

Preventing Falls Among Older Adults

Falls and fall-related injuries are a major public health problem for older adults.

Falls occur frequently and cause considerable injury and, often, death. Typically, older adults who have fallen receive no counseling about how to prevent falling in the future.

Falls often have multiple adverse effects, including psychological trauma, physical injuries, and loss of independent functioning.

Falls are costly. A national study in 2000 estimated fall-related costs for individuals and society to be \$24.3 billion (in 2010 dollars). As the number of older adults grows, the personal and health system costs of falls are expected to increase considerably.

What needs to be done

The good news is that falls are often preventable.

The United States Preventive Services Task Force in late 2010 reviewed evidence about what works to prevent falls. Its report concludes that fall risk assessment and management, along with exercise focusing on strength and balance, reduces the risk of falls.

We need to increase population awareness of what causes falls and how to prevent them.

And we need to reduce older adults' risk of falling by increasing the availability, use, and appeal of fall risk assessment and management programs, as well as the availability of low-cost, accessible, evidence-based physical activity programs.

What HPRC is doing about preventing falls

HPRC investigators are partnering with other organizations, including social service providers, health care organizations, and local and state government agencies, to conduct research on how to increase dissemination of evidence-based fall prevention services to older adults in Washington State.

We are also conducting research among diverse, low-income older adults on their beliefs about what causes them to fall and what will motivate them to seek help to avoid falling again.

Finally, we are conducting research among organizations that serve older adults, such as health centers, to identify gaps in providers' knowledge about and provision of fall prevention programs.



Did You Know?



Each year, one in three people 65 or older, and one in two people 80 or older, falls.



Adults 65 and older account for almost 65% of hospitalizations for unintentional falls and 85% of unintentional fall-related deaths.



In Washington State in 2007, the number of fall-related deaths of adults 65 and older was almost 50% higher than the deaths caused by motor vehicle crashes for all age groups.



Our vision...

Preventive services for falls are coordinated across community and health care settings and are readily available and used by older adults.

Selected fall-related activities

The Fall Prevention Project, in collaboration with Public Health – Seattle & King County Emergency Medical Services, is evaluating the feasibility and effectiveness of using at-scene emergency medical technicians to link adults who have fallen with a fall risk assessment program in their community.

The Falls Prevention Participation Qualitative Study studied the motivators and barriers to participation in fall prevention programs.

The Economics of Falls Study, conducted with Group Health, used administrative health plan data to calculate the medical costs of minor and serious injurious falls.

HPRC worked with the Washington State Department of Health to prepare a report of DOH survey data on older adults' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding falls and fall prevention.

The Good News About Fall Prevention, a short video about fall prevention, is available via the HPRC Web site. The video has been referenced by the National Council on Aging, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the media, including the *New York Times*.

For more information about our fall prevention activities and publications, see depts.washington.edu/hprc/falls.

HPRC fall prevention partners

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Division, Public Health – Seattle and King County. We work with EMS to test outreach strategies and public health messages about the importance of fall prevention and the availability of fall prevention services.

Healthy Aging Partnership (HAP). HAP is a coalition of community organizations in King County, Washington. HPRC participates in the coalition's efforts to increase awareness among aging services providers about the importance of fall prevention and the role that these community agencies play in connecting older adults to evidence-based fall prevention services.

Washington State Senior Falls Prevention Coalition. The coalition works to reduce falls in Washington State. We participate in the coalition's professional development, public education, advocacy, networking, resource development, and referral.

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Healthier Communities Together

HPRC is a research center at the University of Washington School of Public Health.