

# The California Fall Prevention Infrastructure

## The Need for Fall Prevention

Falls are increasingly recognized as a serious public health issue. In California alone, fall-related injuries in 2004 led to almost 80,000 hospitalizations (EPICenter, 2007) with a mean cost of over \$40,000 per hospitalization due to falls among Californians age 60 and older. In recent years, improved understanding of the risks associated with falls has led to a number of improved preventive measures and interventions, but older adults still suffer from too many falls and fall-related injuries.

Falls are a serious problem for older adults. Persons are at varying levels of risk for falling depending on identified intrinsic and extrinsic risk factors. These include a history of falling (and fall-related injuries), mobility impairment, problems with balance, low physical activity, and hazardous living environments.

Interventions including risk and medication assessment, physical activity including balance and strengthening exercises, and environmental modifications in the home and the community including use of assistive devices can greatly reduce falls. Although the risk for falls increases dramatically with age, falls are not an inevitable part of aging.

The need for fall prevention is overwhelming:

- Among Californians age 85 and older, the risk of a fall injury is 57 times greater than for people age 20 to 55 years (Trent & Ellis, 2000).
- California's non-fatal fall injuries cost approximately \$2.4 billion annually in direct medical costs (Choi et al., 2007); by 2020 the total cost of fall injuries for people age 65 and older in the United States may reach nearly \$44 billion (Stevens, 2005).

Falls impose an enormous burden on our health care system. Negative health outcomes for older adults who fall and experience an injury include long-term disability and dramatically reduced quality of life, consequences impacting individuals as well as their families.

## Progress in Fall Prevention in California

Recognition of the importance of falls led to the 2003 conference in which over 130 leaders assembled in Sacramento to develop the *California Blueprint for Fall Prevention*. This meeting created both a sense of urgency about falls as a public health problem and a commitment to a series of strategies to create a fall prevention infrastructure in California.



*“ A remarkable amount has been accomplished in fall prevention - we’ve really made some enormous strides. We need a vision about what more needs to be done for the future. ”*

*-- Joseph F. Prevratil, JD  
President and CEO, Archstone Foundation*

Since 2003 and in response to the recommendations of the *Blueprint*, numerous fall prevention activities have been initiated to raise awareness about fall prevention, increase the skills of professionals working in the field, and develop new evidence-based multi-factorial programs to reduce falls.

The following are several highlights of recent efforts:

- The Archstone Foundation's Fall Prevention Initiative that, in 2005, funded the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence (FPCE), a consortium of the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, the Veterans Administration Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System Geriatric Research, Education, and Clinical Center (GRECC), California State University (CSU) Fullerton's Center for Successful Aging, and the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) State and Local Injury Control, University of California, Los Angeles School of Medicine; FPCE's website - [www.stopfalls.org](http://www.stopfalls.org) - is accessed by thousands of health and social services providers, consumers, researchers and policymakers worldwide.
- Archstone Foundation also supported development of 10 fall prevention coalitions and 6 program expansion projects that provide the basis for a strengthened fall prevention infrastructure in local communities and a variety of new activities throughout California.
- California's Department of Public Health developed "Filling the Gaps: Strategic Directions for a Safe California", a three-year plan to target under-addressed injury areas including senior falls.
- The FPCE convened a statewide StopFalls Network, a 143-member organization that includes AAAs, fall prevention and senior injury programs, adult day health centers, and other community service providers.
- Fall prevention programs such as *FallProof*<sup>TM</sup>, created and disseminated by the Center for Successful Aging at CSU Fullerton, California, and the *InSTEP (Increasing Stability Through Evaluation and Practice)* model program that incorporates the three central elements of fall prevention – medical risk assessment and recommendations, physical activity, and home-risk assessment and modification - at senior centers in Los Angeles and Orange Counties.
- Replication of *A Matter of Balance* under the auspices of the California Department of Aging in collaboration with Partners in Care Foundation. *A Matter of Balance* is an AoA funded group behavior change program, designed to reduce fear of falling and increase physical activity. The program operates in venues such as multipurpose senior service centers as well as senior and community centers.
- The continuation of exemplary fall prevention programs such as San Francisco's Department of Public Health Community and Home Injury Prevention Project for Seniors (CHIPPS) program, Alameda County's senior injury prevention programs (SIPP), Stanford University's *Farewell to Falls*, Sequoia Hospital's *Mature & Secure from Falls*, and Santa Monica's Center for Healthy Aging's *Staying Mobile* program.

