

Document 1- Key Influencers to Ottawa Public Health's Fall Prevention Approach

Falls among adults 65 years and older is a complex community issue. Collective action across jurisdictions, caregivers and individuals is needed for preventing and reducing the severity of falls related injuries in Ottawa's older adults. Ottawa Public Health's (OPH's) effort to reduce falls among adults 65 years and older is driven by key influencers, including epidemiological results, requirements from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), a partnership with the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), the City of Ottawa's Older Adult Plan, as well as efforts to build on the success of previous OPH initiatives.

1. Older Adult Falls in Ottawa

Falls represent a tremendous health and economic burden to individuals, families and societies. In Ontario, falls across the lifespan were the leading cost of injuries in 2010, accounting for \$2.8 billion in spending (\$2.1 billion in direct health care and \$700 million in indirect costs).¹

In Ottawa, falls are the leading cause of injury-related emergency room visits and hospitalization. Every year, approximately one fifth of adults 65 years and older who live in private homes fall,² contributing to over 8200 visits to the emergency department, 2138 hospitalizations and approximately 90 deaths.^{3, 4, 5} This will continue to be a public health concern as Ottawa's population 65 years of age and over is the fastest growing age group and is predicted to grow from 14.6% in 2015 to 21.0% in 2030.⁶ Of particular concern are adults 85 years and older, a group that has significantly higher rates of falls.^{7, 8}

In 2012, OPH conducted an [Older Adults Falls Prevention Survey](#) to better understand the knowledge and behaviours of local older adults about falls. The results revealed that nine out of ten older adults perceive falling as a preventable health concern however; many are not taking the necessary steps to prevent falls. In general, older adults are not optimally using home safety devices, many are not aware that medications may increase their risk of falls, many need more vitamin D and calcium, and fewer than half of older adults are getting the right amount or the right type of physical activity.⁹

2. Ministry Of Health and Long Term Care (MOHLTC) Requirements

The Ontario Public Health Standards outline requirements for Ontario public health units. Requirements related to falls across the lifespan include: conducting epidemiological analysis of surveillance data, increasing public awareness of the prevention of falls and working with community partners using a comprehensive health promotion approach, to influence the development and implementation of healthy policies and programs, and the creation or enhancement of safe and supportive environments.

In 2011, the MOHLTC developed a Public Health Funding Accountability Agreement performance indicator requiring public health units to monitor the rate of injuries related to falls that result in emergency department visits in adults aged 65 years and older. The MOHLTC identifies the limitations of this population level indicator as it does not consider the severity of the injury (e.g. using the Injury Severity Score) or the regional differences that may be related to access to acute health care (e.g. emergency visits vs. walk-in clinics). In March 2015, OPH submitted a compliance report to the MOHLTC which showed a continued increase in the rate of falls for Ottawa residents 65 years and older. The compliance report, held on file and available through the BOH secretariat, demonstrates falls prevention for adults 65 years and older continues to be a public health issue of importance.

3. Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN)

In 2012, OPH joined the Champlain LHIN to develop and co-lead the Champlain Fall Prevention Strategy to effectively reduce falls and the impact of falls in older adults through a coordinated approach to falls prevention that builds on a community-wide, intersectoral collaboration. The group adopted a framework based on six activity pillars:

1. Public awareness & education
2. Detection, diagnosis & intervention
3. Provider best practice
4. Performance measurement
5. System integration & navigation
6. Advocacy

As one of the four public health units within the Champlain LHIN, OPH has been driving the public awareness and education pillar. As part of the LHIN fall strategy, OPH collaborated in the development of a tool called a clinical [algorithm](#) for primary care practitioners to assess falls. The algorithm is now being implemented in primary care settings across the region. Public health units also took the lead developing a falls prevention education module for community support workers which will be implemented region wide in 2016. Finally, OPH is working with the Community Care Access Centre and the Pinecrest Queensway Community Health Centre in mapping out falls prevention exercise programs for older adults with diverse needs and abilities.

