

Get the Facts on Falls Prevention

Key Takeaways

With over one in four Americans age 65+ falling each year, NCOA provides facts, tools, and fall prevention strategies to help keep you safe.

The financial toll for older adult falls is expected to increase as the population ages and may reach over \$101 billion by 2030.

Learn more about the Falls Free® Initiative and how this national effort has promoted effective falls prevention strategies for older adults.

Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries for older Americans. Falls threaten seniors' safety and independence, and generate enormous economic and personal costs. However, falling is not an inevitable result of aging. Through practical lifestyle adjustments, evidence-based falls prevention programs, and clinical-community partnerships, the number of falls among seniors can be substantially reduced.

The challenges of falls for older adults

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other falls research:

- More than one out of four Americans age 65+ falls each year.¹
- Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults.²
- The cost of treating injuries caused by falls is projected to increase to over \$101 billion by 2030.³

- Falls result in more than 3 million injuries treated in emergency departments annually, including over 800,000 hospitalizations.⁴
- In 2015, the total cost of non-fatal fall injuries was \$50 billion.⁵
- Each year about \$754 million is spent on medical costs related to fatal falls.⁵
- For older adults in the U.S., fall death rates went up by 30% from 2007-2016, and researchers predict there will be 7 deadly falls every hour by 2030.⁴
- People with mild hearing loss are nearly three times as likely to fall, with each 10 decibels of hearing loss increasing falls risk.⁶

Falls, with or without injury, also carry a heavy quality of life impact. A growing number of older adults fear falling and, as a result, limit their activities and social engagements. This can result in further physical decline, depression, social isolation, and feelings of helplessness.

NCOA's Role

The National Council on Aging (NCOA) leads the **National Falls Prevention Resource Center** <<https://ncoa.org/professionals/health/center-for-healthy-aging/national-falls-prevention-resource-center>> , which supports awareness and educational efforts about falls and promotes evidence-based falls prevention programs and strategies across the nation. The purpose of the center is to:

- Increase public awareness and educate consumers and professionals about the risks of falls and how to prevent falls.
- Support and stimulate the implementation, dissemination, and sustainability of evidence-based falls prevention programs and strategies to reduce the incidence of falls among older adults and adults with disabilities.
- Serve as the national clearinghouse of tools, best practices, and other information on falls and falls prevention.

The National Falls Prevention Resource Center leads the **Falls Free® Initiative** <<https://ncoa.org/professionals/health/center-for-healthy-aging/national-falls-prevention-resource-center/falls-free-initiative>> , a national effort to address the growing public health issue of falls, fall-related injuries, and deaths. The initiative includes a coalition of over 70 national organizations charged with working toward the progress of one or more of the strategies in the National Action Plan. Members disseminate proven falls prevention programs, advocate for funding and regulatory changes, and educate professionals, older adults, and caregivers about how they can reduce their risk of falling. The initiative also includes a 47-member State Coalition on Falls Prevention Workgroup charged with collaboratively promoting effective federal, state, and local strategies to address falls.

The Falls Free® Initiative's work includes:

- **Falls Free® National Action Plan** <<https://ncoa.org/article/2015-falls-free-national-falls-prevention-action-plan>> : In March 2005, NCOA released the landmark evidence-based Falls Free® National Action Plan to prevent falls and fall-related injuries in older adults. The plan was updated in 2015 and continues to serve as a roadmap and catalyst for action. The plan includes goals, strategies, and action steps to increase physical mobility, reduce the impact of medications as a falls risk factor, and improve home and environmental safety. The plan also promotes the expansion and funding of falls risk screening, assessment, clinical interventions, and evidence-based programs.
- **National Falls Prevention Awareness Week** <<https://ncoa.org/professionals/health/center-for-healthy-aging/national-falls-prevention-resource-center/falls-prevention-awareness-week>> : Every September, the Falls Free® Initiative promotes National Falls Prevention Awareness Week. States are encouraged to host and promote falls prevention awareness and screening activities to draw attention to the problem and offer older adults practical solutions.

