Older Adult Protective Services in Allegheny County, 2015 through 2018

July 2020

When an individual 60 years of age and older is suspected to be the victim of abuse or neglect — either at the hands of another or because of an inability to care for themselves — Pennsylvania Older Adult Protective Services (Protective Services) investigates and, if the allegation is substantiated, connects the individual to supportive services. Anyone can anonymously refer an older adult by calling a 24-hour hotline. Calls are received by trained staff members who determine whether the allegation, or report of need (RON), is eligible for investigation if they meet all the following criteria:

- the victim is a resident of Pennsylvania and 60 years of age or older
- there is no responsible caregiver (i.e., someone who is able and willing to provide basic care and protection)
- the individual is unable to perform or obtain services necessary to maintain physical or mental health
- the individual is at imminent risk of danger to person or property

If investigation by a caseworker finds that the allegation is substantiated, Protective Services creates a care plan, which may consist of in-home services, financial management services, a court-ordered intervention and/or guardianship determination.

This report describes the performance of Allegheny County's Protective Services from fiscal year (FY) 2015–16 through FY 2017–18, with a focus on key performance indicators (KPIs) during FY 2017–18. While Protective Services focuses on the needs of adults 60 years of age and older, some allegations are related to younger victims or victims outside of the County. Data about those clients is provided in this report to provide information about call volume and trends in victims' ages.

KEY FINDINGS

- Reports of need for adults of all ages have steadily increased since FY 2015–16 (from 3,858 to 5,708, an increase of 48%), with reports for older adults increasing even more (up 61%). During the same period, the number of investigations decreased (down 18%) as did the number of substantiated cases (down 15%).
- When comparing the average number of reports, investigations and substantiated investigations per 10,000 residents, Allegheny County Protective Services received more reports and completed more investigations than the State as a whole, but substantiated fewer cases.
- Allegheny County performed better than the State in abiding by recommended time frames for investigation initiation (72 hours) and investigation completion (20 days for allegations of abuse and neglect).

BACKGROUND

The Pennsylvania Older Adult Protective Services Act of 1988 aims to safeguard the rights of older adults by protecting them from abuse, neglect, exploitation and abandonment through the provision of protective services. The Older Adults Protective Services Act (OAPSA §10225.310) defines an older adult in need of protective services as "an incapacitated person in the commonwealth over the age of 60 who is unable to obtain or perform services necessary to maintain physical or mental health, for whom there is no responsible caretaker and who is at imminent risk of danger to his or her person or property."

The Pennsylvania Department of Aging (PDA) is responsible for the administration and oversight of statewide protective service programs. Allegheny County's Area Agency on Aging (AAA) is responsible for monitoring and conducting compliance reviews and for providing ongoing technical assistance for the local Protective Services program.

METHODOLOGY

This report uses aggregated data from the Program Monthly Report released by the Pennsylvania Department of Aging. Protective Services program data from FYs 2015–16 and 2016–17 are included for the purpose of comparison as are data from PDA's FY 2017–18 report on State protective services programs.

Although Allegheny County Protective Services' counts differ from those reported by the State for unknown reasons, the counts provided in this report most accurately reflect the activity of the Allegheny County Protective Services Program.

While this report focuses on reports of need taken for older adults residing in Allegheny County, the Protective Services program takes reports for individuals 18 years of age and older, located throughout the State of Pennsylvania. Investigations, however, are only conducted for individuals 60 years and older located within Allegheny County. Reports of need for individuals in the 18–59 age group are referred to a provider for investigation, and reports for individuals located outside of Allegheny County are referred to other AAAs within the state.

Limitations

The State mandates that reports and investigation-related forms tied to unsubstantiated cases be expunged from the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS) database within six months unless related reports are filed, leading to case re-openings. This mandate, paired with the lack of a reporting mechanism supporting the extraction and maintenance of transaction-level data (i.e., data linking reports and investigation-related information to alleged victims and perpetrators), disallowed the extraction of full historical data prior to May 1, 2018. (Since May 1, 2018, transaction-level data has been extracted and maintained separately from SAMS.) Thus, the content presented in this report is limited to the aggregated data available in Program Monthly Reports and in SAMS and does not cover topics such as the demographic- and health-related information of alleged victims, allegation types and report priority determinations.

