	Not sure/Refused
Cash	72%	27%	1%
Debit Card	74%	27%	<1%
Credit Card	59%	41%	<1%
Internet payment service (e.g. PayPal, Google Wallet)	29%	71%	1%
Personal Check	24%	75%	1%
Smart Phone Payment App	9%	91%	<1%
Wire Transfer	2%	97%	<1%

## 3. Public Wi-Fi

Using public Wi-Fi to access sensitive or personal information can be risky. Technologically savvy consumers can intercept information that is transmitted using a public Wi-Fi connection. This information can be intercepted even if a webpage is secured with https. Online security experts warn that consumers should never use public Wi-Fi to access accounts with financial or other sensitive information.<sup>17</sup>

Over one-quarter (26%) of Washington holiday shoppers who use the internet (n=775) report that they will sometimes or frequently use public Wi-Fi to assist them with shopping over the holiday season, and over one-quarter (27%) say they will rarely use it. Just under half of these Washington holiday shoppers (47%) say they will never use public Wi-Fi this holiday season to assist them with their holiday shopping. Using Public Wi-Fi for certain activities can be relatively safe, however those consumers who are using it to log-in to bank accounts (25%), log into credit cards accounts (16%) or making a purchase online (44%) are all putting their personal information at risk.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Huffman, M. 2015

<sup>17</sup> Shadel, D., Pak, K., Sauer, J., Convenience Versus Security: Challenges of A Wireless World, July 2015 <http://www.aarp.org/research/topics/economics/info-2015/National-Fraud-Survey.html>



Additionally, data from this survey show that over six-in-ten (61%) holiday shoppers say they will access social media networks over public Wi-Fi. While this could be safe, there can also be risks involved especially if they use same login and password for social media accounts as for other accounts with financial information.

### Reasons To Use Public Wi-Fi This Holiday Season

(n=407 Washington Holiday Shoppers age 18+)

Using public Wi-Fi to:	Yes	No	Not sure/Refused
To get a store location	68%	31%	1%
To get product information	72%	26%	2%
To check product availability in a store or on a website	69%	29%	2%
To get discounts, coupons, sale information	55%	42%	3%
To log into bank accounts	25%	74%	2%
To log into credit card accounts	16%	83%	<1%
To access social media networks	61%	37%	2%
To make a purchase online	44%	54%	1%

#### 4. Shipping Packages

Packages left unattended on front porches or other unsecured locations can be stolen all year round. However, especially during the holiday season, thieves are on the look-out for unattended packages.<sup>18</sup> Half (51%) of Washington holiday shoppers say they will mail or ship gifts to friends or family members. Most of them (n=413) are very (91%) or somewhat (8%) likely to ship to a home address, compared to those very (5%) or somewhat (7%) likely to ship to a business address or PO Box (Very likely: 10%; somewhat likely: 9%).

Among those Washington holiday shoppers shipping packages to a home address (n=408), less than one-in-five (17%) say they always require a signature from someone receiving the package, while more than four-in-ten (41%) say they never require a signature. Forty-two percent say they sometimes require a signature for their delivered packages. Additionally, most (77%) of the respondents to this survey say they always (27%) or sometimes (50%) had a package left outside their home without requiring a signature in the past 12 months.

#### 5. Purchasing Gift Cards

Many consumers purchase gift cards during the holiday season. Less than three-in-five (56%) Washington holiday shoppers in this survey say they purchased gift cards last holiday season as presents for friends and family. Nearly half (53%) say they will buy about the same number of gift cards this year as last year, and about one-in-five say they will buy more (8%) or fewer gift cards (11%) this year. Interestingly, one quarter (25%) say they will not buy any gift cards this holiday season.

Among those who say they will purchase gift cards this year (n=579), when asked where they would purchase the gift cards, the most common locations were on a rack at a big box store, pharmacy or grocery store (64%) and at the store of a specific retailer (56%). Significantly fewer holiday shoppers will purchase gift cards on the website of a specific retailer (18%), at the bank (3%) or through online auction or personal sales sites (8%).

