Washington Falls Facts

- Falls are the leading cause of injury death for older Washingtonians, averaging 2 deaths every day.
- Older adults are the population at greatest risk for unintentional falls.
- From 2001-2010, the number of fall-related hospitalizations among adults age 65+ increased 20%.
- Every day in Washington, there are 38 fall-related hospitalizations among older adults; 70% of all injury-related hospitalizations in older adults are due to a fall.
- Most fall hospitalizations result in serious injury; over 80% of older adults that are hospitalized for a fall have a hip fracture, a traumatic brain injury or both.
- In 2010, the average hospital length of stay for persons 65 years of age or older was 5.4 days.
- Falls remain a strong predictor of long-term placement in a nursing home. In 2008, among Washington State older adults who were hospitalized for a fall, about 63% were moved to skilled nursing facilities or to intermediate care facilities for additional care.
- In 1999, Medicare alone paid $68.6 million to treat fractures among Washington’s population age 65 or older; nearly all of these fractures were due to falls.

Fall Deaths are Only the Tip of the Iceberg

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. Washington has one of the most rapidly aging populations in the country. In 2006, there were 726,665 residents age 65 or older, and that number is projected to reach 1.2 million by 2020. After 2015, this population group is expected to show the most rapid growth.
Washington 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. Washington is taking action to prevent falls through the following initiatives:

- In 2011, the Journal of Aging Research printed a research article entitled “Fall Prevention Knowledge, Attitude, and Practices of Community Stakeholders and Older Adults” which is one outcome of the CDC-funded work that took place in Washington State. Research showed that increased awareness and availability of fall prevention services might help engage older adults in fall prevention practices and reduce the adverse effects of falls.
- In 2002, the Washington State Department of Health, the NorthWest Orthopaedic Institute, and the Washington State Department of Social & Health Services took the lead in developing a State Fall Prevention Coalition.
- The purpose of the Washington State Senior Falls Prevention Coalition is to reduce falls among older adults in Washington State through professional development, public education, advocacy, networking, resource development and referral.
- In 2002, the Washington Department of Health started a 4-year CDC grant to implement and evaluate a fall prevention program, which successfully reduced key risk factors for falls. Based on that study, DOH developed the Stay Active & Independent for Life Information Guide for Adults 65+, and an exercise program that emphasizes strength and balance exercises for older adults.
- Through funding from the Washington State Department of Social & Health Services, the coalition has contracted with a physician/expert on falls to develop guidelines for integrating screening and referral for older adult falls into primary care practice.

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The following websites include information on the coalition building efforts in WA:
http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/InjuryandViolencePrevention/OlderAdultFalls.aspx

http://www.adsa.dshs.wa.gov/pubinfo/falls/

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