Falls Prevention Activities in Senior Centers

Survey Conducted by the National Council on Aging’s (NCOA)
National Institute for Senior Centers and the National Falls Prevention Resource Center

August 2015

PURPOSE
This national survey provided an opportunity for senior centers to share information about current falls prevention programming, past successes, awareness of and participation in Falls Prevention Awareness Day, and how NCOA’s National Falls Prevention Resource Center can better serve the falls prevention needs of senior centers.

RESPONSE
The on-line survey was disseminated to senior centers across the U.S. through NCOA’s National Institute of Senior Centers (NISC) e-newsletters. Approximately 900 senior centers received the survey. A total of 107 senior centers responded to the survey for a response rate of 12 percent. Senior centers from 29 states responded to the survey.

RESULTS

1. Falls Prevention Activities

Senior centers were asked what type(s) of falls prevention activities they conduct. The most commonly reported activities conducted are evidence-based programs such as A Matter of Balance and Tai Chi (89%), blood pressure checks (78%) and education about falls risk factors (77%). Six percent of respondents indicated that they do not conduct falls prevention programming. Responses to this question are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Falls Prevention Activities</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-based fall prevention programs such as &quot;A Matter of Balance&quot; or &quot;Tai Chi&quot;</td>
<td>88.7%</td>
<td>94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blood pressure checks</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education about risk factors</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Fair that incorporates falls prevention information or activities</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falls risk screening</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medication reviews</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foot exams offered by a podiatrist</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance and gait testing</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision exams</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No falls prevention programming is conducted</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. **Most Successful Falls Prevention Programs**

When asked to describe their most successful falls prevention program or activity, senior centers responded evidence-based falls prevention programs, specifically the following:

- A Matter of Balance – 28%
- Tai Chi – 22%
- Stepping On – 7%

Other frequent responses included:

- Fitness programs, including Enhance Fitness (21%)
- Falls prevention education, including expert speakers such as physical therapists (12%)

Senior centers also indicated the following types of activities:

- Risk assessments
- Blood pressure checks
- Home safety assessments
- Foot care
- Health fairs
- Healthy Steps program
- Yoga

3. **Falls Prevention Awareness Day**

The annual Falls Prevention Awareness Day is observed on the first day of fall. NCOA facilitates Falls Prevention Awareness Day in conjunction with state and local falls prevention coalitions across the country. Senior centers were asked if they are aware of Falls Prevention Awareness Day. Seventy-two percent of senior centers responded “Yes” that they are aware of Falls Prevention Awareness Day. Senior centers that responded “Yes” indicated that they hosted or participated in the following activities:

- Falls prevention events and/or workshops
- Expert guest speakers
- Falls risk screenings
- A Matter of Balance classes
- Newsletter articles
- Tai Chi classes
- Collaboration with the state Falls Prevention Coalition
4. **How the National Falls Prevention Resource Center Assist Can with Falls Prevention Awareness, Education and Program Implementation**

Table 2 provides the senior center responses when asked how the National Falls Prevention Resource Center can assist with falls prevention awareness, education and program implementation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How can the National Falls Prevention Resource Center at NCOA assist you with falls prevention awareness, education, and program implementation?</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational materials</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming and activity ideas</td>
<td>76.9%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Webinars</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senior centers offered specific comments and suggestions on how the National Falls Prevention Resource Center can assist with falls prevention awareness, education, and program implementation. These comments/suggestions are summarized below:

- Increase access to funding sources.
- Create a resource listing of grant money to host evidence-based programs and health fairs.
- Provide a roster or database of medical professionals willing to speak and help with awareness events.
- Educational videos that could be used by older adults.
- National level sponsorship of evidence-based programs.
- Raise community awareness through advertising efforts.
- Enhance participation in evidence-based programs.
- Share best practices for falls prevention.
- Provide pedometers or step counting mechanisms.
- Provide resources to train professionals on falls risk assessment and evidence-based fall prevention programs.
- Create promotional materials, such as posters.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RESOURCES**

**What are senior centers doing?**

As the survey results show, senior centers play an important role in falls prevention. Currently, 89% of respondents have implemented an evidence-based fall prevention program such as “A Matter of Balance” or “Tai Chi,” while 79% conduct blood pressure screenings and 77% educate participants about falls risk factors. In addition, many have implemented a comprehensive falls prevention program that includes incorporating falls prevention material and activities at health fairs (53%), holding falls risk screenings (39%), medication reviews (38%), podiatrist foot exams (37%) and vision exams (25%).