Consumer fraud experts report that during the holiday season, some thieves hit store gift racks, secretly write down or scan the numbers off the cards, then check online or call the toll-free number to see if someone has activated them. As soon as the card is active, the scammer drains the funds.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The Travelers Companies Inc., How to Protect Yourself from Package Theft and ID Fraud, <https://www.travelers.com/prepare-prevent/home/identity-theft/holiday-theft.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. Zimmerman, A. 2006

## Other Risk Factors for Becoming a Scam Victim

### Life Stress Events

Other research has shown that when individuals have experienced stressful life events, they are more susceptible to scams.<sup>20</sup> Data from this survey show that in the six months prior to completing this survey, over two-thirds (67%) of Washington holiday shoppers indicate experiencing *at least* one life stress event.<sup>21</sup> More specifically,

- ✓ slightly more than a quarter (28%) indicate having experienced ONE stressful life event;
- ✓ almost one-in-five (18%) experienced TWO life stress events;
- ✓ and over one-in-five (21%) experienced THREE OR MORE stressful life events.

### Life Events Experienced In Past Six Months

(n=807 Washington Holiday Shoppers age 18+)

Life Event	% Experienced Life Event
Worry about debts	26%
Having close friend/relative with serious illness / injury	38%
Feelings of isolation or loneliness	14%
Having a serious illness or injury yourself	14%
Loss of a spouse or close relative	15%
Moving from one residence to another	20%
Loss of a job	7%
Birth of a child	6%
Divorce or separation from a significant other	5%
None of these	32%
Not sure/don't know	1%

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Shadel, D., Pak, K., Sauer, J. 2014

<sup>21</sup> This figure was calculated by determining how many of the listed products or services each individual was interested in overall, and a frequency table for all respondents was run.

## Interest in Common Scam Products & Services

Having an interest in or motivation to purchase particular products or services can also be a risk factor for fraud. This survey shows that over three-quarters (77%) of Washington adults who say they shop for the holidays report interest (Very and Somewhat) in **at least one** product or service commonly used by scammers to steal during the holidays.<sup>22</sup> More specifically,

- ✓ one-third of respondents (34%) report interest in ONE OR TWO products or services;
- ✓ one-quarter (23%) reported interested in three or four; and two-in-ten (20%) reported interest in five or more of the products or services.

**Level of Interest:  
Common Scam Products and Services**  
(n=807 WASHINGTON Holiday Shoppers age 18+)

Product or service	% Very interested	% Somewhat interested	% Not at all interested	% Not sure/ Refused
Making a charitable contribution to write off before the end of the year	16%	25%	58%	1%
Downloading a free app that helps identify holiday discounts	10%	21%	70%	<1%
Finding a good deal on a vacation abroad or cruise	13%	20%	67%	<1%
Starting a new diet that will help you lose weight and gain energy	9%	20%	71%	<1%
Finding a part-time job to earn money for the holidays	7%	9%	84%	1%
Making an investment to shelter income before the end of the year	8%	17%	74%	1%
Taking a new vitamin supplement that will improve your health	7%	20%	72%	1%
Getting a new pet like a puppy or dog or kitten or cat	6%	10%	83%	<1%
Finding a good deal on a vacation property rental	7%	15%	78%	1%
Starting a new romantic relationship	4%	9%	86%	1%
Selling a time share you own	3%	4%	92%	1%

<sup>22</sup> This figure was calculated by determining how many of the listed products or services each individual was interested in overall and a frequency table for all respondents was run

## Study Methodology

Between September 29 and October 14, 2015, AARP engaged Alan Newman Research to conduct a research study among the general population ages 18 and older in the United States and in seven select states: Washington, Arkansas, Maine, Michigan, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Washington. The national and each state survey are identical and explored holiday fraud and scams in the upcoming holiday season. Topics included method of paying for, purchasing, and mailing gifts and gift cards; online access and activity; charitable solicitations and donations; and knowledge related to holiday fraud and scams. Each state survey, report, and full methodology can be found at <http://www.aarp.org/research/topics/economics/>.

For this survey, ANR completed a total of 807 interviews (482 by landline and 325 by cell phone) across the state of Washington. Respondents were screened for being aged 18 or older and shopping for gifts and services as part of a holiday celebration during the months of October, November, or December.

The Washington survey was completed by 807 respondents out of a total of 9,700 records that were dialed. The total sample yields a maximum statistical error of  $\pm 3.5\%$  at the 95% level of confidence. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples of this size, the results obtained in the sample would be within  $\pm 3.5$  percentage points of the results obtained had everyone in the population been interviewed.

