

Make Fall Prevention a Priority for Kentucky Seniors

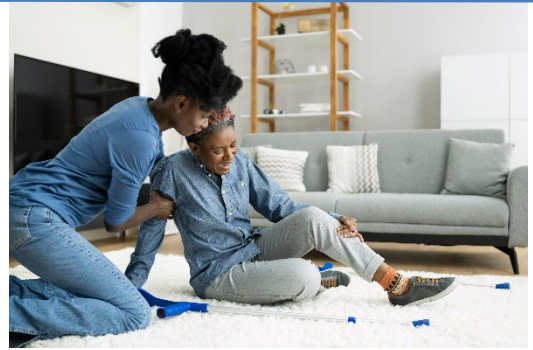
www.nofalls.org

www.safekentucky.org

 [@KentuckySPAN](https://www.facebook.com/KentuckySPAN)



For older adults, falls are the leading cause of injury-related death and hospitalization.



The National Challenge

Unintentional falls contributed to 36,508 deaths across the United States among persons aged 65 years and older in 2020.¹ This totaled \$1.4 billion in medical costs, with the average medical cost totaling \$38,356.¹ The value of statistical life costs (monetary estimate of the collective value placed on mortality risk reduction) totaled \$112.07 billion.¹ In 2020, there were nearly 3 million older adult nonfatal fall injuries across the United States.¹ Additionally, falls threaten the safety and independence of older adults and increase the cost burden to society, the individuals, and their families.

The Challenge in Kentucky



Three in 10 older adult Kentucky residents report falling each year.²



Across the Commonwealth, 264 Kentuckians aged 65 and older died as a result of a fall-related injury³ in 2020. Moreover, there were 39,077 fall-related visits to Kentucky emergency departments⁴ and 8,576 fall-related inpatient hospitalizations in acute care facilities⁵ among Kentucky residents 65 years and older in that same time period.

Risk Factors and Responding to the Challenge

Individuals may experience physiological changes, such as declining vision and hearing, loss of muscle mass, muscle weakness, gait and balance deficits, and slowed reaction times with advancing age. Aging also can contribute to the development of medical conditions, including diabetes, high blood pressure, and other disorders that require treatment with multiple medications. Osteoporosis increases one's risk of a fall and fall-related injuries⁶. All of these factors, as well as living in an unsafe environment, can contribute to the increased risk of falls in older adults.

Falls have a devastating impact on the physical, emotional, and financial health of a person as well as their family, caregivers, and society. The effects of falls can be short-term, limiting activities for a few days, or long-term, resulting in a permanent disability, loss of independence, or death.



However, falls are NOT an inevitable part of aging. The incidence of falls among seniors can be reduced through evidence-based interventions such as Bingocize®, Matter of Balance, Tai Chi for Arthritis, Stepping On, Healthy Steps in Motion; by practical lifestyle adjustments; and with community partnerships to increase fall prevention awareness. As a member of the Falls Free™ Coalition, Kentucky is part of a collection of national organizations and state coalitions working to decrease the increasing number of falls and fall-related injuries among older adults.

The Kentucky Safe Aging Coalition

In June of 2008, the Kentucky Safety and Prevention Alignment Network (KSPAN), the state injury community planning group), hosted a symposium to address falls among seniors after review of Kentucky injury data. Symposium attendees included fall prevention advocates from state and local public health departments, health care (e.g., hospital trauma centers, extended care facilities), area development districts, county extension offices, numerous state and local agencies, health insurance companies, and other private organizations with an interest in senior injury prevention. Attendees also established that KSPAN would coordinate the statewide fall prevention coalition. In October 2008, the new fall prevention coalition, the Kentucky Safe Aging Coalition (KSAC) held its first meeting.

Today, KSAC remains focused on decreasing the incidence of falls among seniors and has expanded its mission to include all forms of injury prevention for older Kentuckians. The coalition receives funding support from the Kentucky Department for Public Health. KSAC supports the efforts to establish local fall prevention coalitions across the



Commonwealth, working with communities to develop new coalitions. KSAC is a member of the national Falls Free™ Coalition sponsored by the National Council on Aging (NCOA) and serves as a link to national resources available to the local coalitions.

Fall Prevention in Kentucky

Kentucky is working to decrease the incidence of older adult falls. KSAC and the Kentucky Department for Public Health host the annual **Falls and Osteoporosis Summit**. This event, which typically occurs in the fall season, is where members of local fall coalitions and other health care and injury prevention professionals gather to learn from experts in this field. The summit is also an opportunity for attendees to share their success stories and best practices and network with other fall prevention enthusiasts.



Historically, Kentucky (through KSAC) has joined other states in celebrating National Fall Prevention Awareness Day on the first day of fall. As part of the observance, the governor of Kentucky issues a proclamation declaring Fall Prevention Awareness Day. Due to the magnitude of the need to prevent falls, this one day-event has transitioned into **Fall Prevention Awareness Week in the Commonwealth of Kentucky**. KSAC works with coalitions from across the nation to develop Fall Prevention Awareness Week resources and the annual NCOA Falls Free Fall Prevention Awareness Week Impact Report. In celebration, local coalitions and other organizations host events to increase awareness of fall prevention in their communities, increase access to fall prevention resources, use tools to assess fall risk factors, and learn about local evidence-based fall prevention interventions. KSAC provides support for these activities by attending these local events and speaking on fall prevention and makes fall prevention material available for distribution. In 2021, KSAC developed two fall prevention materials that are being distributing to the coalition: “Falls at Home: A Checklist for Prevention” (one page-front and back flyer) and a “Prevent Falls at Home” magnet to help remind the older adult or caregiver of some immediate efforts that can be taken to mitigate fall risk.



The Kentucky Injury Prevention and Research Center’s Kentucky Violence and Injury Prevention Program, as bona fide agent for the Kentucky Department of Public Health in injury prevention, provides fall-related data via www.safekentucky.org and ad hoc data reports. State- and local-level fall-related injury data are an important tool to help increase awareness about the burden that falls place on individuals, their families, and our health care system and are useful for helping prioritize and mobilize fall prevention efforts for Kentucky seniors.

Summary

Kentucky is working to reduce elderly falls, but more work needs to be done! This can only be achieved through partner and local community involvement across the Commonwealth. Falls have a devastating impact on our loved ones, families, communities, and health care system. It is imperative that evidence-based interventions and other educational programs are made available and accessible to all Kentucky seniors and support is provided for the sustainability of fall prevention programs.



References

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