



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**News Release**

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GOVERNOR

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**DOH CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON FALL PREVENTION FOR SENIORS**

HONOLULU – Approximately every five hours, an elderly person living in Hawai'i is hospitalized as a result of falling. To address this serious medical and safety concern, the Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) will sponsor a fall prevention conference; "FALL PREVENTION: Implementing What Works" on Tuesday, October 23, at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel. Co-sponsors of the conference are the Elderly Affairs Division-City & County of Honolulu, Hawai'i Island Adult Care, Inc., HMSA, Ohana Pacific Rehab and Project Dana.

The conference is a collaborative effort to educate health professionals, caregivers and seniors on the best practices to prevent falls and their serious consequences, and to promote inter-agency coordination and cooperation. For seniors, injuries due to falls are a major barrier to healthy aging and a critical public health problem. Within the senior population:

- Falls are the leading cause of fatal injuries, injury-related hospitalizations and emergency department visits.
- Falls cause 80 percent of the hospitalizations for traumatic brain injuries (TBI).
- In Hawai'i every year, on average, 65 seniors die, 1760 are hospitalized, and 4,460 are treated in an emergency department because of falls.

"Falls can be tragic and devastating for seniors age 65 or older; however these accidents are preventable," said State Health Director, Chiyome Fukino, M.D. "Fall prevention is critical to the independence and quality of life for our *kupuna*."

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Addressing this issue are two keynote speakers: Dr. Katherine Berg from the University of Toronto and Dr. Debra Rose from the Center for Assisted Living and California State University at Fullerton. In addition, Dr. Rose and local experts from around the state will lead 12 unique breakout sessions, and Dr. Berg will moderate a panel discussing the latest in fall prevention techniques and programs.

“Hospitalization costs for falls in the elderly exceed \$45 million dollars per year in Hawai‘i, and about half of that (53 percent) is paid by Medicare/Medicaid,” said Dan Galanis, PhD, an epidemiologist for the DOH’s Injury Prevention Program. This does not take into account the rehabilitation costs, or the enormous fiscal and emotional burden on the families that care for the fall-injured seniors after their release to home monitored living or a long-term care facility.

One of the contributing factors to seniors falling is dizziness caused by multiple medications. The DOH is partnering with Times Supermarket pharmacists to help inform seniors of medications that may cause dizziness that can lead to falls. Additional information on fall prevention will be available in the Times Supermarket Midweek newspaper ads and on line at [www.nogethurt.hawaii.gov](http://www.nogethurt.hawaii.gov)

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