Percentages of some questions may exceed 100% due to rounding or the use of multiple response question formats. All data have been weighted by age and sex according to 2013 Census estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS). Statistical tests have been performed to determine whether observed differences in the tables are statistically significant. Since there is no comparable population to weight this survey data back to and because the sample was randomly drawn from the Washington population, all data have been weighted by age and gender according to 2013 Census estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS).<sup>23</sup> The response rate for this study was measured using the American Association of Public Opinion Research's (AAPOR) response rate 3 method, the cooperation rate was measured using AAPOR's cooperation rate 3 method, and the refusal rate was measured using AAPOR's refusal rate 3 method. Production summary is as follows:

<b>Washington</b>	<b>Landline</b>	<b>Cell</b>
<b>NUMBER OF FULL COMPLETES</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>325</b>
<b>TOTAL NUMBERS RELEASED</b>	<b>5600</b>	<b>4100</b>
<b>COOPERATION RATE (COOP3)</b>	<b>51.00%</b>	<b>40.00%</b>
<b>REFUSAL RATE (REF3)</b>	<b>22.60%</b>	<b>26.30%</b>
<b>RESPONSE RATE (RR3)<sup>24</sup></b>	<b>14.40%</b>	<b>13.30%</b>

<sup>23</sup> Washington state adults age 18 and older were randomly sampled and then screened for shopping during the holiday season months of October, November, December. Those who said *no, not sure or refused* to respond, were terminated (see Question 1). The ACS does not include frequency holiday shopping frequency or behavior

<sup>24</sup> This response rate formula (RR3) requires the calculation of 'e' which is the proportion of cases of unknown eligibility that are estimated to actually be eligible. The following formula was used to determine 'e':  $e = \text{Complete} + \text{Terminate Early} + \text{Confirmed Household No Answer, Busy, and Answering Machine} + \text{Callbacks} + \text{Language Barrier} / \text{Complete} + \text{Terminate Early} + \text{Confirmed Household No Answer, Busy, and Answering Machine} + \text{Callbacks} + \text{Language Barrier} + \text{Government/Business} + \text{Non-Working} + \text{Screened Out} + \text{Over Quota}$ .

# **ANNOTATED QUESTIONNAIRE**

**2015 AARP Holiday Scams Survey  
(WASHINGTON GENERAL POPULATION AGE 18+ n=807)**

Note: Data contained in this annotated questionnaire are weighted based on age and gender.

**SCREENING QUESTIONS**

Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_ calling from Alan Newman Research, a national opinion research firm. We are not telemarketers and are not trying to sell you anything. This survey should only take about 15 minutes of your time. Your responses to this survey will be kept entirely confidential.

S1. Our study is interested in the opinions of certain age groups. Could you please tell me your age as of your last birthday? [IN YEARS] \_\_\_\_\_ [RECORD ACTUAL AGE AND USE THE AGE GROUPS BELOW TO KEEP TRACK OF HOW MANY RESPONDENTS WE ARE GETTING IN EACH GROUP]

**AGE**

%	n=807
31	18-34
27	35-49
16	50-59
27	60+
-	Under 18 [TERMINATE]
-	Refused [TERMINATE]

**GENDER – RECORD BY OBSERVATION**

%	n=807
51	Female
50	Male

## Main Questionnaire

### HOLIDAY SHOPPING

1. Do you shop for gifts and services as part of a holiday celebration during the months of October, November or December? **[DO NOT READ RESPONSE ITEMS]**

%	n=807
100	Yes
-	No <b>[TERMINATE]</b>
-	Not sure <b>[TERMINATE]</b>
-	Refused <b>[TERMINATE]</b>

2. Thinking about the upcoming holiday season, would you say you are *very interested*, *somewhat interested*, or *not at all interested* in: **[INTERVIEWER/PROGRAMMER: RANDOMIZE a-m; NO NEED TO READ SCALE EACH ITEM – READ SCALE AGAIN AT d, h, k OR IF NECESSARY/ASKED]**

n=807	% Very interested	% Somewhat interested	% Not at all interested	% Not sure	% Refused
Getting a new pet like a puppy or dog or kitten or cat?	6	10	83	<1	0
Finding a good deal on a vacation abroad or cruise?	13	20	67	<1	0
Finding a part-time job to earn money for the holidays?	7	9	84	1	<1
Starting a new romantic relationship?	4	9	86	1	<1
Finding a good deal on a vacation property rental?	7	15	78	1	0
Selling a time share you own?	3	4	92	1	<1
Making a charitable contribution to write off before the end of the year?	16	25	58	1	<1
Making an investment to shelter income before the end of the year?	8	17	74	1	<1
Downloading a free app that helps identify holiday discounts?	10	21	70	<1	0
Starting a new diet that will help you lose weight and gain energy?	9	20	71	0	<1
Taking a new vitamin supplement that will improve your health?	7	20	72	1	0

3. How often do you use the internet either on a computer or on a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet? Would you say.....