4. The City Older Adult Plan (OAP)

Elements of OPH's falls prevention work have been incorporated within the City's proposed 2015-2018 Older Adult Plan. Specifically, OPH will work with Parks Recreation and Cultural Services to develop a range of fall prevention exercise programming for older adults and will work with all City departments to advance the Age-Friendly City. The goal of an Age-Friendly City is to transform into a city that is more responsive to the needs of older adults.

5. OPH Activities

In January 2014, the Board of Health received OPH's [Senior's Healthy Aging Strategy Update](#) which outlined OPH's commitment to focus on reducing falls and improving access to services for older adults through engaging primary care providers, increasing physical activity opportunities for older adults and working with municipal partners as part of the 2012-2014 Older Adult Plan. In 2014-2015, OPH continued to collaborate with municipal partners, the Council on Aging, the Regional Geriatric Advisory Committee, Community Health and Resource Centres, the Champlain LHIN, Community Care Access Centre, Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre, retirement homes, and Aging in Place buildings resulting in the following:

Increasing access to fall prevention programming and services

- OPH was awarded the contract by Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre to provide free strength and balance exercise classes for adults 65 years and older. This funding was made possible by the Champlain LHIN. In collaboration with the City's Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department, OPH developed a 12 week fall prevention progressive exercise and education program, *Better Strength Better Balance/En force en équilibre (BSBB/EFEE)*. Since September 2014, more than 2300 older adults have participated in the program. Program evaluation results show an increase in participants' self reported strength and balance, intention to continue to exercise, a reduced fear of falling as well as reports of increased social support.
- In 2015, OPH coordinated with the Canadian Council of the Blind's Mobile Eye Clinic to provide comprehensive Ontario Health Insurance Plan covered eye exams to Aging in Place buildings in Ottawa. Having an annual eye exam is a key action older adults can take to reduce their risk of falling. This initiative reached over 100 vulnerable older adults who otherwise would not have received services. Results showed the majority had not been to an optometrist in several years, two-thirds had eye conditions that required follow-up such as cataracts and macular degeneration and approximately 50 percent needed new prescriptions.

Raising awareness of behaviours that reduce fall risk

- In 2014, OPH launched its fall prevention public awareness campaign *Taking Care of My Health* which profiled the primary behaviours that would reduce falls risks. Key messages of the campaign included the importance of safe environments, strength and balance exercises, calcium rich foods and vitamin D supplementation, annual check-up (physical exam, eye exam and medication check) and reporting falls to health professionals.

Outreach for fall prevention education and early identification

- OPH provided fall prevention health education sessions to older adults in community settings such as senior centres, faith groups, libraries, older adult apartments and in vulnerable settings such as Ottawa Community Housing. Over 350 fall prevention health education sessions took place from October 2014 to June 2015.
- Early in 2014, OPH staff assessed risk of falling of older adults through community fall prevention screening clinics. The clinics were discontinued when a self screening tool (the Staying Independent Checklist/Préserver votre autonomie) became available for older adults and caregivers to use to assess falls risk factors.
- OPH worked with OC Transpo to include fall prevention key messages in the travel training resource for older adults.

Capacity building

- OPH worked with older adult service providers including retirement homes and senior centres to provide fall prevention education and awareness. More than 90 percent of service providers reached intend to include fall prevention activities in their practice.

Policy development

- OPH worked with Ottawa Community Housing and developed a fall prevention checklist assessing public areas in apartment buildings to reduce falls in older adults. Ottawa Community Housing will be piloting the checklist in its buildings. The checklist was also shared with the City of Ottawa's Infrastructure Services Department for consideration in retrofits and upgrades to municipal facilities as part of the proposed 2015-2018 Older Adult Plan.

Overall, the need to address falls in Ottawa with adults 65 years and older remain to be a priority for OPH and with existing and continued support from City and community partners, OPH is moving forward a renewed Fall Prevention Approach.

References

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