



### The Challenge

Falls remain the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injury for older Americans, sixty-five and older. Falls threaten seniors' safety and independence and generate enormous economic and personal costs. CDC's Injury Center monitors falls, fall-related injuries, and associated costs, reporting:

- In 2007, more than 18,000 older Americans died from injuries related to unintentional falls.
- In 2008, about 2.1 million nonfatal fall injuries in people 65 and older were treated in emergency departments and over 550,000 of these patients were subsequently hospitalized.
- The total cost of fall injuries for older Americans was \$19 billion in 2000. By 2020, the annual direct and indirect cost of fall injuries is expected to reach \$54.9 billion.

### Fall Facts in New Hampshire

In New Hampshire:

- In 2007, costs for fall related hospitalizations and emergency department visits for older adults was approximately \$70.4 million.
- Although death rates due to falls in older adult males has stayed stable for the last few years, deaths in females has risen significantly between 2003 and 2007, from 34.4 to 85.1 falls per 100,000 females 65 and over.
- Emergency department visit rates are consistently higher for females than males. However, while rates in females have stayed stable, rates in males have rose significantly from 2003 to 2007 from 3508 to 3857 falls per 100,000 males 65 and over.

### The Response

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.

The New Hampshire Falls Risk Reduction Task Force is a member of the [Falls Free™ Coalition](#), a national collaborative effort to educate the public and support and expand evidence-based programs and interventions that help communities, states, federal agencies, non-profits, businesses, and older adults and their families fight back against falls.

### The New Hampshire Falls Risk Reduction Task Force

In 1999, the New Hampshire Falls Risk Reduction Task Force (Task Force) was organized to address the growing concern of older adult (65 plus) falls. With an electronic membership of over 300 professionals statewide, the Task Force is currently made up a variety of disciplines, all working with the older adults, and all sharing a commitment to reducing the risk and numbers of falls among New Hampshire's oldest citizens. The Task Force has been involved in a gamut of multifactorial initiatives such as, but not limited to:

- The facilitation of training for health care professionals on how to do falls risk screenings and assessments within the primary care setting according to national guidelines.

- Annual conferences on the latest in falls research and practice, including sessions specifically for those working in long-term, community based, and acute care. Eighty percent of 2009 conference participants were members of a multidisciplinary falls team at work, up from fifty-seven percent in 2007.
- "You can reduce your risk of falling", a health communications campaign designed to increase older adults self-efficacy with respect to falls. This campaign includes different types of signage including public service announcements.
- "Slips, Trips and Falls, Prevent Them All", a curriculum geared towards the older adult that can be facilitated community wide.
- "Best Practice, Falls Risk Reduction Project" with 20 teams across the state for a two-year learning collaborative. Achievements from this project included staffing changes with high risk patients, increased signage and environmental modifications, falls rates and falls injury rates declining in places that made substantial changes, increased referrals, additional strength and balance exercise programs, and substantial improvement in physical status of exercise program attendees.
- Annual data symposium where various sources of falls data are discussed including home care, nursing home statistics, and emergency systems runs.
- Collaborative data project with E-911 to look at the nature and number of calls related to falls.
- Falls/Fire project with the State Fire Marshal, Concord Regional Visiting Nurse Association, and the Bureau of Emergency Medical Services on the value of joint collaboration in community based prevention. Sessions have been facilitated all across the state.

The New Hampshire Falls Risk Reduction Task Force has been highlighted in the document "Making A Difference" (The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials and the State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors' Association, 2006), "The State of Aging and Health in America, 2007" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Merck Company, 2007), and the "State Coalitions on Fall Prevention: A Compendium of Initiatives. The Task Force's work has been recognized locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally. In 2010, New Hampshire won the national Safe States Alliance "Prevention Program Achievement Award" for the work of the Task Force as a visionary force in the field of statewide falls prevention activities.

### Looking Ahead

New Hampshire continues to pursue the following long-term goals:

- Encourage older adults to adopt healthy behaviors, become more physically active, have their medications reviewed, and make appropriate safety modifications to their homes.
- Encourage health care providers to assess all older patients for fall risk factors.
- Educate and train caregivers and family members in strategies to reduce falls.
- Increase availability of evidence-based fall prevention and physical activity programs in community-based organizations serving older adults.
- Improve mechanisms for health care providers to refer older adults to community-based fall prevention and physical activity programs.
- Empower all individuals to promote fall prevention strategies in their communities.

For more information, visit [www.nhfallstaskforce.org](http://www.nhfallstaskforce.org) or contact Rhonda Siegel at [rsiegel@dhhs.state.nh.us](mailto:rsiegel@dhhs.state.nh.us) or Debra Samaha at [debra.samaha@dartmouth.edu](mailto:debra.samaha@dartmouth.edu)

### **Developed by the National Council on Aging**

The National Council on Aging is a nonprofit service and advocacy organization headquartered in Washington, DC. 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](http://www.ncoa.org).