%	n=807
80	Several times a day
8	About once a day
6	A few times a week
2	A few times a month
1	A few times a year
4	Never
<1	Not sure
0	Refused

4. Now, thinking about *the upcoming holiday season*, from October through December 2015, would you say you will purchase *ALL, SOME, OR NONE* of your gifts:

n=807	% All	% Some	% None	% Not sure/ can't remember	% Refused
Online? (base: uses internet; n=775)	3	75	22	1	0
In a store?	13	80	7	<1	0
By calling and placing an order over the phone?	<1	27	72	1	0
Sending an order form through the mail?	0	19	80	1	0

**IF Q3 = NEVER, NOT SURE, REFUSED, GO TO Q7**

**PUBLIC WIFI (ONLY THOSE WHO ACCESS INTERNET)**

5. And how much do you **think you'll** use public Wi-Fi (like at a coffee shop or in a mall or store, or other public place) this year to assist you in your holiday shopping? **[PROGRAMMER: ALTERNATE d, c, b, a / a, b, c, d]** Do you think you'll use it.....

%	n=775
8	Frequently?
18	Sometimes?
27	Rarely?
47	or Never? <b>[SKIP TO Q8]</b>
1	Not sure/don't remember <b>[DO NOT READ] [SKIP TO Q8]</b>
0	Refused <b>[DO NOT READ] [SKIP TO Q8]</b>



6. And do you think you'll use public Wi-Fi this holiday season ..... [RANDOMIZE a-i]

n=407	% Yes	% No	% Not sure	% Refused
To get store locations?	68	31	1	0
To get product information?	72	26	2	0
To check product availability in a store or on a website?	69	29	2	0
To get discounts, coupons, sales information?	55	42	3	0
To log into bank accounts?	25	74	2	0
To log into credit card accounts?	16	83	<1	<1
To access social media networks	61	37	2	0
To make a purchase online?	44	54	1	0

7. Do you think you'll purchase all of your gifts, some of your gifts, or none of them using:  
**[PROGRAMMER: INSERT a-f; KEEP a and b in order; RANDOMIZE c-f; AFTER a and b, READ ....]** and do you think you'll purchase all, some or none of your gifts using [insert c,d,e,f].

n=807	% All	% Some	% None	% Not sure/ can't remember	% Refused
a debit card?	10	64	27	0	<1
a credit card?	7	52	41	<1	<1
Cash?	4	68	27	1	0
an internet payment service like PayPal or google wallet?	0	29	71	1	0
through a wire transfer?	0	2	97	<1	0
a personal check?	0	24	75	1	0
a smart phone payment app?	0	9	91	<1	0

## GIFT CARDS

8. Did you purchase gift cards last holiday season as presents for family and friends?

%	n=807
56	Yes
42	No
1	Not sure
<1	Refused

9. And would you say you plan to *buy more, about the same, or fewer* gift cards ***this year*** as presents for family and friends during the holidays? [ALLOW ONE RESPONSE]

%	n=807
8	Buy more gift cards
53	Buy about the same amount of gift cards
11	Buy fewer gift cards
25	DO NOT plan to buy any gift cards at all this year [VOLUNTEERED] [SKIP TO Q11]
3	Not sure [DO NOT READ] [SKIP TO Q11]
1	Refused [DO NOT READ] [SKIP TO Q11]

10. And where will you purchase your gift cards ***this year***... will you buy them.... [MULTIPLE RESPONSES ALLOWED]

%	n=579
64	On a rack at a big box store, pharmacy or grocery store?
56	At the store of a specific retailer?
18	On the website of a specific retailer? [DO NOT READ IF Q3=NEVER, NOT SURE, REF]
3	At the bank?
8	Online through auction or personal sales sites like ebay or craigslist? [DO NOT READ IF Q3=NEVER, NOT SURE, REF]
5	OTHER – [ALLOW FOR ONE OTHER PLACE NOT MENTIONED in a-e]
4	Not sure/don't remember

## CHARITABLE SOLICITATIONS

Now I'd like to learn a little about your experience with charities.

