

Increasing older adult participation in falls prevention programs that work



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Falls are the leading cause of death and injury among older adults in Iowa and the U.S. More than one-third of older adults fall each year in the country, and many of these falls result in injury, loss of independence and a fear of falling. Older adults are also at risk for home fires due to mental impairments and mobility issues that reduce reaction times. Proven programs to reduce falls and residential fires exist in Iowa, but community agencies face challenges in recruiting vulnerable older adults to participate in them. The University of Iowa Injury Prevention Research Center (UIIPRC) is developing a referral infrastructure to increase participation of older Iowans in falls prevention programs.

The UI IPRC is developing an infrastructure and protocols to refer older adults to falls prevention programs that are efficient, sustainable and effective.

We organized a stakeholder advisory group to develop the **RW-PLUS** program. Stakeholders include leaders in organizations related to falls prevention, older adult health, fire service, and transportation.

In 2-4 Eastern Iowa communities:

- ⇒ We will identify who is trained to deliver falls prevention programs, who has the ability to reach out to older adults, which organizations are currently delivering programs, and what barriers to falls prevention efforts exist.
- ⇒ We will study how relevant organizations in the communities interact to understand their roles in older adult falls prevention, health and well-being.
- ⇒ We will look for ways to increase access to community falls prevention programs, like finding organizations that provide transportation services.
- ⇒ We will develop referral protocols by involving organizations that serve older adult populations in their community.
- ⇒ We will train deliverers of RW (fire personnel), as well as instructors of falls prevention programs to support referrals and encourage participation in these programs.
- ⇒ We will test the referral infrastructure and evaluate its impact. This will help us understand how to better reach older adults in the community and increase participation of falls prevention programs in Iowa.

Our previous research evaluating the *Remembering When* program (see right) found that **older adults in Iowa want more information about falls prevention, such as exercises.**



Our previous research found older adults trust fire service personnel.

We are connecting with older adults through the *Remembering When* falls & fire prevention program delivered by local fire department personnel.

In the *Remembering When* (RW) program, fire personnel deliver falls & fire safety messages to older adults.

We will expand the RW program to RW-PLUS to include a **referral component** that links high risk older adults to falls prevention programs that work.

Programs that work:

- ⇒ Exercise programs that improve balance & strengthen legs
- ⇒ Home safety programs
- ⇒ Gradual withdrawal of psychotropic medications
- ⇒ Vitamin D supplementation
- ⇒ Individualized interventions
- ⇒ Programs endorsed by the CDC like: *Stepping On, Tai Chi, Matter of Balance, and Otago Exercise Program.*