

Preventing Falls Together Coalition Projects

The following are summaries of some of the exciting projects developed and implemented by our Preventing Falls Together coalitions in Nova Scotia. Some variations of these projects have been implemented by more than one coalition. The projects can be adapted for use in your communities. Suggestions for ways to you can use these in your communities follows each group of projects. But don't feel limited by these ideas. Be creative! Each coalition has a unique understanding of their community what might work best.

When developing strategies, and thus projects to meet your goals, remember to use a population health approach, consider which of the determinants of health will be impacted, include an action or community change component, and evaluate your efforts.

FALL PROOFING

Falls Safety in the Community: Coalition members identified and photographed cracks in sidewalks, steps without railings, steep unmarked curbs and other potential fall hazards. The photographs became the illustrations for presentations to three town councils. The presentations were well received, with a number of questions asked and a verbal commitment of support provided. Follow up included a letter from the Lunenburg Town Council describing the actions taken to reduce the risk of falling in the town as well as improvements noted in both of the other two towns. The Bridgewater Town Council meetings were videotaped and played on the local cable channel, providing additional exposure to the issues presented. (Lunenburg Queens Falls Prevention Association)

How Safe is Your Seniors' Club?: The Inverness and Victoria Counties Coalition decided to add an action component to their information sessions. A presentation explaining the project was given at the meeting of the Seniors' Council. Clubs were given the opportunity to have a presentation on falls prevention at their regular meeting and also participate in a falls risk assessment of their club or meeting location. A coalition member together with a member of the club will, just before a club meeting, together spend about 20 minutes completing a checklist (Section 5, Resource #6) to assess the space for falls hazards. The coalition member then gives a presentation on falls prevention to the club's members that includes an overview of the identified falls



risks in the club and some suggestions for improvements. A copy of the checklist is sent to the club and the coalition keeps a copy. Clubs are contacted by the coalition 3 months later to discuss any improvements made to reduce the risk of falls in the seniors' club. (Cape Breton Inverness and Victoria Counties Preventing Falls Together Coalition)

Working with Community Health Boards: Community Health Boards grant funding to community groups to conduct projects. Often times these projects take place at church and community halls and other public places. A coalition member attended a meeting of the Council of Community Health Board Chairs and presented the idea of connecting falls prevention with their grant programs. Each recipient would be asked to assess the space at which their project would take place. The Choose A Fall Safe Meeting Space checklist (Section 5 Resource #5) will be distributed with funding cheques, completed for the sites at which community projects take place, and returned to the Community Health Board. It was recommended that the Community Health Boards also assess their meeting spaces. (Cape Breton Regional Municipality and Inverness and Victoria Counties Preventing Falls Together Coalitions)

In Your Community

- Use the checklists in Section 5 of this Tool Kit to identify falls hazards.
- Identify, photograph and record falls hazards in your community. Make a presentation to your municipal council on the impact of falls on seniors and requesting the reduction of risks in the town.
- Fall proof the spaces at which you meet.
- Advocate for safer public events by requesting that the use of electrical cords in walkways be minimized and at fairs and festivals there be ample seating for seniors and that pathways be free of clutter with lots of room to walk safely.

PHYSICAL FITNESS

Senior Friendly Trails: Coalition members took up the Mayor's Challenge – an annual initiative to encourage citizens to become physically active. They approached Municipal Recreation Services and worked with staff to add a senior friendly component when assessing the trails to evaluate their level of difficulty. This was a great example of the population health approach as a coalition worked with partners to achieve a goal– a reminder that we don't have to do all the hands-on work ourselves. Further plans include signage and a brochure guide to the trails. (Colchester–East Hants Coalition)



Exercise Programs: Coalitions have been instrumental in making exercise programs available to seniors. The Lunenburg Queen's Falls Prevention association spearheaded the establishment of aqua-fit classes. The Cape Breton coalition in Inverness County received funding from the Community Health Board to offer Tai Chi classes in several rural communities. The Guysborough County coalition members in Isaac's Harbour began an exercise group that meets twice a week to exercise together and to keep motivated. The members of the Shamrock Seniors Club in Guysborough learned of the falls preventing benefits of exercise at the Tool Kit workshop. They made sure an exercise program continued at their club even though it was only supposed last a few weeks. They recently received funding to purchase a treadmill. These are only a few of the many actions undertaken by Preventing Falls Together Coalitions to encourage and provide opportunities for physical fitness for seniors.