FINDINGS

Total Reports of Need to the Protective Services Program

Allegheny County Protective Services takes reports of need for both the 18–59 age group and the 60 and older age group for residents of Allegheny County. It also serves as a backup for the State and takes out-of-county reports. Analysis of all reports of need received by Protective Services finds the following:

- **Total reports:** There was a steady and significant increase (48%) in the number of reports made from FY 2015–16 through FY 2017–18.

- **Reports for older adults:** In FY 2017–18, around 70% of the reports that Allegheny County Protective Services received were for older adults (60+).

- **Trends in age over time:** Reports regarding older adults increased more than those for younger ages during the three fiscal years analyzed; reports for older adults increased by 61% (2,557 to 4,129), while reports for other ages went up by 21% (1,301 to 1,579) from FY 2015–16 through FY 2017–18.

- **Reports of need for Allegheny County residents:** In FY 2017–18, 79% of the reports that Allegheny County Protective Services received were for victims in Allegheny County.

- **Trends in County reports over time:** Both in-county and out-of-county reports significantly increased from FY 2015–16 to FY 2017–18, by 49% and 46% respectively.

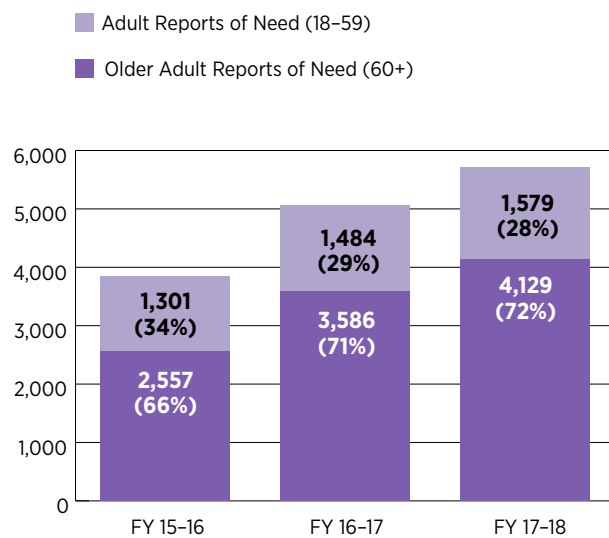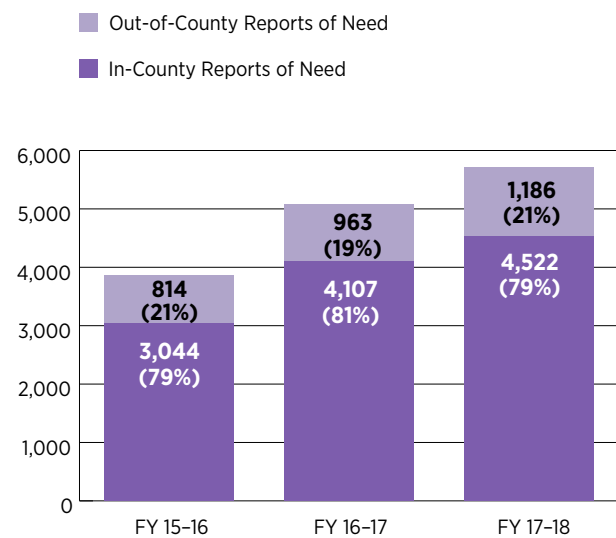**FIGURE 1: Adult and Older Adult Reports of Need, FY 2015–16 through FY 2017–18**

Adult Reports of Need (18–59)
Older Adult Reports of Need (60+)

FIGURE 2: In-County and Out-of-County Reports of Need, FY 2015–16 through FY 2017–18

Out-of-County Reports of Need
In-County Reports of Need

Investigations and Substantiations

Protective Services conducts investigations for all reports of need taken on behalf of individuals 60 years of age and older who were located in Allegheny County at the time the report was taken, unless the report is categorized as "no need for protective services." Analysis of investigations and substantiations finds:

- Thirty-three percent of reports were investigated in FY 2017–18 (N=5,708), compared to 48% in FY 2016–17 and 42% in FY 2015–16.