11. In the past 12 months, or since last September, have you **received a request BY PHONE, EMAIL, OR IN PERSON** to make a donation to: [INSERT a-k, and ASK 'I' LAST EACH TIME]

%	n=807
44	Disabled or Wounded Veterans?
35	Local Police or Sheriff departments?
40	Local Firefighters?
30	Disaster Relief?
12	Missing Children?
42	Breast Cancer?
28	Children's Cancer?
34	Other cancer-related causes or research?
20	Disabled and Handicapped Workers?
31	Church or Faith community?
23	Animal Protection or Welfare?
6	Other (specify)
19	Not received donation requests
3	Not sure/don't remember

**11A. IF YES TO a-I, ASK AND RECORD YES OR NO AFTER a – I, Q11A: ‘And did you make a donation to that cause or organization?’]**

	% Yes	% No	% Not sure	% Refused
Disabled or Wounded Veterans? (n=355)	43	54	3	<1
Local Police or Sheriff departments? (n=281)	27	70	3	1
Local Firefighters? (n=320)	36	61	3	1
Disaster Relief? (n=238)	49	47	4	<1
Missing Children? (n=97)	31	63	6	0
Breast Cancer? (n=339)	46	50	3	1
Children’s Cancer? (n=229)	47	48	5	<1
Other cancer-related causes or research? (n=277)	42	54	4	0
Disabled and Handicapped Workers? (n=162)	39	56	5	0
Church or Faith community? (n=253)	71	26	3	<1
Animal Protection or Welfare? (n=183)	37	59	3	1
Other (specify) (n=50)	66	30	4	0

**[If they did not answer “yes” to at least one charity in Q11A, SKIP to Q14]**

12. Thinking again about those donations you made during the past 12 months, how many of them would you say were made AFTER you asked how much of your donation would go to the fundraiser (that is, the person or organization calling or writing you for the donation) and how much would go to the charity itself? **[DO NOT READ RESPONSE ITEMS]** Would you say....

%	n=444
30	All of them
19	Some of them
45	None of them
6	Not sure/can’t remember [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

13. And about how many of them were made AFTER you verified that the fundraiser or charity requesting funds was legally authorized to raise money in your state? Would you say....

%	n=444
34	All of them
19	Some of them
41	None of them
6	Not sure/can’t remember [DO NOT READ]
1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

14. **[IF Q13=ALL OR SOME, ASK:** Where or to whom have you gone to verify that the fundraiser or charity was legally authorized to raise money in your state?] **[OPEN END - DO NOT READ RESPONSE ITEMS – USE RESPONSE ITEMS BELOW FOR CODING]**

%	n=236
8	Attorney general
6	Police
20	Better Business Bureau
6	Secretary of State's office
1	Consumer Affairs office
3	Governor's office
1	Mayor's office
50	Other – specify:
14	Not sure/don't know
1	Refused

14a. **[IF Q13=NONE, NS, REF OR WAS SKIPPED, ASK:** If you wanted to verify that a charity or fundraiser was legally authorized to raise money in your state, where or to whom would you turn? **[OPEN END - DO NOT READ RESPONSE ITEMS – USE RESPONSE ITEMS BELOW FOR CODING]**

%	n=568
10	Attorney general
5	Police
16	Better Business Bureau
3	Secretary of State's office
4	Consumer Affairs office
2	Governor's office
2	Mayor's office
32	Other – specify:
35	Not sure/don't know
2	Refused

15. Have you ever developed a formal charitable giving plan where you determine which charities you'll donate to and how much money you'll donate to them each year? **[DO NOT READ RESPONSE ITEMS]**

%	n=807
26	Yes
72	No <b>[SKIP TO QUESTION 17]</b>
2	Not sure <b>[SKIP TO QUESTION 17]</b>
1	Refused <b>[SKIP TO QUESTION 17]</b>

16. And, in general, would you say you stick to your personal charitable giving plan completely, somewhat, or not at all?