**The 2007 California Fall Prevention Summit: *Progress, Challenges & Next Steps***

Nearly five years of progress in fall prevention preceded the 2007 California Fall Prevention Summit: *Progress, Challenges & Next Steps*. Held in Long Beach, on December 5-6, 2007, it convened over 140 leaders from a variety of fields and organizations involved in and who had a stake in fall prevention, including Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), community-based service organizations, health plans, service providers, local and state governments, consumer advocacy organizations, foundations and universities as well as senior housing, and assisted living facilities.



*“If you have an issue that the state needs to do something about, let me know about it. I view my job as the advocate for aging. I will deliver a loud and clear fall prevention message to Governor Schwarzenegger.”*

*-- The Honorable Lynn Daucher  
Director, California Department of Aging*

The Summit’s Steering and Advisory Committees defined its purpose as sharing the latest developments in the field and engaging participants in crafting policy recommendations and strategies to accelerate the development of a fall prevention infrastructure. The agenda included presentations on fall prevention model programs, coalitions and partnerships for community change. The Summit also included presentations by experts and national leaders such as Ileana Arias, PhD, (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention); Lynn Beattie, MPT, MHA, (National Council on Aging); the Honorable Lynn Daucher (California Department of Aging); Linda Hale, RN (Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services); State Senator Alan Lowenthal, PhD; Vicky Scott, PhD (British Columbia Ministry of Health, Population Health and Wellness); and

Fernando Torres-Gil, PhD (University of California, Los Angeles). They described current trends, promising practices and strategies in fall prevention and provided the basis for dialog in the five work group areas.

The invitational 2007 California Fall Prevention Summit: *Progress, Challenges & Next Steps* was made possible by generous support from the Archstone Foundation and The California Wellness Foundation.

**The Fall Prevention Center of Excellence (FPCE)**

The 2007 California Fall Prevention Summit: *Challenges, Progress & Next Steps* was planned, organized and coordinated by the FPCE in collaboration with the California Geriatric Education Center at UCLA’s David Geffen School of Medicine. The FPCE was formally established in 2005 as part of the Archstone Foundation “Fall Prevention Initiative”.

A consortium known as the Fall Prevention Center of Excellence is led by Co-Directors Jon Pynoos, PhD (University of Southern California’s Andrus Gerontology Center), Debra Rose, PhD (The Center for Successful Aging (CSA) at California State University, Fullerton), and Laurence Rubenstein, MD, MPH (Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center (GRECC), VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System, UCLA School of Medicine). A major partner is the California Department of Public Health, State and Local Injury Control Section (SLIC) represented by Barb Alberson. Since its launch, the FPCE has evolved into

an information source and coordinator of fall prevention activities, one of the goals of the 2003 *California Blueprint for Fall Prevention*. Additionally, the FPCE provides technical assistance to agencies and other entities interested in developing fall prevention programs.

The FPCE’s mission is to provide leadership, create new knowledge, improve practice, and develop sustainable fall prevention programs for California, widely considered the “model state for fall prevention”. It is currently developing and testing the effectiveness of the multifactorial InSTEP (Increasing Stability Through Evaluation and Practice) fall prevention program within senior centers in Orange and Los Angeles counties.

In 2005, the FPCE launched [www.stopfalls.org](http://www.stopfalls.org), an online clearinghouse for fall prevention information accessed by thousands of social service providers, consumers, researchers and policymakers worldwide. In 2006, it convened the StopFalls Network, a statewide organization that today includes 143 members representing AAAs, fall prevention and senior injury programs, adult day health centers, and other service providers. The FPCE also provides technical assistance to new Archstone Foundation funded fall prevention programs coalitions and collaborates with organizations such as the California Commission on Aging (CCoA) with the aim of establishing fall prevention as a key public health priority in California.

The FPCE conducts training and education for current and future professionals via teleconferences, coursework and online training. For example, the University of Southern California, home of FPCE’s Program Office, offers an online “Executive Certificate in Home Modification”, and CSU Fullerton offers a balance and mobility instructor specialist certification.

In advance of the Summit, the FPCE developed background information packets for the participants including:

- *California Fall Prevention Efforts* chart;
- *Tracking Falls in California: Better Data Needed* brief;
- *Multifactorial and Physical Activity Programs for Fall Prevention* brief;
- *Opportunities and Challenges in Fall Prevention since 2003 – A Progress Report*
- 43 draft policy recommendations that Summit participants reviewed and revised in their groups

Materials prepared for the Fall Prevention Summit, as well as Summit policy recommendations, are now available at [www.stopfalls.org](http://www.stopfalls.org).



**Jon Pynoos, PhD**  
Co-Director

Fall Prevention Center of Excellence



**Debra Rose, PhD**  
Co-Director

Fall Prevention Center of Excellence



**Larry Z. Rubenstein, MD, MPH**  
Co-Director

Fall Prevention Center of Excellence