

PREVENTING FALLS AMONG OLDER ADULTS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- Among people ages 65 years and older, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths and hospital admissions. In 2001, more than 11,600 people 65 years and older died and 373,000 were hospitalized because of fall-related injuries.
- Hip fractures are the most serious fall-related fracture. Hospital admissions for hip fractures among people over age 65 have steadily increased from 230,000 admissions in 1988 to 321,000 admissions in 2000. The number of hip fractures is projected to exceed 500,000 by 2040.
- Only half of older adults who were living independently before their hip fracture were able to live on their own a year later.
- The direct cost of fall injuries for people age 65 years and older in 1994 was \$20.2 billion. By 2020, the cost of fall injuries is expected to reach \$32.4 billion (before adjusting for inflation).

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC distributed more than 6,000 copies of its *Tool Kit to Prevent Senior Falls*, a comprehensive collection of research findings, materials, and tools, in English and Spanish, to fall prevention programs through its website. In 2001, CDC published *U.S. Fall Prevention Programs for Seniors: Selected Programs Using Home Assessment and Modification*, describing 18 model fall prevention programs. The CDC-funded National Resource Center on Aging and Injury at San Diego State University was established to collect, organize, and disseminate information about preventing unintentional and violence-related injuries. This information will be provided to public health practitioners, senior service providers, and others through an interactive website.

CDC is funding two randomized controlled trials to learn what community-based strategies are effective in preventing falls among adults ages 65 and older. The California State Health Department is studying the effectiveness of the “No More Falls!” program, which integrates fall prevention strategies into existing community-based public health programs for older adults. The Wisconsin Department of Health, in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin, is studying a comprehensive approach to preventing falls among high-risk seniors; this approach will use in-home assessments followed by individualized plans to reduce fall risks.

Example of Program in Action

In October 2000, CDC began funding state health departments (in AK, MA, MN, NC, and VA) to implement and evaluate *Remembering When: A Fire and Fall Prevention Program for Older Adults*, based on a curriculum jointly developed by the National Fire Protection Association and CDC. This innovative program teaches older adults how to prevent both fires and falls. In August 2002, Georgia State University was awarded a cooperative agreement to perform an in-depth evaluation of the effectiveness of this program.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Injuries affecting older adults will increase as the population ages. Identifying effective science-based interventions, translating these interventions into programs, and implementing the programs in community settings nationwide are the next critical steps in fall prevention. The final step is to support local evaluations of programs so that communities can tailor effective programs to suit their specific needs.

For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/program

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