%	n=206
55	Completely
41	Somewhat
3	Not at all
0	Not sure/can't remember <b>[DO NOT READ]</b>
0	Refused <b>[DO NOT READ]</b>

**PACKAGE DELIVERY**

17. This holiday season, do you plan to mail or ship any gift packages to friends or family members? **[DO NOT READ RESPONSE ITEMS]**

%	n=807
51	Yes
45	No <b>[SKIP TO QUESTION 20]</b>
4	Not sure <b>[SKIP TO QUESTION 20]</b>
<1	Refused <b>[SKIP TO QUESTION 20]</b>

18. And how likely are you ship that package or packages to a [INSERT a-c]? Are you very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not at all likely?

n=413	% Very likely	% Somewhat likely	% Not too likely	% Not at all likely	% Not sure	% Refused
Home address?	91	8	1	1	0	0
Business address?	5	7	12	76	1	0
PO Box?	10	9	11	69	1	0

**[READ Q19 ONLY IF Q18=VERY OR SOMEWHAT OR NOT TOO]**

19. When you ship packages to a home address, would you say you typically request a signature from someone receiving the package *all of the time, some of the time, or never?*

%	n=408
17	All of the time
42	Some of the time
41	Or never
<1	Not sure/can't remember <b>[DO NOT READ]</b>
0	Refused <b>[DO NOT READ]</b>

20. Thinking about the **past 12 months**, would you say packages have been left outside your home, say on a front porch or near the front door, without requiring a signature all of the time, some of the time, or never?

%	n=807
27	All of the time
50	Some of the time
21	Or never
1	Not sure/can't remember <b>[DO NOT READ]</b>
1	Refused <b>[DO NOT READ]</b>

## KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

After I read the following statement, tell me if you think it's true or false, or if you don't know or aren't sure....let's begin: **[PROGRAMMER: RANDOMIZE Q21 – Q27]**

21. Gift cards purchased from a **gift card rack** at a grocery store are safe from hackers or thieves while gift cards purchased from an online retailer are not.

%	n=807
22	True
57	False
21	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

22. Professional fundraisers are allowed to keep most of the money they raise for charity as long as they don't lie about how much they keep.

%	n=807
51	True
32	False
17	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

23. It is safe to access websites with sensitive information, such as banking or credit cards, while using a public Wi-Fi network, as long as the website is secured by https.

%	n=807
24	True
60	False
17	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

24. Package delivery companies are responsible for losses resulting from packages they leave at your door that get stolen.

%	n=807
31	True
55	False
14	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

25. Even if you are not using the Internet, if you're in a location with a public Wi-Fi network, you should disable your wireless connection.

%	n=807
49	True
31	False
20	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

26. If you receive an e-card from Hallmark or American Greetings, you'll know it's safe to download the attachment to pick up your card as long as it comes with a confirmation code.

%	n=807
31	True
38	False
31	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

27. In most states, professional fundraisers must be registered with the government and report how much they raise and how much goes to the charitable purpose.

%	n=807
69	True
19	False
12	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

28. Which of the following things have you experienced in the **past 6 months**: **[RANDOMIZE a-j; MULTIPLE RESPONSES ALLOWED]**

%	n=807
15	Loss of a spouse or close relative
5	Divorce or separation from a significant other
14	Having a serious illness or injury yourself
38	Having a close friend or relative with a serious illness or injury
7	Loss of a job
20	Moving from one residence to another
6	Birth of a child
14	Feelings of isolation or loneliness
26	Worry about debts
32	None of these [DO NOT READ]
1	Not sure/don't remember [DO NOT READ]

## Demographics

The following questions are for classification purposes only and will be kept entirely confidential.

D1. What is your current marital status?

%	n=807
58	Married
7	Not married, living with partner
1	Separated
8	Divorced
4	Widowed
21	Never married
1	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D2. [ASK IF AGE 50+] Are \_\_\_\_\_ currently a member of AARP? [IF D1=A, then \_\_\_\_\_='you or your spouse'; if D1=B, then \_\_\_\_\_='you or your partner'; if D1=C-F, then \_\_\_\_\_='you']

%	n=343
39	Yes
60	No
1	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D3. What is the highest level of education that you completed?