For more information:

- **NCOA Center for Healthy Aging** <<https://ncoa.org/professionals/health/center-for-healthy-aging>>

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Sources

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Older Adult Falls

A growing problem that can be prevented.



IN 2018

1 in 4 older adults reported falling—
this equals about 36 million falls.

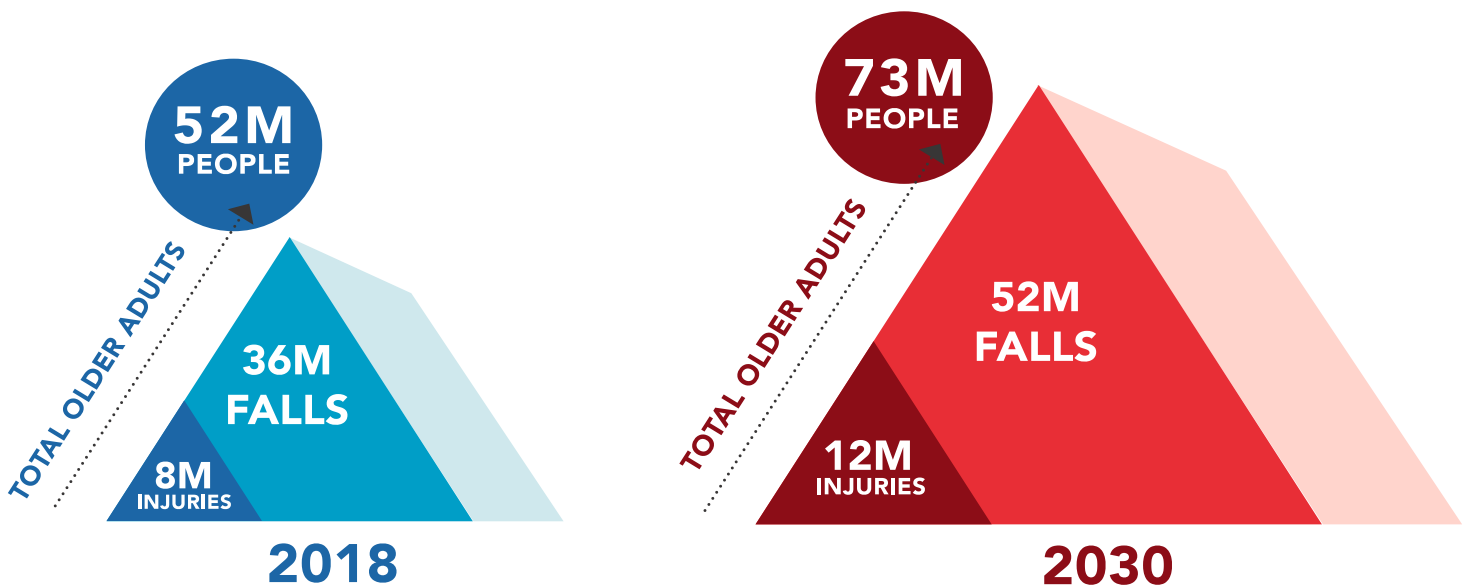
Falls can threaten the health and independence of older adults.

More than **8 million** falls required medical attention or limited activity for at least a day.

More than **32,000** older adults died from falls—that's 88 older adults every day.