**What was most successful?**

When we asked respondents what was their most successful program or activity, 28% sited “A Matter of Balance” (MOB). The Los Alamos Retired & Senior Organization, NM commented that they have offered MOB for 10 years. At Mitzell Senior Center, Palm Springs, CA, one participant reported that the class has taught him “not take chances where there is a possibility of falling.” The class is so popular that the participants requested an on-going follow-up course called “Get Balanced.”

Tai Chi was the next most popular program (22%), although it was unclear if centers were running Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance or a general Tai Chi class. Eustis Senior Center, NE has run the Tai Ji Quan: Moving for Better Balance program for the past five years. They said, “Each fall a Fall Prevention program is held and participants are encouraged to attend the Tai Chi classes.”

Sixteen percent said the fitness programming has been the most successful. Friendship Centers, FL commented that “The most popular activity has been the exercise. Not only are the participants stronger and more confident, they enjoy the social interaction.” This senior center has a very active falls prevention program that consists of regular exercise, specifically designed for building core strength, maintaining balance, gait and awareness. Additionally, home safety is discussed and a checklist is provided. They are encouraged to have medications reviewed regularly by either their physician or a healthcare staff member.

**Falls Prevention is a Community Effort**

Many senior centers mentioned the partnerships that are involved in offering a broad falls prevention program. At the Baltimore County Dept. on Aging, Maryland, in addition to evidence- based programs, they offer 4 to 5 fall prevention screenings (vision, hearing, balance/gait, hydration check, bone density and hand function) in collaboration with community partners, such as hospitals and local universities. These screenings are offered at senior centers and senior housing buildings when requested. The Sandy Senior Center, Utah, collaborates with numerous community partners, including the local fire dept., hospital and rehab centers to provide center participants ongoing education in falls prevention.

At Pocomoke Senior Center MD, they are currently running a six week program to reduce falls (Stepping On). They also hold a medication review twice a year offered by the School of Pharmacy at University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) and Salisbury University (SU). A registered nurse comes to the center once a month and offers blood pressure screenings. Once a year they have a nursing student from SU administers vision screenings along with a presentation on glaucoma and cataracts. In addition, UMES invites center participants to their annual health fair which incorporates falls prevention in their agenda.

**Falls Prevention Day is on September 23, 2015**

Most of the centers were aware of Falls Prevention Awareness Day (72%), which is observed annually on the first day of fall. Their celebration activities have included a Falls Prevention Fair, guest speakers, highlights of falls events in their newsletters, falls risk screenings, Tai Chi demonstrations and beginning an evidence-based program (MOB) that day. Food is also a good incentive, such as presenting
educational material during lunch and Negaunee Senior Center, MI, presents a Falls Prevention program during their Ice Cream Social.

**What Do Senior Centers Need?**

Members told us they were looking for educational material (89%), program ideas (77%), webinars (41%), and training (38%) from NCOA’s National Fall Prevention Resource Center (NFPRC), along with funding sources, videos and promotional material. Below are some resources to help you raise awareness and educate older adults about falls prevention.

**Resources Available**

- **Join the Falls Prevention Awareness Day Webinar on August 13, 2015, 2:00 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. ET** Register
- **Plan for the 8th annual Falls Prevention Awareness Day (FPAD) on the first day of fall, Sept. 23, 2015. The 2015 theme is Take a Stand to Prevent Falls.**

Download the following materials and more at ncoa.org/FPAD:

- **Media Toolkit:** Sample media tip sheets, press releases, media alerts, proclamations, and fact sheets
- **Promotional Materials:** Handouts, flyers, tips, and more
- Use the official social media hashtag for this year’s event: #FPAD15.
- The NCOA-led Falls Free® Initiative offers tools and resources to help you connect with events in your state and plan your own.
- **Falls Free® Photo Contest 2015:** Help us spread the word about Falls Prevention Awareness Day—share your photos by August 17th!

Other resources:

- **Consumer materials**, including the “6 Steps to Prevent a Fall” infographic.
- In September 2015, the NFPRC will release a new video to educate older adults about the six steps they can take to prevent a fall. Stay tuned for more information about this video!
- Information about evidence-based falls prevention programs, such as MOB, Stepping On and Tai Chi
- NCOA’s Center for Healthy Aging monthly e-newsletter includes the latest falls prevention research, programs, trainings, funding sources, etc. Click here to sign up for the e-newsletter.
- New National Falls Prevention Action Plan: The NFPRC just released the 2015 Falls Free® National Action Plan, a blueprint with 40 strategies to reduce falls and fall-related injuries among older adults; one of the major goals is to raise awareness about falls in a variety of settings, including senior centers.