In Your Community

- Approach recreation departments and facilities to request exercise classes and opportunities for seniors.
- Apply to Community Health Boards for funding initiate seniors exercise classes or Tai Chi in your community.
- Promote to the public the message that exercise can help prevent injuries from falling and help seniors keep their independence.
- Start a seniors walking group outdoors, in a mall, or at a recreation centre.
- Ask fitness instructors to incorporate falls prevention messages in their classes and to join the coalition.

WORKING WITH YOUTH

Keeping Our Grandparents Safe: Involving youth in preventing falls among seniors encourages healthy lifestyles from a young age and promotes keeping our homes and communities safe for all ages. Grade three students at Antigonish Educational Centre enjoyed an interactive presentation by an occupational therapist and a physiotherapist on the impact of falls on seniors. They discussed what the children could do to prevent falls and their responsibilities to help each other and the seniors in their lives stay safe. The Hazardous House activity (Section 5, Resource# 17) was used and enthusiastically received. The school staff was extremely positive about the presentations and requested more be completed in the future. As a result, the edges of the stairs at the school were marked with brightly contrasting paint to make them safer for students and visitors. (Antigonish County Preventing Falls Together Coalition)



The Hazardous House: Information and student activity suggestions were provided to teachers in local elementary schools with the co-operation of the school board. The Hazardous House activity sheet and a Teacher's Resource which the coalition members developed (Section 5 Resource #19) were distributed to grade four teachers. Each teacher decided how to use the activity with their class. (Cape Breton Regional Municipality and Cape Breton Inverness and Victoria Counties Preventing Falls Together Coalitions)

Snow Shoveling Prevents Falls!: Seniors feared falling on snow and ice and caregivers experienced difficulty getting into the homes of seniors. The junior boy's basketball team needed money to attend clinics and away games. A new program was developed to meet the needs of the seniors and the youth. A snow shoveling program was advertised to seniors and the local newspaper published a story about it. The rates were extremely reasonable and the youth were not involved in collecting the money. Often the boys took time to clear off cars and steps as well as the driveway. The program was well received by the seniors and many other communities are looking to set up a similar arrangement with their schools. (Digby and Area Preventing Falls Together Coalition)

In Your Community

- Presentations at schools are a great way to encourage youth to become involved in falls prevention. If you do not have the human resources to visit the schools or would like to reach a greater number of children consider approaching the school board to request the incorporation of falls prevention in the curriculum using the Hazardous House activity.
- Many young people belong to groups that encourage contributing to the community such as Girl Guides and Scouts, youth groups, and sports teams to name only a few. Offer to make a presentation, provide literature, or help them develop a community project around falls prevention.
- Young people can complete falls risks checklists (found in Section ? of this Tool Kit) of the places they meet and of their neighborhoods. They could work with the coalition to identify, photograph and record falls hazards in the neighborhood and prepare a presentation to the municipal council.
- Snow shoveling and raking leaves are important falls prevention activities youth can complete. These activities can be part of their community service and volunteer requirements.



IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

A *Professional Development Workshop on falls* was developed for delivery to occupational therapists and physiotherapists to increase their awareness of falls risks so they in turn could provide the proper education, interventions and/or referrals to their clients. A PowerPoint presentation was adapted from resources found in the Tool Kit. It included information on the causes and impacts of falls along with prevention suggestions. Information on diet, calcium and vitamin D, drug interactions, and exercise was used along with information on fall proofing and safe exercises. (Annapolis-Kings Coalition)

Integrating Falls Prevention in Members' Organizations: In addition to completing projects in the community as a coalition, one of the aims of the Preventing Falls Together program is to integrate falls prevention into the everyday activities, policies, and procedures of the organizations of our members. This was accomplished by members of the Halifax Regional Municipality Preventing Falls Together Coalition in particular and by other coalition members across the province by hosting information sessions for their clients and staff; including falls prevention articles and tips in newsletters; adding falls prevention to topics addressed by safety committees; modifying and creating new policies; developing public service announcements; and conducting falls risks checks of their offices and buildings to name a few examples. (Halifax Regional Municipality Coalition and various coalition member organizations throughout NS)

In Your Community

- Use the Tool Kit to develop a presentation for colleagues, volunteers and clients.
- Think of ways you can improve your site, the services you provide, or your policies and procedures to make your organization more senior friendly.
- Add falls prevention tips in your newsletter.
- Use the checklists in Section 5 to conduct a falls risk assessment of your site.