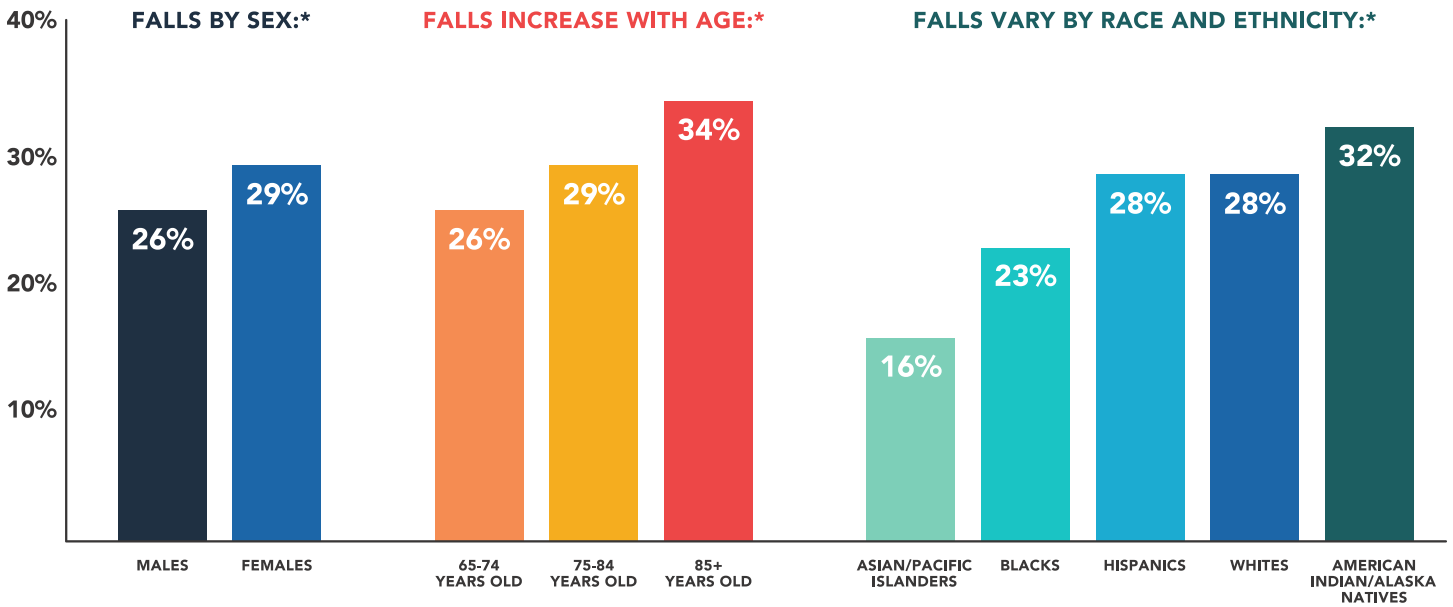
Falls—and the injuries and deaths they cause—are increasing.

Over 10,000 people in the United States turn 65 every day. The number of falls and fall injuries will increase as the population of older adults grows. Death rates from falls have increased about 30% in the last decade. Healthcare costs are also on the rise. In one year alone, medical costs for falls are about \$50 billion.



All adults, aged 65 and over, are at risk for a fall.