- Eighteen percent of the investigations were substantiated in FY 2017–18, the same as in FY 2016–17 and fewer than in FY 15–16.

TABLE 1: **Reports of Need, Investigations and Substantiations, FY 2015–16 through FY 2017–18**
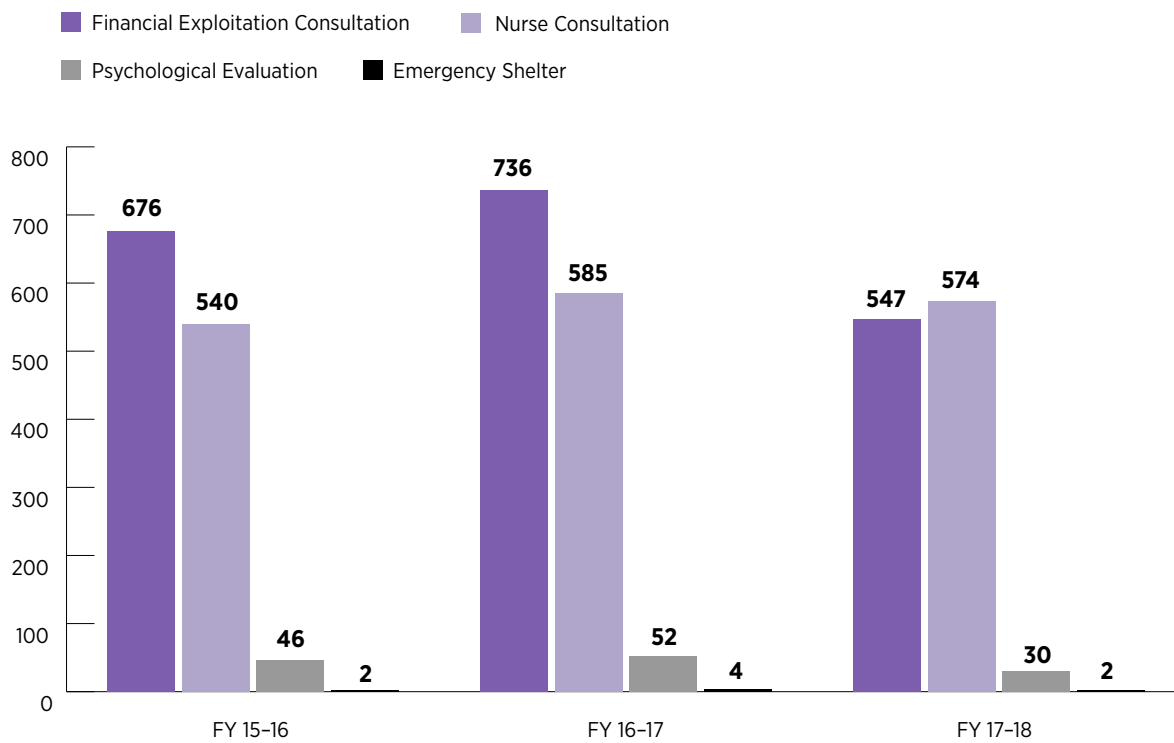
	REPORTS	INVESTIGATIONS	SUBSTANTIATIONS	% REPORTS INVESTIGATED	% INVESTIGATIONS SUBSTANTIATED
FY 2015–16	3,858	1,605	395	42%	25%
FY 2016–17	5,070	2,452	432	48%	18%
FY 2017–18	5,708	1,898	344	33%	18%

Services for Older Adults in Need

Protective Services provides services to certain older adults to ensure their immediate safety. The following services are available:

- **Emergency shelter:** provided to older adults requiring removal from dangerous environments. This is a temporary service and is typically provided for a maximum of 15 days.

