Falls among Maricopa County 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 age 65 years and older. Between 2000 and 2007, the death rate for falls among older Maricopa County adults increased from 49.6 deaths per 100,000 residents to 101.2 deaths per 100,000 residents. This represents a 104 percent increase in the rate of deaths over eight years.

Cost of unintentional falls:
For the 4,681 hospitalizations due to unintentional falls among older adult residents of Maricopa County:
- The average length of stay was 4.8 days; the longest stay was 49 days.
- The average charge per hospitalization to a Maricopa County resident was $39,245; this is 25% higher than the average cost per hospitalization for residents from the remainder of the state.
- Total hospitalization charges were more than $183 million (does not include costs related to physician care, rehabilitation, or long-term disability).
- 91 percent of these hospitalizations were paid for by Medicare (n=4,256).
- 58 percent were discharged to skilled nursing facilities (n=2,730).

Who is at risk?
Established risk factors 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 can be done to reduce the risk of unintentional falls?
Many falls are preventable. The most effective way to prevent 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