

Stepping On Reduces Risk of Falls Among Older Adults

The Situation

Falls are the leading cause of injury and death for older Americans. Nationally, one out of every three people 65 and older fall each year. In fact, an estimated 50 percent of older adults 80 and older will fall each year. The consequences of falls are substantial, including serious injury, loss of independent living and limits on physical activity. By 2020, the total cost of fall injuries is expected to reach \$55 billion. **A total of 559 North Dakota residents died due to falls from 2009 through 2014, an average of 93 deaths per year. Seventy-one percent of these deaths were 80 and older.**

Extension Response

The NDSU Extension Service partnered with the North Dakota Department of Health to conduct seven-week *Stepping On* workshops, along with a three-month follow-up session. *Stepping On* is a national evidence-based program designed to help older adults take control of their fall risks, explore coping behaviors and use safety strategies in everyday life. Twenty-three trained Extension agents are working with local community leaders to offer *Stepping On* workshops across the state. Two Extension agents are master trainers.

Impacts

Participants, in the state, who completed the *Stepping On* workshop in 2016 reported:

- Their knowledge about the importance of balance and strength exercises for preventing falls increased 78 percent
- Their confidence in applying safe strategies in mobility situations increased 57 percent

In a follow-up survey three months after the workshop, participants reported positive changes in behavior, such as:

- 76 percent exercise routinely
- 91 percent had practiced techniques for safe transfers, standing, walking, and climbing curbs and stairs

- 91 percent had assessed their home environment for safety hazards
- 51 percent had learned about side effects of medications
- 82 percent decreased falling incidents

Participant Feedback

- *"I love it! It was the most informative thing I have ever learned."*
- *"I think it is the best program ever. Thank you so much and keep up the good work."*

Public Value Statement

Reducing the risk of falls can increase older adults' quality of life and save thousands of dollars in health-care and long-term care costs for North Dakotans.

Primary Contact

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County Impact

Upon completion of the *Stepping On* workshop in Pembina County, Agent Helgoe and Public Health nurse Kujava co-taught participants how to make positive changes in their lifestyles, such as

- 100% of participants took actions to reduce home hazards
- 100% of participants considered safe features when choosing footwear
- 83% of participants practiced techniques for safe transfers, standing, walking, climbing curbs and stairs

County Contact

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Non-Extension Collaborators

North Dakota Department of Health -
Division of Injury Prevention and Control
Local community leaders