- **Financial exploitation consultation:** a voluntary service provided by an employee with financial expertise at the request of older adults or their responsible parties.

- **Nurse consultations and capacity determinations:** provided by staff nurses when investigators have immediate medical concerns for an older adult.

- **Psychological evaluations:** provided when investigators are unable to reach older adults' primary care physicians to secure capacitation-related information and when investigators have concerns related to individuals' cognitive capacity. Evaluations are also conducted for all older adults in need of guardianship services (see below for more information).

Financial exploitation consultation and nurse consultation were the most frequently used services across all three fiscal years, while emergency shelter was rarely used.

FIGURE 3: Services by Number of Units/Sessions,[1] FY 2015–16 through FY 2017–18

In addition to the services described above, Protective Services may appoint a legal guardian if an investigation finds that the individual is not able to care for themselves and does not have a responsible caregiver or power of attorney. Guardianship petitions occur through the court system, and as guardianship is typically the last resort for adults in need, new referral counts are low. Data presented in **Table 2** includes only those guardianship appointments made as a result of a protective services investigation. For the years analyzed, there were seven or eight new referrals to guardianship as a result of a protective services intervention. The data below also provide information on the total number of people who had active guardians, which ranged from 80 to 90 people per year. There were fewer cases in FY 2017–18 than in the two previous fiscal years.

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1   "Units/Sessions" refers to a specific service quantity (or specific service outcome) as determined by programs/providers.

TABLE 2: **Guardianship Services Referrals, Census and Recipients, FY 2015–16 through FY 2017–18**

GUARDIANSHIP SERVICES	FY 15–16	FY 16–17	FY17–18
Guardianship Referrals	7	8	7
Guardianship Census (average monthly for 6-month coverage)	90	86	80
Guardianship Recipients who received guardianship units in SAMS (average monthly)	78	71	64

Comparison of Key Performance Indicators: Allegheny County and Pennsylvania

Each county provides Protective Services to its residents through county AAAs. The State collects and stores data on reports of need, investigations and substantiated investigations for all Pennsylvania counties in its Data Warehouse and uses it to generate a benchmark report every quarter (for the previous quarter). In this section, we compare the data for Allegheny County Protective Services and the State, using the State's benchmark reports.[2]

Number of reports, investigations and substantiations

Compared to the State, the number of reports and investigations in Allegheny County per 10,000 residents was slightly higher, but the rate of substantiations was slightly lower.

- **Reports of need:** Allegheny County received more reports per 10,000 residents than the State. In addition, though the rate of reports per 10,000 residents has been increasing both statewide and in Allegheny County, the rate is increasing faster in Allegheny County. Between FY 2015–16 and FY 2017–18, the rate of reports per 10,000 residents increased by 51% in Allegheny County compared to an increase of 24% statewide.

- **Investigations:** In FY 2015–16 and FY 2016–17, there were more investigations per 10,000 residents in Allegheny County than statewide. In the first three quarters of FY 2017–18, the number of investigations per 10,000 residents in Allegheny County was roughly the same as the number statewide.

- **Substantiations:** Investigations in Allegheny County resulted in about three substantiations for every 10,000 residents while investigations in Pennsylvania resulted in 4–5 substantiations for every 10,000 residents.

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2   As noted above, State counts are inconsistent with Allegheny County Protective Services' counts. The reasons underlying these discrepancies are unknown, however, the Allegheny County counts provided throughout this report most accurately reflect the activity of the program.