WORKING WITH BUSINESSES

Seating for Seniors: The lack of seating in retail stores and businesses poses a falls risk for seniors. The risk of falling is reduced if seniors have the opportunity to rest and gather their belongings prior to exiting the store. Coalition members identified local businesses and stores that were lacking seating. They then approached the business



managers in person and provided a verbal overview of the impact of falls on seniors and the role of the coalition in the community. A letter was presented outlining all of the above and the request for seating. Coalition members periodically checked in to determine if any changes had been made. Those that added seating were presented with a letter of thanks. (Guysborough County and Antigonish County Preventing Falls Together Coalitions)

Stair Safety: Coalition members recognized that falls occur on stairs and that there are ways to make stairs safer for seniors. Members purchased brightly coloured paint, made templates and painted the edges of stairs of buildings previously identified and after obtaining permission. One organization installed no slip sheeting on the surface of their exterior stairs. (Guysborough County Preventing Falls Together Coalition)

In Your Community

- Inform business owners and managers of falls hazards in and around their businesses. Ask them to be corrected and follow up with a thank you card when completed.
- Provide information kits to businesses or speak at the Chamber of Commerce or service club meetings.
- Ask retail stores to put heavy items on lower shelves and to keep the aisles free of merchandise.
- Request that businesses check their parking lots to make sure they are level, free of holes, and are cleared of snow.
- Organize a community falls prevention day and with the help of volunteers make the "down town" area more senior friendly by painting the edges of stairs, removing mats, repairing railings, and conducting checks of the neighborhood and parking areas.

EDUCATION and AWARENESS

Physicians Can Prevent Falls: Family doctors are critical recipients of information on falls prevention. They are the people prescribing medications, staying in contact with the patient, and first responders in some situations. Physicians provide follow-up for arthritis and other issues affecting the aging population and having a possible impact on accidental falls in the community. They are also seen as being an excellent and credible provider of health/safety education. An information kit was developed that included a letter of introduction, information about the coalition and the impact of falls on seniors,



and resource materials regarding falls prevention. The kits were hand delivered to 66 physicians. This approach is also being considered for distribution to community pharmacists. (Colchester–East Hants Preventing Falls Together Coalition)

Speakers Bureau: Coalition members formed a speakers bureau to offer presentations to community groups and organizations. Seven members of the coalition volunteered and one member agreed to coordinate their activities. Coalition members developed a PowerPoint presentation with information from the Tool Kit. This presentation was made available to all the coalitions in Nova Scotia. A coalition member approached Conserve NS and arranged for a donation of LED night lights to be distributed to those who participated in a falls prevention presentation. More than 1,000 nightlights have been distributed across the province.

Most coalitions have at least one member who is willing to give presentations to seniors clubs, community groups, service clubs, church groups and at senior serving organizations. This is a way to increase awareness and recruit new members to your coalition. (Halifax Regional Municipality Preventing Falls Together Coalition)

Safety Aids Displays: The coalition partnered with a local pharmacy to host an information event at the store on their monthly Seniors Day. The focus was encouraging the proper use of safety aids and assistive devices to prevent falls among seniors. The event was advertised in advance. The coalition used their display board and handouts from the toolkit. The pharmacy provided a number of different types of aids for the display including bath seats, ICERS, non-slip bath mats, hip protectors and raised toilet seats. An occupational therapist was present to discuss and demonstrate proper usage of the equipment. (Antigonish County Preventing Falls Together Coalition)

“Putting Your Best Your Foot Forward”: A booklet comprised of information relevant to seniors such as falls prevention, the Vial of Life, 911, and community resources was developed. The 39 page booklet is distributed to seniors at presentations given by the coalition and seniors. The Tool Kit and various booklets/pamphlets from Health Canada were used as sources of information, along with local knowledge on best practices. (West Hants-Cobequid Preventing Falls Together Coalition)



In Your Community

- You can develop presentations on a number of different topics relating to falls prevention. Most groups only want a guest speaker for 10 to 20 minutes so you can stick to one message. Topics could be: falls prevention in the home, falls prevention in the community, using safety or assistive devices, the benefit of physical activity and a balanced diet, to name a few. Section 4 of this Tool Kit will be useful in your planning.
- Consider reaching those people who are unable to get out to a public event by asking your community cable television station to interview coalition members and plan a show around falls prevention.
- Attend and set up a falls prevention display at health fairs, seniors games, concerts festivals and other events where there are bound to be lots of seniors.
- Contact public Health and the VON and arrange to have displays at the flu clinics in the fall. Provide handouts and checklists from Section 5.
- Remember: Education is an essential component that must be integrated in to falls prevention initiatives, but education alone does little to reduce the risk of injury. Education can empower seniors to take action that will reduce the risk of falls and fall related injuries. (adapted from Preventing Fall-Related Injuries Among Older Nova Scotians: A Strategic Framework, page 90) So try to add an action component to your presentations.

