



Iowa Falls Prevention Coalition

Falls are the leading cause of injury death, ahead of motor vehicle crashes.

The total charges for fall-related hospitalizations in Iowa average \$298 million annually.



20 to 30% of people who fall suffer moderate to severe injuries such as lacerations, hip fractures, or head traumas.

Policy Brief: Falls in Iowa (2016)

The Problem:

Injuries and deaths from falls have risen 20% over the last decade in Iowa. Iowa's death rate from falls – 15.45 per 100,000 – is higher than the US rate (9.2 per 100,000). Iowa has an average of 475 deaths from falls annually. For those over the age of 65, falls are the 1st leading cause of all unintentional injury deaths in the United States. (All sources: CDC, [WISQARS](#))

Falls account for 84% of injury-related hospitalizations for older Iowans, which is higher than the national data (77.1%). (Source: CDC, [WISQARS](#); IDPH)

With the number of older Iowans growing rapidly, these rates could increase in the next several years, leading to many older adults losing their independence.

What are the costs?

The cost of fall-related hospitalizations is the largest of any injury and is high due to the large number of hospitalizations. Iowa averages 10,825 hospitalizations from falls annually.

The total charges for hospitalizations in Iowa due to falls are \$298 million per year. For people over 65, the total annual charges are \$44.3 million, an average charge per hospitalization of around \$26,400. In comparison, it costs \$500 annually for one person to participate in a falls prevention class. (Source: IDPH)

How does it impact someone's life?

- In addition to medical costs, falls also contribute to a decreased ability to perform household tasks, a reduced quality of life, and may result in loss of independence for those over 65.
- Falls are the most common cause of traumatic brain injuries (TBI).
- Most fractures among older adults are caused by falls.
- Many people who fall develop a fear of falling, which may cause them to limit activities, leading to reduced mobility and loss of physical fitness, which increases their risk of falling.

Who is at Risk?

The chances of falling and of being seriously injured in a fall increase with age. Between 2009-2013, the rate of fall injuries for adults 65 and older was almost five times that for adults 50 to 64. The rate of death from falls was 10 times greater for adults over 65. (Source: IDPH)

People age 75 and older who fall are four to five times more likely than those age 65 to 74 to be admitted to a long-term care facility for a year or longer.

Rates of fall-related fractures among older women are more than twice those for men.

What can be done to reduce falls in Iowa?

- Health care providers can identify a patient's risk for falls, assess the scope of risk, introduce tailored interventions and provide effective referrals through use of a screening tool.

- Communities can create programs to reduce seniors' risk of falls and provide consumer education to older adults on risk reduction. Some examples of evidence-based programs available in Iowa include: Matter of Balance, Stepping On and Tai Chi for Arthritis.

- Academic health care programs can include falls prevention education as a core subject area in professional courses of study.

- Health care settings can include fall risk assessment for older adults and make referrals for interventions to reduce risk.

- Communities can use Complete Streets initiatives that support safe walkable communities and improved access for all ages and abilities.

- Legislators can approve a refundable income tax credit for up to 50% of costs incurred for an individual to retrofit a primary residence to accommodate aging and disability access.

- Community leaders can designate the first week of fall each year to be "Fall Prevention Awareness Week."

What can older adults do to prevent falls? They can:

- **Exercise regularly to increase leg strength and improve balance.**
- **Consume a healthy diet with adequate protein and vitamin D.**
- **Review medicines with a doctor or pharmacist to identify ones that may cause side effects such as dizziness.**
- **Be properly evaluated and fitted for adaptive equipment, including eyeglasses, shoes or walking devices.**
- **Make homes safer by reducing tripping hazards, adding grab bars & railings in baths and on stairs, and improving lighting.**