TABLE 3: **Reports, Investigations and Substantiations per 10,000 People, Allegheny County and Statewide, FY 2015–16 through FY 2017–18**

	REPORTS			INVESTIGATIONS			SUBSTANTIATIONS		
	FY 2015–16	FY 2016–17	FY 2017–18	FY 2015–16	FY 2016–17	FY 2017–18	FY 2015–16	FY 2016–17	FY 2017–18
Allegheny County	22	29	33	13	17	17	3	3	3
Pennsylvania	20	24	26	12	14	17	4	4	6

Time between referral and investigation

According to Pennsylvania Code, investigations of reports are initiated according to level of urgency:

- Investigations into **emergency** reports are to be initiated immediately following the report referral.

- Investigations into **priority** reports are to be initiated as soon as possible, and the agency shall ensure that reasonable attempts to initiate the investigation are made within 24 hours after the report is received.

- Investigations into **non-priority** reports are to be initiated in a timely manner but never later than 72 hours after the report was received.

The State reports on the percentage of investigations that are out of compliance for investigation time frames (i.e., in excess of 72 hours). The utility of future State reports would be enhanced, however, if the investigations were categorized by report priority level, as emergency and priority reports have different time frames for investigation initiations.
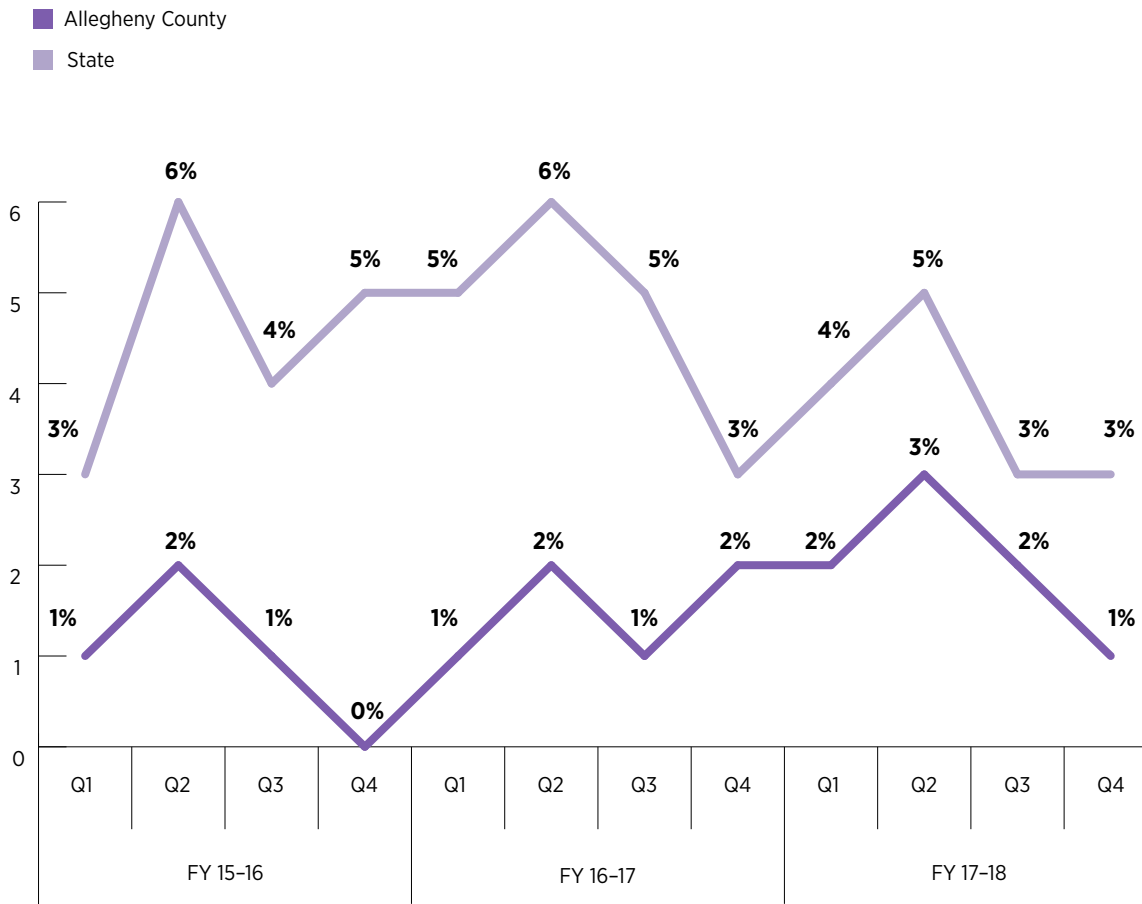
While data on investigations does not differentiate between priority levels, it does allow for analysis on investigation time frames by two types of allegations: (1) Abuse and Neglect[3] and (2) Exploitation and Other.[4]

