Falls among Arizona Residents 65 Years and Older

Magnitude of the problem
Unintentional falls are a public health problem that impacts the lives of thousands of Arizona residents each year. In 2005, Arizona ranked 5th in the nation for unintentional fall-related deaths among adults ages 65 years and older. Between 2001 and 2005, the age-adjusted death rate of unintentional falls among older adults increased from 59.5 deaths per 100,000 residents to 76.1 deaths per 100,000 residents. This represents a 28 percent increase in the rate of deaths over five years.

In 2007, falls accounted for 64 percent of unintentional injury deaths among older adult residents of Arizona (n=617). Additionally, there were 8,337 inpatient hospitalizations and 22,442 emergency department visits due to unintentional fall-related injuries among older adult residents of Arizona. Hospitalizations and emergency department visits do not include data from federal or tribal hospitals (Indian Health Services and the Veterans Administration).

Cost of unintentional falls
For the 8,337 hospitalizations due to unintentional falls among older adults:
- The average length of stay was 4.8 days; the longest stay was 50 days.
- The average charge per hospitalization was $35,809.
- Total hospitalization charges were more than $298 million (does not include costs related to physician care, rehabilitation, or long-term disability).
- 89 percent of these hospitalizations were paid for by Medicare (n=7,390).
- 52 percent were discharged to skilled nursing facilities (n=4,349).

Who is at risk?
Established risk factors for fall-related injury include:
- advanced age
- physical frailty
- chronic diseases
- poor lower body strength
- difficulty climbing stairs
- difficulty rising from chairs
- medications (number & type)
- safety hazards in home
- frequent dizziness
- history of falls
- poor vision
- poor balance

What will reduce the risk of unintentional falls?
Many falls are preventable. The most effective way to prevent unintentional falls among older adults is a comprehensive approach that includes all of the following:
- Maintain a regular exercise program to increase strength, balance, and coordination.
- Regularly review medications with a healthcare provider.
- Have yearly eye exams.
- Modify home environments to reduce hazards such as slippery floors and poor lighting.

Please visit the Healthy Aging Arizona website at http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/healthyagingarizona/index.htm