

# FACTS preventing falls among older adults

## THE REALITY

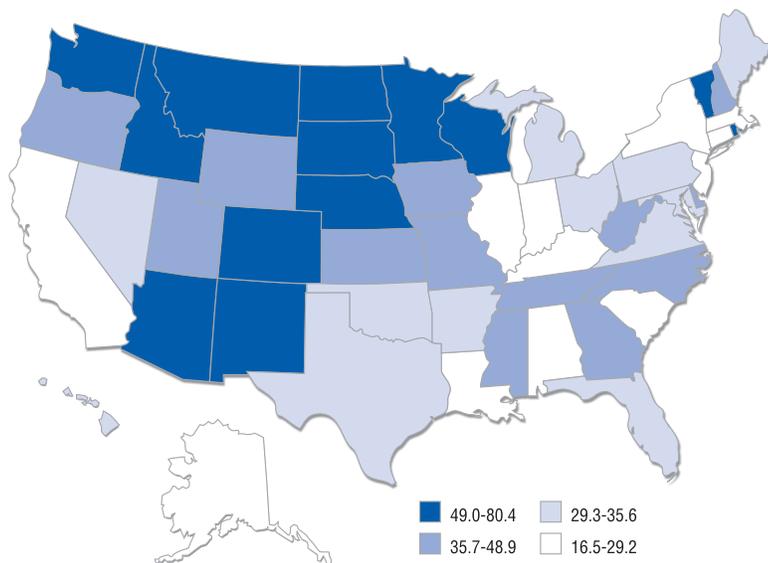
- > Falls are the leading cause of injury deaths among adults age 65 and older.
- > One in three Americans age 65 and older fall each year.
- > Approximately 1.85 million older adults were treated in hospital emergency departments for fall-related injuries, and more than 433,000 of those were subsequently hospitalized.
- > An older adult who falls but is not injured may voluntarily restrict activity due to a fear of falling again, which leads to an increased risk of falling.
- > Older adults are the fastest growing segment of our population. The 65 and over population will increase from 35 million in 2000 to 55 million in 2020 (an increase of over 50%).



## COSTS AND LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

- > Falls result in the greatest total lifetime costs among adults age 65 and older injured in 2000 – more than \$19 billion. Given the growing population of this age group, these costs are expected to reach \$43.8 billion by 2020.
- > A study of people age 72 and older found that the average health care cost of a fall injury per person was \$19,440.
- > Just over one-third of non-fatal injuries from falls were fractures, but they made up 61% of costs – or \$12 billion.
- > Medical costs due to falls for women, who made up 58% of older adults in 2000, were two to three times higher than for men.

### AGE-ADJUSTED UNINTENTIONAL FALL-RELATED INJURY DEATH RATES FOR PERSONS AGES 65 YEARS AND OLDER, UNITED STATES (2000-2004)



Deaths per 100,000 population, by quartiles.  
Data Source: National Vital Statistics System.

### FACT FACT

Death rates from injuries resulting from falls are higher for men. Women are more likely than men to sustain non-fatal injuries from falls, especially fractures. In all probability, this is because osteoporosis is more prevalent among women.



# preventing falls among older adults

# FACTS

## PROGRAMS IN ACTION

Tai Chi is sometimes described as “meditation in motion.” People performing Tai Chi assume a defined series of postures, moving in a slow, graceful manner. Tai Chi programs have been proven to improve balance and decrease falls among older adults.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded a Tai Chi-based falls program in Oregon to translate an evidence-based Tai Chi instruction program into a user-friendly resource package for use with adults 60 years or older who are physically mobile with or without the use of assistive devices.

More than 100 older adults participated in the “Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance” program. Initial evaluation results indicate that the 12-week program improved the physical performance of participants over time. In a post-program survey, 61% of participants reported continued practice of Tai Chi on their own, and 29% continued to pursue Tai Chi instruction.

The final evaluation, anticipated in 2008, is expected to provide insights into the most effective methods for implementing the program and ensuring community acceptance.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Older adults can take several steps to reduce their risk of falling. They can:

- > Exercise regularly; exercise programs like Tai Chi that increase strength and improve balance are especially good.
- > Ask their doctor or pharmacist to review their medicines—both prescription and over-the-counter—to reduce side effects and interactions.
- > Have their vision checked by an eye doctor at least once a year.
- > Improve the lighting in their home.
- > Reduce hazards in their home that can lead to falls (e.g. remove small throw rugs or use double-sided tape to keep rugs from slipping.)



## RESEARCH AND PROMISING PRACTICES

- > The Michigan Department of Community Health conducted a study to evaluate hospital-based fall prevention clinics that offered an intervention that included physical therapy modalities, medication review, and Tai Chi. Study results show that patients in the intervention group had 34% fewer falls than those in the control group.
- > The State of Washington Department of Community Health evaluated the effectiveness of a fall prevention intervention among community-dwelling seniors. Participants received a program that included exercise, education, medication review and modification, referral for medical care management of fall risk factors, and a home assessment and hazard reduction. The model was found to be effective in reducing fall risk factors, including improving strength, balance, and mobility.

## FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Older adults are the fastest growing segment of the population. As the rate of falls increases with age, falling and fear of falling can keep older adults from living strong, independent, productive, and healthy lives. The good news is that falls are preventable. There are opportunities to:

- > Support community-based falls prevention programs that target older adults who are at high risk for falling.
- > Improve understanding of the most effective strategies for reducing health care costs associated with falls.
- > Continue efforts to identify factors that may cause an older adult to fall, or fear falling, and develop programs to address these factors.
- > Increase awareness of the problem among older adults, family members, caregivers, and others involved with older adults.
- > Increase resources available for programs and research that will reduce fall-related injuries and deaths among older adults.



### CONTACT CDC

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC)  
Call: 1.800.CDC-INFO (232-4636) | TTY: 1.888.232.6348

### FOR MORE INFORMATION AND DATA SOURCES

[www.cdc.gov/injury](http://www.cdc.gov/injury)



Developed by the State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association (STIPDA)  
[www.stipda.org](http://www.stipda.org)