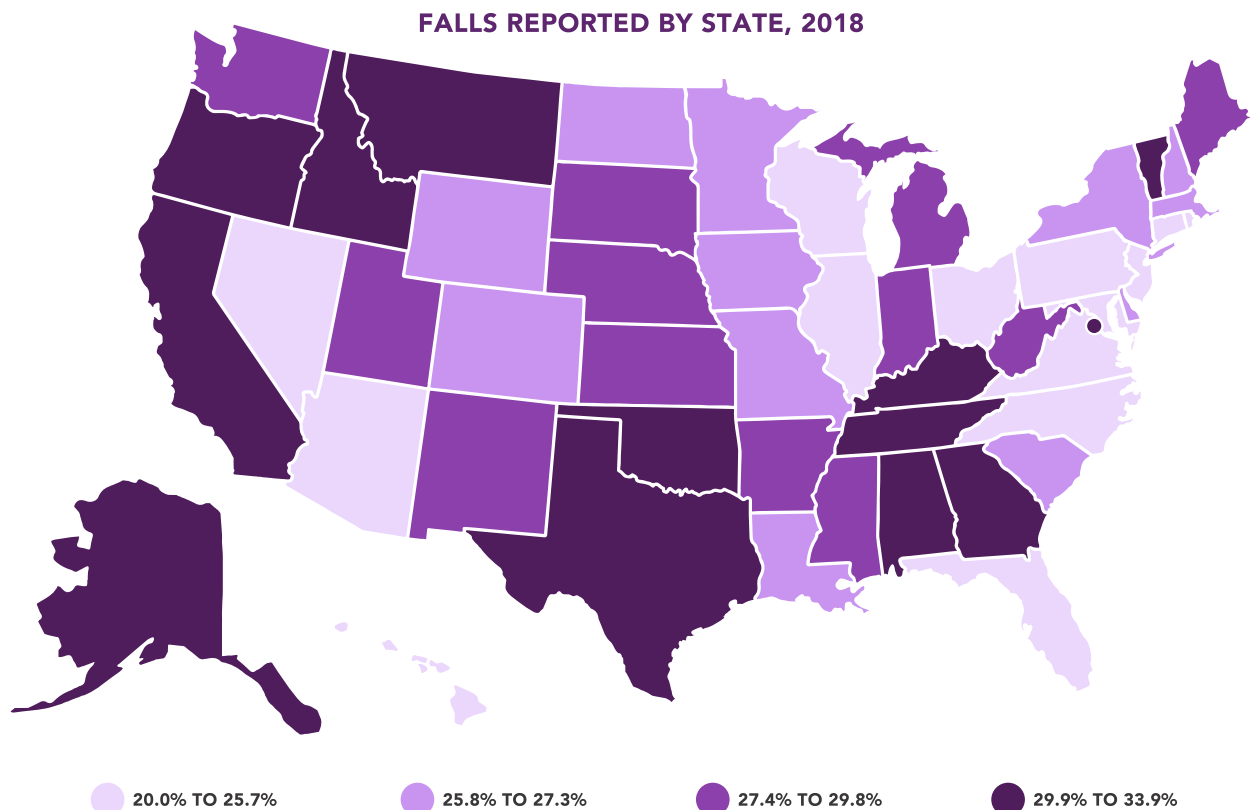
Older adults more likely to fall include females, those 85 and older, and American Indian and Alaska Natives.



*Percent of older adults who reported a fall

Falls vary by where you live.

While falls are common among people across the United States, there are some differences by state. Even in the state with the lowest percentage of falls, 1 out of 5 older adults reported a fall.



Falls are not a normal part of aging—they can be prevented.

Older adults, caregivers, and healthcare providers can work together to reduce the risk of falling and prevent devastating injuries.

Older Adults

If you're an older adult, there are simple things you can do to keep yourself from falling and stay independent longer.

Talk to your healthcare providers

- ▶ Tell your doctor if you have fallen, if you feel unsteady when standing or walking, or if you're afraid you might fall.
- ▶ Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medicines to see if any might increase your risk of falling.
- ▶ Ask your doctor about health conditions (like depression or osteoporosis) that can increase your risk for falling.
- ▶ Ask your doctor to check your eyes at least once a year and update lenses as needed.

Stay active

- ▶ Do exercises that make your legs stronger and improve your balance (like Tai Chi).

Make your home safer

- ▶ Get rid of trip hazards. Keep floors clutter free.
- ▶ Add grab bars in the bathroom.
- ▶ Have handrails and lights installed on all staircases.

Caregivers

As a caregiver, you can encourage your loved ones to take action to reduce their fall risk.

- ▶ Initiate a conversation with your loved one and their healthcare provider about fall risk and prevention.
- ▶ Encourage your loved one to participate in exercise programs that can help improve strength and balance (like Tai Chi).



Healthcare Providers

As a healthcare provider, you have an important role in caring for older adults and helping them prevent falls.

Use CDC's STEADI initiative in your practice

- ▶ CDC's STEADI (Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths, & Injuries) initiative offers a coordinated approach to implementing the American and British Geriatrics Societies' clinical practice guideline for fall prevention.

Less than half of older adults who fall talk to their doctor about it. Providers can proactively ask about falls.

STEADI consists of three core elements:

STEP 1:



Screen all patients age 65+ for fall risk.

STEP 2:



Assess a patient's modifiable risk factors and fall history.

STEP 3:



Intervene to reduce identified risk using effective strategies.



STEADI in practice



CDC funded health departments and health systems to integrate STEADI into their clinical practice.



Using STEADI led to positive practice changes, such as screening more older adults for fall risk, and meaningful outcomes such as lower hospitalizations due to falls.