- For investigations of the first allegation category, Abuse and Neglect, Allegheny County consistently had lower percentages of out-of-compliance investigations than the State's average. For both Allegheny County and the State, the percentage of Abuse and Neglect investigations that began after the 72-hour period stayed stable over the three-year period (1–3% for the Allegheny County and 3–6% for the State).

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3   "Abuse" includes physical injury, sexual harassment or rape, and/or unreasonable confinement. "Neglect" is the failure of oneself or a caretaker to provide goods or services, leading to a threat to physical or mental health.
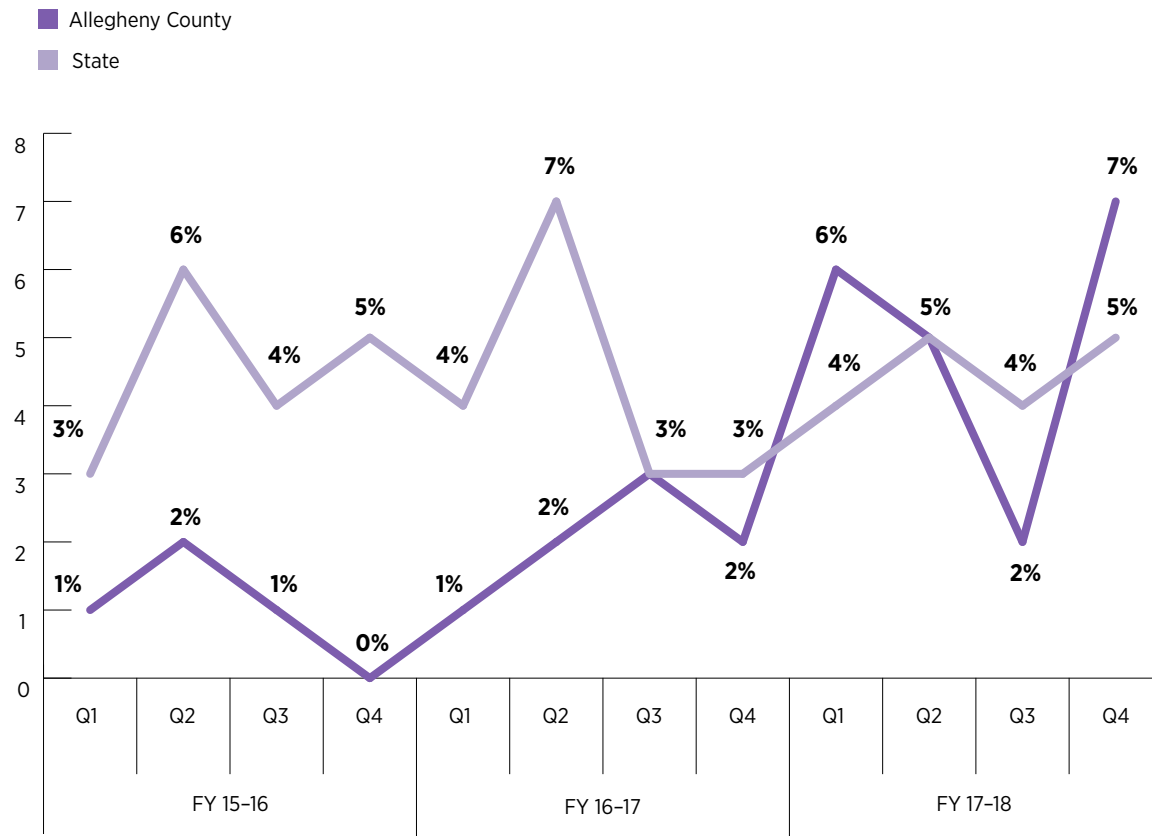
4   "Exploitation" is conduct against an older adult that results in another's gain and an older adult's loss without consent or with consent obtained through coercion or misrepresentation. In most cases, "other" refers to abandonment, which is the desertion of an older adult by a caretaker.