%	n=807
3	0-12th grade (no diploma)
15	High school graduate (or equivalent)
2	Post-high school education (no degree)
18	Some college, no degree
15	2-year college degree
29	4-year college degree
17	Post-graduate study or a graduate degree
1	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D4. Which of the following best describes your current employment status? Are you.....  
[READ EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]

%	n=807
54	Employed or self employed full-time
13	Employed or self-employed part-time
19	Retired and not working at all
12	Currently unemployed or not in labor force for other reasons such as attending classes
1	Don't know [DO NOT READ]
1	Refused [DO NOT READ]



D5. Are you of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino origin or descent?

%	n=807
7	Yes
93	No
0	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
<1	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D6. What is your race?

%	n=807
82	White or Caucasian
4	Black or African American
2	American Indian or Alaska Native
4	Asian
1	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
5	Other
1	Not sure [DO NOT READ]
2	Refused [DO NOT READ]

D6. What is your 5-digit ZIP Code? (Write in your ZIP CODE): \_\_\_\_\_

D7. Please stop me when I reach the category that includes your household's income before taxes in 2014. Was it [INSERT AND READ EACH ANSWER CATEGORY]?

%	n=807
4	Less than \$10,000
5	\$10,000 to less than \$20,000
9	\$20,000 to less than \$30,000
9	\$30,000 to less than \$40,000
9	\$40,000 to less than \$50,000
7	\$50,000 to less than \$60,000
5	\$60,000 to less than \$70,000
7	\$70,000 to less than \$80,000
4	\$80,000 to less than \$90,000
4	\$90,000 to less than \$100,000
7	\$100,000 to less than \$125,000
6	\$125,000 to less than \$150,000
3	\$150,000 to less than \$200,000
3	\$200,000 or more
6	Don't know/Not sure [DO NOT READ]
14	Refused [DO NOT READ]

LL1. Now thinking about your phone usage, do you have a working cell phone?

%	n=420
90	Yes
9	No
1	Don't know/refused

LL2. Does someone else in your household have a working cell phone?

%	n=42
35	Yes
55	No
10	Don't know/refused

CC. Now thinking about your phone usage, do you have a working home phone?

%	n=387
34	Yes
66	No
1	Don't know/refused

PP. Of all the phone calls you and your household receive, are...?

%	n=524
31	All or most received on your cell phone
48	Some calls received on your cell phone and some on your home phone
22	Very few or no calls received on your cell phone
<1	Don't know/refused

**That was our last question for tonight. Thank you very much for taking the time to help us out. Have a great day/night!**

---

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of nearly 38 million, that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities, strengthens communities and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse. We advocate for individuals in the marketplace by selecting products and services of high quality and value to carry the AARP name as well as help our members obtain discounts on a wide range of products, travel, and services. A trusted source for lifestyle tips, news and educational information, AARP produces AARP The Magazine, the world's largest circulation magazine; AARP Bulletin; [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org); AARP TV & Radio; AARP Books; and AARP en Español, a Spanish-language website addressing the interests and needs of Hispanics. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions to political campaigns or candidates. The AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. AARP has staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Learn more at [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org).

State Research brings the right knowledge at the right time to our state and national partners in support of their efforts to improve the lives of people age 50+. State Research consultants provide strategic insights and actionable research to attain measurable state and national outcomes. The views expressed herein are for information, debate, and discussion, and do not necessarily represent official policies of AARP.

AARP staff that contributed to the design and implementation of this study include: Doug Shadel, Karla Pak, and Jason Erskine of the AARP office in Washington state; Jodi Sakol and Kristin Keckeisen of AARP Integrated Communications and Campaigns; Rachelle Cummins, Cheryl Barnes, and Kadeem Thorpe of AARP Research; Willieree Murray of AARP Library. Alan Newman Research fielded, entered, tabulated, and weighted the data and special thanks go to Alan Newman and Amanda Frail at ANR. Jennifer H. Sauer designed the survey and authored this summary. For more information about this survey, the methodology or the call disposition report, please contact Jennifer H. Sauer at [jsauer@aarp.org](mailto:jsauer@aarp.org) or at (202) 434-6207. For more information about types of fraud and fraud prevention and AARP Fraud Watch Network, please visit our website at <http://www.aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/fraud-watch-network/>



**AARP Research**

**For more information about this survey, please contact Jennifer Sauer at:**

**202.434.6207 or e-mail [jsauer@aarp.org](mailto:jsauer@aarp.org)**