Hawaii Falls Facts

- Falls are the leading cause of fatal injuries (44% of the total) and injury-related hospitalizations (83%) among Hawai’i residents age 65 and older.
- Each year, falls result in 82 deaths and nearly 1,800 hospitalizations among Hawai’i older adults. By comparison, there are only about 470 hospitalizations due to motor vehicle occupant injuries for all ages combined.
- Falls are costly. Hospital charges for seniors in Hawai’i average over $65 million a year, with most (92%) being paid by Medicare.
- Falls are a major threat to the independence and quality of life of older adults. Among Hawai’i seniors who are hospitalized for a fall, 43% are discharged to skilled nursing facilities for additional care, and another 12% are moved to a rehabilitation facility.
- For every senior resident who dies from a fall, there are an estimated 22 who require hospitalization for falls, which they ultimately survived, and another 64 who are treated in an emergency department.

Fall Deaths are Only the Tip of the Iceberg

Average annual statistics over the 2006-2010 period for Hawaii residents aged 65 years and older. Hospitalization and ED data include only patients with nonfatal injuries as principal diagnosis. Patients who were transferred at discharge were also excluded to prevent duplicate counting.

The population of Hawai’i is aging. During the past decade, the state's population of people 65 or older increased by nearly 19% (from 163,688 in 2001 to 195,138 in 2010). As the population ages, the impact and cost of fall-related deaths and injuries will increase dramatically unless this serious public health issue is addressed effectively.
Hawaii Responds

Falling is NOT an inevitable result of aging. Through evidence-based interventions, practical lifestyle adjustments, and community partnerships, we can substantially reduce the number of falls. Hawai‘i is taking action to prevent falls through the following initiatives:

- The Injury Prevention and Control Section (IPCS) co-sponsored statewide conferences on fall prevention in Hilo in 2001, and in Honolulu in 2003, 2005 and 2007. Internationally recognized keynote presenters included Katherine Berg and Debra Rose. Conferences will hopefully resume when the economy rebounds.
- Participate in CDC-sponsored communications/message framing development training focused on fall prevention. Messages developed through this training are being tested, and final messages will be used by Consortium members to increase awareness.
- Conduct a series of fall prevention awareness events where hundreds of seniors are screened for balance and fall risk, and coordinate reviews of seniors’ medications by pharmacists at over 60 stores statewide.
- Implement and evaluate a pilot program using Dr. Paul Lam’s Tai Chi for Health Institute’s Tai Chi for Fall Prevention and Arthritis protocols at Pohai Nani Residential Care Home and the Leahi State Hospital long term care facility. Due to successful results, both facilities conduct Tai Chi for Fall Prevention twice weekly programs with their own certified Tai Chi instructors.
- Co-sponsor a series of nine “Take Charge of Your Health” workshops statewide for AARP members and the public that included fall prevention awareness for older adults and their caregivers and Tai Chi for fall prevention instruction.
- Partner with the Regional Trauma Advisory Councils to get designated Trauma Centers in Hawai‘i to sponsor fall prevention and awareness for older adults in both rural and community settings.

Contact Information

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Website: http://hawaii.gov/health/healthy-lifestyles/injury-prevention/prevprojects/fallprev

Sources:

Developed by the National Council on Aging The National Council on Aging is a nonprofit service and advocacy organization with headquarters in Washington, DC. The NCOA is a national voice for older Americans – especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged – and the community organizations that serve them. For more information, please visit www.ncoa.org