



Wisconsin State Legislature

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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Healthy Aging and Fall Prevention

When we think of a public health epidemic, we might think of something like the spread of whooping cough, concerns about the Zika virus or problems with opioid abuse. Nationwide, there is another public health epidemic that impacts the quality of life of people and the cost of health care: unintentional falls. Wisconsin has the second highest rate of death from unintentional falls in the nation; in fact, it is twice the national average. Recognizing this and understanding the importance of fall prevention, Governor Scott Walker proclaimed September as Falls Prevention Awareness Month in Wisconsin and Thursday, September 22, 2016 as Falls Prevention Awareness Day. On the previous day, I participated in a press conference with a coalition of government agencies, universities and aging groups to help raise awareness of the importance of fall prevention.

In 2014, more than 27,000 Americans aged 65 and over died because of a fall, meaning 74 adults died every day because of a fall. Nationally, falls were the leading cause of non-fatal injuries for people 65 and older in 2014 resulting in 800,000 hospitalizations and 2.8 million emergency room visits. That means someone visited the emergency room every 11 seconds as a result of a fall. In Wisconsin, more people die from a fall-related injuries than from auto accidents. Preventing falls saves money too. Last year, Medicare costs for non-fatal falls were over \$31 billion nationally. To put that number in perspective, Medicare costs for cancer in the same year were \$36 billion. In Wisconsin, hospital charges from hospitalizations and emergency room visits due to falls were estimated to be \$771 million in 2014.

Falling is not just a normal part of the aging process. Older adults and their doctors can take steps to reduce both the chance of falling and the severity of an injury caused by a fall. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) National Center for Injury Prevention and Control has created the Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths, and Injuries (STEADI) initiative, to help doctors screen for fall risk as part of their normal practice. STEADI provides information and resources for patients and healthcare providers, including screening tools to assess risk and provide interventions, a checklist to assess the risk of falling, a patient brochure to educate patients on how to reduce the chance of falling and information to identify and remove fall hazards at home. To help health care providers make risk assessment part of their practice, Verona-based Epic Systems is working with the CDC, University of Wisconsin, and Oregon Health and Sciences University, to create the STEADI Clinical Program.

Another innovative fall prevention program has roots right here in Wisconsin. The "Stepping On" Program was first developed in Australia and adapted for U.S. use by a doctor at UW-Madison. It offers older adults evidence-based tools to avoid a fall. The seven week program is offered in 66 counties and includes strength and balance training, real-world home modifications and information on how vision and medications can impact an individual's fall risk. Research has shown that Stepping On participants reduce their fall risk by 50 percent and have a 70 percent reduction in emergency room visits caused by falling. The program first began in Wisconsin in 2008. Since then, nearly 12,000 people have participated in over 1,300 Stepping On workshops.

I introduced a motion in the last biennial state budget to provide funding for health promotion programs including Stepping On and I look forward to working with the Governor and legislature in the next budget to continue this investment in fall prevention and healthy aging. In July, I was honored by the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging for my work with the 2016 Healthy Aging Star Award.

With programs like STEADI and Stepping On available in Wisconsin, I encourage senior citizens to talk with their health care providers to get screened and, if assessed to be at risk for a fall, take a Stepping On workshop or another fall prevention program in their community. Call your county Health and Human Services or Aging Departments for information on the times and location of these programs.

If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at: Sen.Olsen@legis.state.wi.us. You can also sign up for our newsletter at our website: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/senate/sen14/news/index.htm>.

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