

Core Member Organizations

- Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (ADPAW)
- Alzheimer's Association Wisconsin Chapter
- Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association (WADSA)
- Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging (W4A)
- Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists (WABS)
- Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors (WAND)
- Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers (WASC)
- Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA)
- Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (WISCA)
- Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network is a collaborative group of individuals and associations working with and for Wisconsin's older adults to shape public policy to improve their quality of life.

WAAN State Issue Brief
February 2021

Healthy Aging Through Reducing Falls:

Saving lives and reducing costs with proven programs.

WAAN's Position: Provide a \$500,000 annual budget appropriation to reduce Wisconsin's high rate of deadly falls through a statewide support center and proven, locally delivered prevention programs.

Wisconsin has the nation's highest rate of deadly falls among older adults and the problem is worsening.¹ The rate of deaths from falls among people 65 and older in Wisconsin rose 19.1% from 2016 to 2019, while the nationwide rate increased 7.6% over the same time period.² According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 5,968 older adults in the state died from falls during that time. In 2019, 1,675 older adults died from falls, more than the total of the American Cancer Society's 2019 combined estimate of 740 breast cancer and 620 prostate cancer deaths among all Wisconsinites.³

Wisconsin's high rate of death from falls among older adults cannot be blamed on our weather. The majority of older adult falls occur in the home, and states with similar weather have much lower rates.

The medical costs of falls in Wisconsin are extremely high. The CDC's most recent analysis shows the yearly cost of falls in Wisconsin is nearly \$800 million, including approximately \$137 million in Medicaid expenses and \$147 million in out-of-pocket expenses.

The good news is we know how to fix this problem and save lives now. According to the CDC, the rising number of deaths from falls among older adults can be addressed "by screening for fall risk and intervening to address risk factors." Wisconsin and the Department of Health Service (DHS) are well positioned to take on this challenge in partnership with the non-profit Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (WIHA). State funding will provide critically needed support for WIHA's delivery of statewide programs that put healthy living and fall prevention skills in the hands of older adults.

WIHA's evidenced-based *Stepping On* program has been proven to reduce falls by 31%, with an average participant cost savings of \$345.⁴ In another study, program participants experienced a 50% reduction in emergency department visits and a 50% reduction in fall-related hospitalizations.⁵ In addition to delivering *Stepping On*, WIHA is a clearinghouse for other evidence-based programming and practices related to chronic disease, pain, incontinence, diabetes, and other physical and mental conditions that increase the risk of falls.





WIHA also partners with health care systems and the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, and holds workshop licenses statewide to reduce fall-related injuries and deaths. WIHA's local partner agencies, workshop host sites, and program leaders cannot deliver proven cost-effective programs without statewide coordination and support. Purchasing program licenses, attending trainings, conducting outreach and education, and collecting and compiling data are cost-prohibitive if done by individual county or tribal Aging & Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs), Aging Units, or health care systems. In addition, local coalitions are working across Wisconsin to pull together resources and strategies to reduce falls in their communities, but they cannot succeed with their work in isolation.

Efforts supported by this funding will include:

- establishing and leading a statewide falls-prevention initiative to support and coordinate local falls-prevention coalitions and initiatives
- developing and maintaining the infrastructure for coordination of evidence-based falls-prevention programs
- supporting ADRCs, county and tribal aging units, public health, and other local partners in developing and training leaders and recruiting participants;
- developing an online hub of falls-prevention information and resources;
- conducting a public education campaign to make older adults and their caregivers aware of the risk of falls and how they can prevent them; and
- collecting data and conducting analyses.

References

1. <https://www.cdc.gov/falls/data/index.html>
2. Estimated Number of New Cancer Cases and Deaths by State - 2019, <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/annual-cancer-facts-and-figures/2019/estimated-new-cases-and-deaths-by-state-for-21-cancer-sites-2019.pdf>
3. Wisconsin still has nation's highest rate of deadly falls among older adults, https://madison.com/wsj/news/local/health-med-fit/wisconsin-still-has-nations-highest-rate-of-deadly-falls-among-older-adults/article_b81e5663-0e29-5861-8e74-ca7409127138.html
4. Stepping On, <https://wihealthyaging.org/stepping-on-consumer>
5. Bringing Healthy Aging to Scale: A Randomized Trial of a Quality Improvement Intervention to Increase Adoption of Evidence-Based Health Promotion Programs by Community Partners – Implementation Science News, (<https://news.consortiumforis.org/abstracts/bringing-healthy-aging-to-scale-a-randomized-trial-of-a-quality-improvement-intervention-to-increase-adoption-of-evidence-based-health-promotion-programs-by-community-partners>)



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