PREVENTING FALLS AND HARM FROM FALLS
Falls can have serious consequences for older people, their families and carers. They can lead to reduced quality of life, disability, reduced physical activity, social isolation, functional decline and even death. In NSW, falls are a major cause of harm to older people, and fall-related injuries impose a substantial burden on the health care and aged care systems.

Rates of hospitalisations for falls among older people have been increasing for the last fifteen years, with a gradient of increasing rates and change over time and with increasing age from 65-69 years to 85 years and over. While rates have increased for all age groups over this period, the gradient of the increase has been steeper in older age groups.

In NSW in 2012/13
- Ambulance NSW responded to over 83,000 calls related to falls
- There were approximately 28,000 overnight hospitalisations of people aged 65+ due to a fall
- 451 people aged 65+ suffered a serious injury from a fall that occurred whilst they were an inpatient in a public hospital (SAC1 + SAC2)

For more data: Clinical Incident Management in the NSW public health system and Trends in fall-related hospitalisations, persons aged 65 years and over, NSW, 1998-99 to 2011-12

FALLS AND FALL INJURIES CAN BE PREVENTED

A strategic, collaborative approach has been at the heart of the fight against falls in NSW. The Clinical Excellence Commission, Ministry of Health and Local Health Districts are working together to prevent falls and fall injury through the development of evidence-based policy, provision of strategic leadership and practical support and implementation of state and local initiatives.
**Key Strategies and Priorities for Action**

**Build a Resilient Population**

**What We Know**

Investment and support for individuals is required throughout life to achieve and maintain healthy bones, strength and balance. This includes:
- The right physical activity
- Good nutrition (esp calcium)
- Healthy vitamin D levels

**Action Highlights**

- State-wide rollout of Stepping On program (see next page).
- Healthy Ageing initiative classes (see next page).
- NSW Falls Prevention Network (see next page).
- Rural networks supporting volunteers to deliver programs (see next page).

**Next Priorities**

- Support exercise providers to deliver sustainable programs with a falls prevention component, and promote via Active and Healthy (see next page).
- Build professional capacity through the NSW Falls Prevention Network.
- Collaborate and coordinate with strategies from the Healthy Eating & Active Living Strategy.

**Identify Potential Future Fallers**

**What We Know**

Opportunistic identification and early intervention can be provided through:
- Primary Care Networks
- Community care and health settings
- Specialist services

**Action Highlights**

- A range of strategies across NSW has included:
  - Resources for community service providers
  - Home based programs in partnership with GPs
  - Telephone interventions for socially or geographically isolated fallers.

**Next Priorities**

- Implement National Standard 10 in community care settings.
- Screen for falls risk and deliver tailored interventions and/or referral into preventive care (eg physical activity programs).
- Develop and deliver resources and education for community staff.
- Build tools into community eMR.

**Deliver Early Interventions**

**What We Know**

Ambulance NSW and Emergency Department attend to many fallers that do not require admission. These events may herald far more serious events to come, and are an opportunity for early intervention.

**Action Highlights**

- Strategies trialled in some areas have included:
  - Enhanced Care Paramedics trained to undertake fall risk assessment and referral.
  - The Phoning Fallers program identifies and follows up on older people that attended ED due to a fall (without admission).

**Next Priorities**

- Continue to work with Ambulance NSW regarding pathways of care for paramedics.
- Build stronger linkages to re-fracture prevention, Chronic Care Programs.
- Build tools into the eMR, improve data.
- Connect more effectively with strategies delivered through primary care and community service providers.

**Identify and Reduce Risks**

**What We Know**

Regardless of the reason for admission, many older people are vulnerable to a fall during inpatient stays. Systematic risk screening and evidence-based care planning can reduce risk. Discharge planning should include ongoing preventive care.

**Action Highlights**

- 90% of clinical units across NSW who identified that they care for patients who are at risk of falls state that they have a standardised approach for managing patient falls risk.

**Next Priorities**

- Provide support for implementation of National Standard 10.
- Ensure quality and reach of interventions, notably regarding cognition and delirium, night sedation, supervision and discharge planning.
- Build tools into the eMR, improve data.
- Improve hospital environment safety.

**Manage Those Who Are Most Frail**

**What We Know**

Residential aged care/MPS aged care patients account for one in five admissions into hospital for fall-related care. Systematic care planning and risk reduction is essential in these settings.

**Action Highlights**

- Increased participation from the residential aged care sector at professional networking forums.
- Staff provided with resources and information.
- Numbers of residents on vitamin D medication increased.

**Next Priorities**

- Implement relevant accreditation and best practice protocols.
- Undertake comprehensive geriatric assessments.
- Focus on interventions with strongest evidence, eg vitamin D.
- Ensure intervention quality and reach.
- Liaise with hospital teams.
The Clinical Excellence Commission's NSW Falls Prevention Program provides strategic coordination and practical support for action across NSW. The program website provides professional tools, information and resources.

The NSW Falls Prevention Network continues to grow, with over 1,300 members and 1,600 hits per month to the site. Professional support, maintenance of a listserv and website, and inventory of resources pertinent to the field are key aspects of this network.

State-wide investment in building the capacity of exercise providers to deliver sustainable programs. Stepping On delivered to >10,000 people since 2009. Support provided for over 200 rural volunteers to deliver Tai Chi and other suitable programs.

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Approximately 275,000 copies of the Staying active and on your feet falls prevention consumer booklet have been printed for distribution across NSW since 2010. The booklet provides information and tools to reduce risk of falling.

NSW Health, NSW Sport & Recreation and the Dept of Ageing Disability & Home Care collaborate to increase physical activity opportunities for older people through the Aquatics and Recreation Institute. A pilot from Jan-Jun 2014 delivered 817 active ageing classes with 10,212 individual visits.

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National Safety and Quality Standard 10: Falls calls for a systematic and multifactorial approach to preventing inpatient falls. Released in late 2012, the new accreditation process has commenced.

Clinical practice and compliance with National Standard 10 is supported by clinical best practice guidelines produced by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

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Through the NSW Health Aboriginal Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Demonstration Grants Program, a demonstration research project commenced in February 2014 to address falls among older Aboriginal people.

Ongoing research is supported through NHMRC Partnership Grants. A collaborative research agenda includes partnerships with Neuroscience Research Australia, the George Institute and the University of Sydney.

www.health.nsw.gov.au

Suggested Citation: NSW Ministry of Health, Snapshot of Falls Prevention, November 2014