WORKSHOPS

Don't Fiddle with Falls was the theme of two falls awareness and prevention workshops in Cape Breton. The session began with local musicians who entertained while the public visited booths that focused on falls prevention, bone health, assistive devices and safety aids, while enjoying calcium rich smoothies. An overview of the impact and causes of falls and prevention tips set the stage. An occupational therapist demonstrated a number of safety aids including grabs bars, walkers, canes, and bath seats. A physiotherapist discussed the benefits of physical activity and demonstrated a number of exercises. A representative of the Housing Division of the Department of Community Services discussed their programs to assist seniors in making their homes safer. One of the events also included a presentation on proper footwear and



a walk outdoors to encourage physical fitness. (Cape Breton Regional Municipality and Inverness and Victoria Counties Preventing Falls Together Coalitions)

Assessing Health At Home was a project led by the Pictou County VON that brought nearly 100 seniors together for a day of fun, food, information, and exercise. The day began with a presentation on the impact of falls and prevention strategies. This was followed by the opportunity to visit the booths representing services available in the community to seniors. A nutritious lunch was provided followed by chair exercises and lots of prizes were given away. One the reasons for the success of this event was the recognition of the Determinants of Health and overcoming barriers to participation by providing transportation, a nutritious lunch, and holding it at a site accessible to all at no cost to the senior. (Pictou County Preventing Falls Together Coalition)

In Your Community

- Plan a falls prevention workshop in your community. It can be an all day event or just an hour. Think about what will work best in your community. The presenters can be coalition members and /or health professionals.

USING TECHNOLOGY

Using Technology to Conquer Geographical Challenges: Coalitions members often travel an hour or even longer to come together for meetings. During the winter months this can be a dangerous, and often meetings are cancelled due to poor driving conditions. One coalition successfully used teleconferencing technology available through the District Health Authority to hold meetings and members had to drive only a short distance to one of five sites. This is a new way of conducting business while ensuring the safety and comfort of coalition members. More coalitions will be using this approach in the future. (Annapolis Kings Coalition)

Falls on the 'Net: The coalition partnered with the Seniors Safety Association of Hants County to launch a new website devoted to safety for seniors. One section of the site is dedicated to falls prevention. There is also a resource section that includes links to other relevant sites including Preventing Falls Together. Visit their site at www.seniorsafetyprogram.ca

(West Hants- Cobequid Preventing Falls Together Coalition)



In Your Community

- Find out what types of technology are available in your community and use it to “meet” during the winter months.
- Hold a workshop or educational session using teleconferencing technology that would be accessible to people in a number of communities and who would therefore not require transportation to attend.
- Post falls prevention tips on your organization’s website and make links to other sites like the one above or www.preventingfallstogether.ca
- Partner with other community organizations or businesses to have falls prevention tips on their websites.

PLACES OF WORSHIP

Places of Worship Project: Two years in a row (Fall 2005 and 2006) coalitions around the province reached seniors with a falls prevention message through their place of worship. Coalition members distributed packages that included Fall Proof Your Place of Worship checklists (Section 5 Resource #7), a letter to the clergy, copies of an insert for their bulletins (more than 50,000 distributed) with general information about falls and falls prevention, and an evaluation questionnaire. It is estimated that more than 200 places of worship participated over the two years, and many small changes were made to the buildings as a result. (See example below.)

Making Our Church Safe: After participating in the Places of Worship initiative, church and coalition members wanted to make their churches a safer. Some of the improvements made in churches across the province included installing grab bars, stair railings and double doors; building new steps; painting the edges of indoor and outdoor stairs; removing or securing mats; installing emergency lighting and other general repairs. (Digby and Area Preventing Falls Together Coalition and members of various coalitions and churches in Nova Scotia)

In Your Community

- Ask to have falls prevention tips added to the bulletins.
- Conduct a Fall Proof Your Place of Worship checklist (Section 5 Resource #7) at your place of worship and then organize volunteers for a fall proofing day when the hazards are fixed or improved.
- Give a presentation to faith based community groups and encourage them fall proof their place of worship.

