

## **Connecticut**

### **Older Adults Stand Tall**

#### **Public Health Problem**

More than any other preventable injury, falls cause Connecticut's older adults to lose their independence and be placed in nursing homes. Falls can also lead to hospitalization and possibly death, costing the state millions of dollars. In Connecticut:

- Falls are responsible for approximately 11,000 hospitalizations each year.
- Average direct medical cost per hospitalization is \$12,000.
- 70% of fall-related hospitalizations are among persons aged 65 years and older.
- Older adults have a death rate due to falls that is six times that of the state's average death rate.
- At least 30% of community-dwelling adults aged 65 years and older will fall each year.

#### **Taking Action**

The Connecticut Department of Public Health's Injury Prevention Program works with local health departments to implement community fall prevention programs for older adults. Local health departments receive an annual allocation from the PHHS Block Grant to address community health needs, including fall prevention. Each year, three to six local health departments conduct fall prevention programs. Fall prevention activities funded under the Block Grant focus on decreasing home hazards, improving strength and balance through exercise programs, reducing adverse medication interactions, and increasing awareness of fall risks and prevention among older adults and their families.

Local health departments, usually in collaboration with home health care agencies, conduct home safety visits to identify fall hazards, such as slipping and tripping hazards, inadequate lighting, and lack of grab bars or railings. Home visitors provide safety supplies, such as non-slip mats, night lights, tub chairs and rubber cane tips to older adult participants. Home visitors also provide education on how to prevent falls and work with older adults and family members to correct hazards.

Fall prevention presentations and medication safety reviews, which check prescription and over-the-counter medicines for possible interactions that could lead to falls, are provided in senior centers, housing complexes and other settings. Exercise classes for older adults, which focus on improving strength, balance and flexibility, are offered in 4- to 6-week sessions at senior centers and housing sites.

#### **Implications and Impact**

PHHS Block Grant funding enables the Connecticut Department of Public Health and local health agencies to provide critical fall prevention services to older adults in their communities. The PHHS Block Grant is the only funding source for many local health agencies to provide these services, which can prevent nursing home admissions, reduce health care costs, and help Connecticut's older residents remain active and independent members of society. Results from the past four years include the following:

- More than 550 home safety visits were conducted for older adults, and at least 77% of identified fall hazards were corrected on visits.
- 50% of the home safety visit recipients reported falling during the year prior to the visit, while only 3% reported falling at the four-month follow-up after the visit.
- At least 370 older adults participated in exercise classes, with 92% reporting at the end of program that they continued to exercise.
- Approximately 900 persons participated in fall prevention seminars or medication safety review programs. Approximately 87% were able to identify fall risk factors and 79% reported taking action to reduce their fall risks as a result of the programs.