

Alaska Commission on Aging

Senior Fall Prevention Implementation

DHSS Division of Public Health

Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion Component

Problem Statement: Falls are the number one source of non-fatal hospitalized injuries for Alaskans age 65 and older, making falls a serious public health problem impacting older Alaskans. Each year, one in three Alaskans age 65 years and older experience a fall, with twenty to thirty percent of those incidents resulting in severe injuries such as hip fractures, head traumas and lacerations. As the State's senior population grows, so will the number of older Alaskans at risk for falls.

Between 2005 and 2009 hospitals reported treating 3,356 cases of non-fatal falls for Alaskans age 65 and older, representing a 24% increase in such hospitalizations compared to the preceding 5-year time period (from 2000-2004, 2,698 cases were reported). During that timeframe, there were 61 fatal falls among those age 65 and older (Alaska Trauma Registry 2010). For older adults over the age of 75, falls are the leading cause of death. Falling is the source of 60% of at-home injuries among older Alaskans (DHSS 2011).

Falls are expensive. The average fall-related hospitalization cost per Alaskan patient is \$27,000 and totaled \$96 million statewide from 2005 to 2009 (DHSS 2012). More than half of these patients require some nursing home care and with nursing home costs in Alaska running at \$247,760 per year (\$687 daily), even a brief stay in a nursing home can be very costly (MetLife Mature Market Institute 2011). Most importantly, the emotional trauma for an elderly person who experiences a serious fall is significant and may lead to loss of independence, depression and a reduced quality of life.

Factors that contribute to the risk for falling include pre-existing medical conditions (Alzheimer's disease and related dementia, arthritis and other pain syndromes, poor circulation, osteoporosis, diabetes, depression and neurological conditions); inaccessible living conditions (due to indoor clutter and lack of grab bars and railings); residence in nursing homes or assisted living facilities; complications with medication management; physical changes due to aging (loss of muscular strength, vision and hearing impairments, and brittle bones); physiological changes affecting how multiple medications are metabolized; and suspected alcohol use.

Proposal: The Alaska Senior Fall Prevention Coalition has initiated a public awareness campaign to raise awareness about senior falls and ways to prevent them. The proposed project seeks to expand this effort to significantly reduce the rate of fall-related injuries and deaths for older Alaskans by implementing multi-faceted intervention using evidence-based strategies to address risk factors related to senior falls in a three-year pilot project. This project will involve a strong collaborative effort with the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services, the Division of Public Health Chronic Disease Prevention program, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and ACoA to implement the following evidence-based strategies:

Alaska Commission on Aging
P.O. Box 110693 Juneau, Alaska 99811-0693
Phone: 907-465-3250 / Fax: 907-465-1398

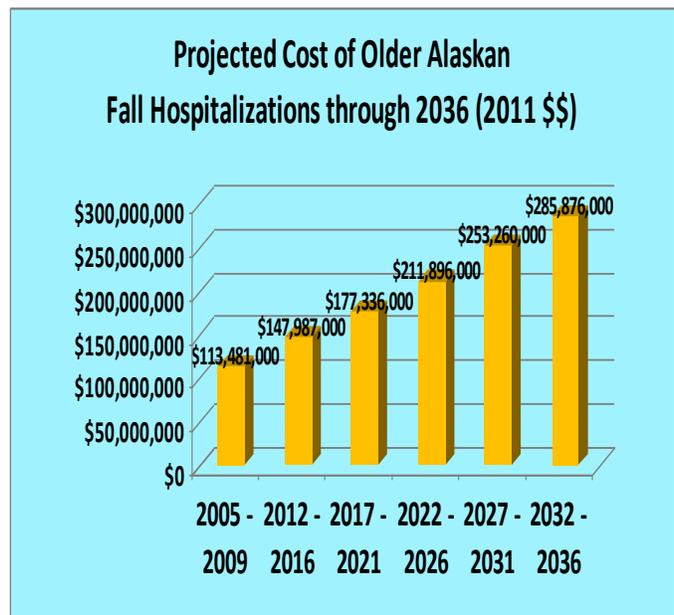
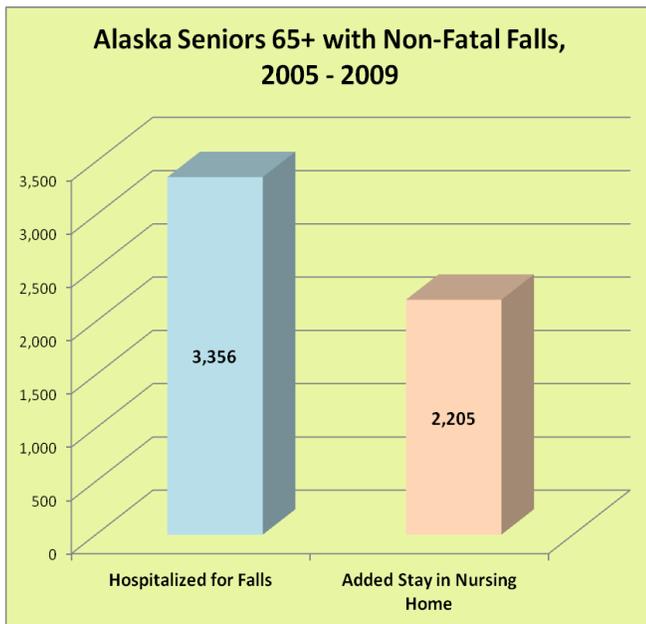
www.alaskaaging.org

1

Ensuring the dignity and independence of all older Alaskans and assisting them through planning, advocacy, education and interagency cooperation to lead useful and meaningful lives.

- Promote public awareness about senior falls by emphasizing risk factors, consequences of falls, and ways to avoid falls through a media campaign and provide educational presentations at senior centers, community health centers, and other senior-appropriate settings.
- Offer training to assisted living and nursing home providers on ways to reduce senior falls in their facilities.
- Increase availability of evidence-based falls prevention exercise programs for older adults approved by the U.S. Administration on Aging and the National Council on Aging at senior centers, adult day programs, community health centers, and assisted living facilities.
- Implement a “home hazard reduction program” that includes a home safety assessment to identify risk factors in the home and provide resources to help seniors make accessibility modifications.
- Strengthen the medication education/management program targeting older adults, their caregivers, and health professionals to prevent senior falls due to medication complications and medication misuse.
- Incorporate evidence-based falls prevention intervention as part of hospital discharge programs to include patient and caregiver education on ways to reduce falls in the home, perform a home safety assessment, and provide assistance with making appropriate accessibility modifications.
- Strengthen falls data reporting for planning and monitoring purposes by incorporating critical incident reporting (gathered by SDS grantees and Medicaid waiver providers) and emergency medical services callout data for falls that do not end up in the emergency room.
- Evaluate the outcomes of the pilot project to determine program outcomes and cost effectiveness.

Recommendation: The ACoA recommends \$500.0 to establish a multi-faceted senior fall prevention effort utilizing the above strategies to turn the curve and reduce the number of preventable fall-related injuries and deaths to older Alaskans, the financial costs related to health care due to falls, and the personal loss to older Alaskans and their family caregivers.



Alaska Commission on Aging
 P.O. Box 110693 Juneau, Alaska 99811-0693
 Phone: 907-465-3250 / Fax: 907-465-1398
www.alaskaaging.org

Ensuring the dignity and independence of all older Alaskans and assisting them through planning, advocacy, education and interagency cooperation to lead useful and meaningful lives.