

# Falls Among Older People

This report card provides a snapshot of the data on falls among older people and the actions NSW Health are taking to prevent falls and reduce the harm from falls among older people. This Report Card was produced by the Population Health Division of NSW Health.

## Falls among older people at a glance

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. No other single injury cause, including road trauma, costs the health system more than injuries resulting from falls.<sup>1</sup> In 2006/07 the total cost of health care associated with fall injuries in older people was estimated at \$558.5 million.<sup>2</sup> The burden from fall related harm among older people is expected to grow as our population ages. It is projected that by 2056, between 23 and 25 per cent of the Australian population will be 65 years or older.<sup>3</sup>

However, the good news is the research indicates that many falls can be prevented and the risk of injury reduced.<sup>4,5</sup>

## Falls are common among older people<sup>6</sup>

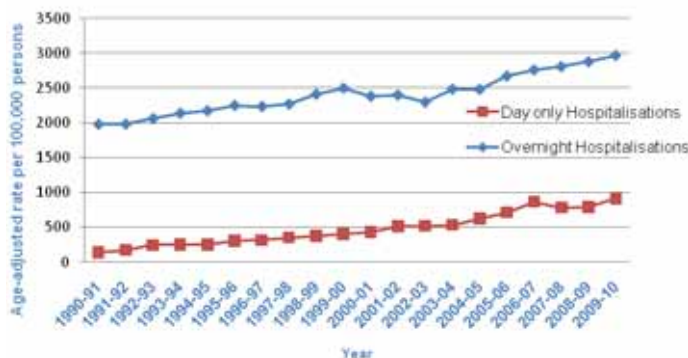
- In 2009, 25.6 % of older people fell at least once in the preceding 12 months.
- Among those who fell, 66.1% indicated they were injured as a result of their fall and 20% had to visit a hospital as a result of their fall.
- The majority of falls among older people happen in and around their homes. In 2009, among older people who had fallen in the previous 12 months, over 65% indicated that they had most recently fallen in their home or yard.

## Fall related injury is a major cause of morbidity and mortality for older people

- In 2009-10, falls among older people led to approximately 32,000 hospitalisations.<sup>7</sup>
- Fall-related hospitalisation rates for older people increased from 1990-91 to 2009-10 (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

- The likelihood of being seriously injured as a result of a fall increases with age (Figure 2).<sup>8</sup>
- Fall-related hospitalisations for older people are predicted to continue to increase as a result of our ageing population.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1: Fall-related injury hospitalisations, persons 65 years and over, NSW, 1990-91 to 2009-10.



## A snapshot of NSW Health actions to prevent falls and harm from falls among older people

The NSW Health policy, *Prevention of Falls and Harm from Falls among Older People: 2011-2015*<sup>9</sup> describes the actions that NSW Health will undertake to support the prevention of falls and fall-related harm among older people. Actions will take place in three key domains: health promotion, NSW Health clinical services and NSW Health residential aged care services. The Policy aims to reduce the incidence and severity of falls among older people and reduce the social, psychological and economic impact of falls on individuals, families and the community.

NSW Health is implementing a number of initiatives to prevent falls and harm from falls among older people. Examples of current initiatives include:

For more information visit the *Health Statistics NSW* website:

<http://www.healthstats.nsw.gov.au>

OR email: [Health.StatisticsNSW@doh.health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Health.StatisticsNSW@doh.health.nsw.gov.au)



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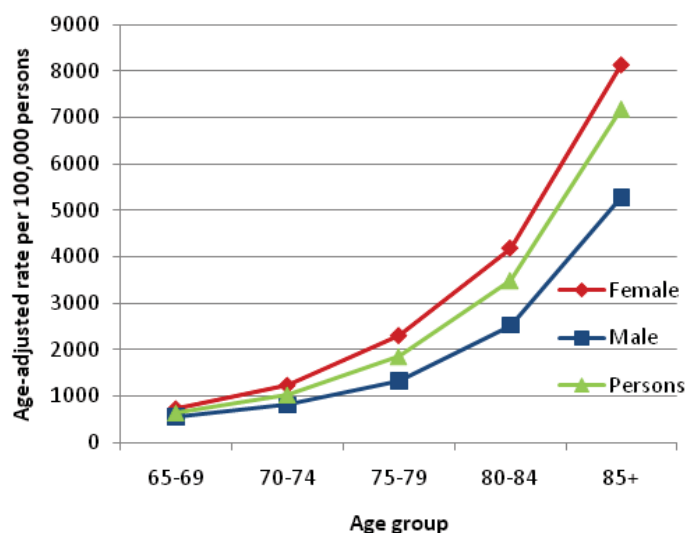
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- **Stepping On:** an evidence-based multidisciplinary falls prevention program to increase the confidence of older people in self-managing falls risks and establishing a regular habit of balance and strength exercise.
- **Otago Home Based Exercise Program:** a home based, individually tailored strength and balance retraining program that has been shown to reduce falls among frail older people.
- **Staying Active and On Your Feet:** a booklet that provides information and tips for staying active and preventing falls, along with a self assessment checklist for falls risk.
- **Active and Healthy website:** a web-based resource for older people, their carers and health providers, that provides older people with information to locate falls prevention exercise programs in their local area, as well as information on ways to reduce falls.
- **Implementation of national falls prevention best practice guidelines in NSW Health clinical and aged care services** – adoption of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care guidelines in hospitals, community based services, multi-purpose services and multi-purpose services and State Government Residential Aged Care Facilities.

## References

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- 4 Cameron ID, Murray GR, Gillespie LD et al.: Interventions for preventing falls in older people in nursing care facilities and hospitals *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2010, Issue 1. Art. No.: [CD005465](#). DOI: [10.1002/14651858.CD005465.pub2](#)
- 5 Gillespie LD, Gillespie WJ, Robertson MC, Lamb SE, Cumming RG, Rowe BH. Interventions for preventing falls in older people living in the community. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2009, Issue 2. Art. No.: [CD000340](#). DOI: [10.1002/14651858.CD000340.pub2](#)
- 6 Centre for Health Advancement and Centre for Epidemiology and Research. *New South Wales Falls Prevention Baseline Survey: 2009 Report*. Sydney: NSW Department of Health, 2010.
- 7 Centre for Epidemiology and Research. Health Statistics New South Wales. Sydney: NSW. Department of Health. Available at: [www.healthstats.doh.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.healthstats.doh.health.nsw.gov.au). (Accessed 28 June 2011).
- 8 NSW Admitted Patient Data Collection (HOIST). Centre for Epidemiology and Research, NSW Department of Health.
- 9 NSW Department of Health . *Prevention of Falls and Harm from Falls among Older People 2011–2015 (PD2011\_029)*. Sydney: NSW, Department of Health, 2011. Available at: [www.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/pd/2011/PD2011\\_029.html](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/pd/2011/PD2011_029.html) (Accessed 28 June 2011).

Figure 2: Fall-related injury hospitalisations, males, females and persons 65 years and over by age, NSW, 2009-10.



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