FIGURE 4: **Abuse and Neglect Investigations, Percent Started More Than 72 Hours After Report**

- In the Exploitation and Other category, Allegheny County had a lower percentage of out-of-compliance investigations than the average number of the State (0%–3% of investigations, **Figure 3**) in FY 2015–16 and FY 2016–17. However, in Q1 and Q2 of FY 2017–18, the County had higher percentages than the State. Though the proportion of out-of-compliance investigations was still low throughout the years, this reversed trend in FY 2017–18 should be closely watched and addressed if necessary.

FIGURE 5: Exploitation and Other Investigation, Percent Started More Than 72 Hours after Report

Time to investigation completion

According to Pennsylvania Code, agencies should make all reasonable efforts to complete an investigation as soon as possible, and in cases of Abuse and Neglect, within 20 days of the receipt of the report. An investigation is considered complete when a report has been determined to be substantiated or unsubstantiated and, if substantiated, after necessary steps have been taken to reduce imminent risk. Analysis of completed investigations found:

- Relative to the State, Allegheny County Protective Services completed a higher percentage of investigations within 20 days over the three-year period. This was true for both Abuse and Neglect cases and Exploitation and Other cases.

- In Allegheny County, 3% to 11% of Abuse and Neglect investigations lasted more than 45 days, which was lower than the State's percentage of long investigations in almost all quarters.

- Despite some fluctuations in the investigation completion times for Exploitation and Other cases, Allegheny County Protective Services' proportion of Exploitation and Other investigations that were completed within 20 days was higher than that of the State. Investigations that lasted 45 or more days were also lower than that of the State in all quarters.

TABLE 4: **Investigations Completed Within 20 Days, Allegheny County and Pennsylvania, FY 2015–16 through FY 2017–18**

	QUARTER	ABUSE AND NEGLECT, % COMPLETED WITHIN 20 DAYS		EXPLOITATION AND OTHER, % COMPLETED WITHIN 20 DAYS	
		STATE	ALLEGHENY COUNTY	STATE	ALLEGHENY COUNTY
FY 15–16	Q1	79%	60%	77%	53%
	Q2	71%	50%	79%	54%
	Q3	77%	57%	80%	55%
	Q4	74%	52%	80%	54%
FY 16–17	Q1	67%	58%	79%	58%
	Q2	69%	56%	75%	55%
	Q3	71%	60%	71%	60%
	Q4	71%	55%	52%	46%
FY 17–8	Q1	74%	59%	55%	55%
	Q2	73%	51%	63%	43%
	Q3	76%	57%	68%	50%
	Q4	77%	58%	67%	56%

CONCLUSION

This analysis of reports of need shows an increasing number of reports, especially for older adults in Allegheny County. Compared to the State, the rate of older adults in need in Allegheny County is increasing faster, while non-compliance in investigation and completion times has remained relatively low.

The report also highlights important data limitations. Given the limitations in using the static program reports to keep track of the data, AAA has initiated a project to extract and store data that will enable more up-to-date, interactive and in-depth analyses of the served population (e.g., demographic characteristics, health conditions, involvement with other service programs at DHS), as well as the program's efficiency in responding to the community's needs and in providing timely and quality services.

Please call 412-350-6905 or 1-800-344-4319 (toll-free) if you believe that an older adult has been abandoned or is being abused, neglected (including self-neglect) or exploited. Protective Services investigates every report of elder abuse or neglect, and all cases are kept confidential. Callers may remain anonymous and are not obligated to be involved in any case.