

### **Inviting Occupational Therapists to join Us In Preventing Older Adult Falls**

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) and National Council on Aging (NCOA) invite you to be part of a growing national movement to reduce falls and fall related injuries and deaths in older adults. Occupational therapy practitioners (i.e., occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants,) play a unique role and contribute to healthy and safe aging for our clients, community members, neighbors and family and friends. AOTA is a member of the National Falls Free© Initiative, joining over 70 national organizations and 38 states all working together to address this growing public health issue. (Visit [www.ncoa.org/fallsfreeinitiative](http://www.ncoa.org/fallsfreeinitiative) and [www.ncoa.org/fallsmap](http://www.ncoa.org/fallsmap)).

### **Facts About Falls**

**Widespread:** At least 30% of older adults (i.e., people aged  $\geq 65$  years) living in the community fall each year, and the likelihood of falling increases rapidly with advancing age.

**Often Fatal:** Falls are the leading cause of both fatal and nonfatal injuries for those 65 and over. Each year, over 20,000 older adults die from falls. 90% of all hip fractures among older adults result from falls.

**Often Lead to Loss of Independence:** Falls and concerns about falls can lead to disability among older adults. Although some concerns about falling are protective and keep a person from engaging in activities with demands that exceed abilities, many people who are afraid of falling enter a debilitating spiral of loss of confidence, restriction of activities, physical frailty, falls, and loss of independence.

**Very Expensive:** \$28.2 billion a year is spent annually on treating older adults for the effects of falls: Fractures are both the most common and most costly type of nonfatal injuries.

- Just over 1/3 of nonfatal injuries are fractures, but they make up 61% of costs—or \$12 billion.
- In a study of people  $\geq 72$  years, the average health care cost of a fall injury totaled \$19,440.

**Prevention Works and Is Cost Effective:** Evidence-based fall prevention programs offer promising directions for simple, cost-effective interventions by addressing known risk factors, promoting behavior change, and leveraging community networks to link older adults seen in medical settings to effective programs available in the community. Likewise, occupational therapy practitioners' commitment to fall prevention increasingly involves linking older adults to community-based programs designed to reduce fall risk. These programs include *Stepping On* (authored by an occupational therapist), *Matter of Balance* (co-authored by an occupational therapist), as well as the *Otago Exercise Program* and *Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance*.

Did you know that occupational therapists are being trained to offer or participate in community programs? Contact [lisa.m.shields@state.or.us](mailto:lisa.m.shields@state.or.us) for information about *Stepping On* trainings and [zundel@ohsu.edu](mailto:zundel@ohsu.edu) for information regarding *Matter of Balance* trainings. Numerous additional resources are available to support occupational therapists in their efforts to help older adults make good activity choices to avoid falls and create home environments that support their safety and functioning. AOTA is working hard to bring fall prevention resources to its members including on-line continuing education opportunities, podcasts and articles in *OT Practice* and *AJOT*. These are available on [www.AOTA.org](http://www.AOTA.org); additional opportunities will be offered in AOTA annual conferences. In addition to championing the role of occupational therapy practitioners in fall prevention, AOTA is also working to promote reimbursement for services in all venues.

The Oregon Senior Falls Prevention Program is working with national partners to bring greater awareness and resources to this growing public health issue in our own state. Join this important collaborative effort by contacting Lisa Shields at [lisa.m.shields@state.or.us](mailto:lisa.m.shields@state.or.us) today!

## Key contributions to the solution

1. CDC's [National Center for Injury Prevention and Control](#) is addressing falls through a 5 year plan to:
  - Create tools to support the implementation of effective fall prevention programs.
  - Increase the number of states that utilize a comprehensive approach to preventing older adult falls.
  - Strengthen the capacity of state health departments, health care providers, and community-based organizations to implement and sustain older adult fall prevention programs.
  - Increase the proportion of health care providers that incorporate fall prevention into clinical practice.
2. The [National Falls Free<sup>®</sup> Initiative](#) and its many partners are working to bring greater awareness to the issue of falls and fall related-injuries and deaths, education and training to health care providers and greater investment in effective community-based solutions. Key to the initiative is the [State Coalitions on Fall Prevention Workgroup](#) wherein 40 states are working collaboratively to affect greater awareness, education and training, and effective integrated community interventions. Led in collaboration with state departments of public health and aging; joined in partnership by community leaders, health care providers, educators, family members and caregivers these dedicated champions of older adults are making a difference.
3. The U.S. Surgeon General and the National Prevention, Health Promotion, and Public Health Council (National Prevention Council) developed the nation's first ever [National Prevention and Health Promotion Strategy](#) (National Prevention Strategy) as a critical component of the Affordable Care Act. Fall Prevention plays a prominent role. The National Prevention Council comprises 17 heads of departments, agencies, and offices across the Federal government who are committed to promoting prevention and wellness.
4. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) developed the nation's first strategic framework for improving the health status of individuals with multiple chronic conditions. The [Multiple Chronic Conditions: A Strategic Framework](#) serves to catalyze change within the context of how chronic illnesses are addressed in the United States—from an approach focused on individual chronic diseases to one that uses a multiple chronic conditions approach. Sufficient evidence now exists to demonstrate increased falls risk among those with chronic health conditions.