

**Home Safety Council**  
**To The**  
**Senate Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,**  
**Education and Related Agencies**  
**On**  
**FY 2010 Appropriations**  
**For The**  
**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
**National Center for Injury Prevention and Control**  
**May 21, 2009**

**Introduction**

Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Cochran, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the FY 2010 Appropriations for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC).

I am Patricia Adkins, chief operating officer and director of public policy for the Home Safety Council which is located in Washington, DC.

**About the Home Safety Council**

The mission of the Home Safety Council (HSC) is to help prevent and reduce the nearly 20,000 deaths and 21 million medical visits each year from such hazards as falls, poisoning, fires and burns, choking and suffocation, and drowning. Through national programs, partnerships and the support of volunteers, HSC educates people of all ages to help keep them safer in and around their homes.

Our vision for our nation is safer homes that provide the opportunity for all individuals to lead healthy, active, and fulfilling lives.

**Increased Funding for CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control**

CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) has the mission of preventing injuries and violence, and reducing their consequences. It strives to help every American live his or her life to its fullest potential. Funds are utilized by NCIPC for intramural and extramural research and in assisting state and local health agencies in implementing injury prevention programs.

The Home Safety Council and a coalition of 30 like-minded nonprofit organizations are requesting an increase of \$10 million to the "Unintentional Injury Prevention" account to begin to comprehensively address the large-scale growth of older adult falls.

Ultimately, success in reducing the number and severity of older adult falls will be reached through partnerships with federal, state, and local agencies along with the cooperation of many non-governmental organizations.

## **Why Injury Prevention is a Critical Element of Health Care Reform**

In 1998, the National Academy of Sciences stated - "Injury is probably the most under-recognized public health threat facing the nation today."

Each year, injuries resulting from a wide variety of physical and emotional causes – motor vehicle crashes, sports trauma, violence, poisoning, fires and falls – keep millions of children and adults from achieving their goals and making the most of their talents and abilities.

This is what we know:

- Nationally and in every state in the United States, injuries are the leading cause of death in the first 44 years of a person's life.
- In a single year, more than 50 million injuries required medical attention, with an estimated total lifetime cost of \$406 billion.
- This total lifetime cost includes \$80 billion in medical care costs and \$326 billion in productivity losses, including lost wages and benefits and the inability to perform normal household functions.

These three statistics clearly show the consequences of injuries and its major burden on the health care system.

Fortunately, injury research has proven that there are steps that can be taken to prevent injuries and increase the likelihood for full recovery when they do occur. By incorporating these strategies into our communities and everyday activities, we can help to ensure that Americans remain healthy and live their lives to the fullest potential.

### **Protecting Older Adults from Injury**

We all want a society where people, including our older citizens, can live healthy and productive lives. A key component of achieving this is helping older adults avoid injuries. There are actions we can take to prevent injuries and premature death to our parents, grandparents, and friends. Some of the most important include preventing older adults from falling and being injured in fires or motor vehicle crashes.

One of the injuries affecting the quality of life for older adults is falls. Falls are the leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries for those 65 and older. Each year, 1.8 million older adults are treated in emergency departments. Every day, 5,000 adults 65 and older are hospitalized due to fall-related injuries, and every 35 minutes, an older adult dies from a fall-related injury.

We know one of the greatest financial challenges facing the U.S. Government, its citizens, and their employers is the rising cost of health care services needed by older Americans. CDC reports that \$80.2 billion is spent annually for medical treatment of injuries, of which fully \$19.2 billion (\$12 billion for hospitalization, \$4 billion for emergency department visits, and \$3 billion for outpatient care) is for treating older adults injured by falls. That's almost one-quarter of all health care expenses for injuries each year spent on older adult falls and the majority of these expenses are paid by CMS through Medicare. If we cannot stem this rate of increase, it is projected that the direct treatment costs will reach \$54.9 billion annually in 2020, at which time the cost to Medicare would be \$32.4 billion.

While falls are a threat to the health and independence of older adults and can significantly limit their ability to remain self-sufficient, the opportunity to reduce falls among older adults has never been better. Today there are proven interventions and strategies that can reduce falls and in turn help older adults live better and longer. Studies show that prescription medications have an effect on balance. A medication review and adjustment is a simple, cost-effective way to help prevent a fall. Additionally, older adults who actively participate in physical exercise and

receive vision exams are at a lower risk for falling. These evidence-based interventions can help save health care costs and greatly improve the lives of older adults. The costs are small compared to the potential for savings. **For every \$1 invested in a comprehensive falls prevention program for an older adult, it returns close to a \$9 benefit to society.**

### **How Congress Can Help**

Congress took a major step forward in preventing older adult falls with passage of the *Safety of Seniors Act of 2007* (S.845 and P.L. 110-202) which authorized increased research, education, and demonstration projects. Further evidence of support included the passage of S. Res. 674 and the introduction of H. Res. 1478 for the first *National Falls Prevention Awareness Day* in September 2008. For the good intentions of Congress to bear fruit, an appropriation of \$10 million is needed for FY2010 for CDC's Injury Center.

The Injury Center's funding in this area is severely inadequate to address the scale of human suffering and the impact of falls on our health care system. Additional funding would enable the Injury Center to expand research, evaluation of demonstrations, public education, professional education, and policy analysis. At present, CDC can only allocate **\$2 million per year to address a problem costing \$19.2 billion a year.** The benefits of increased funding would be enormous, vastly improving the quality of life for those 65 and older and greatly reducing health care costs for falls and related disabilities.

Increased funding for older adult falls prevention efforts is supported by a broad-based coalition of nonprofit organizations and a growing number of state falls prevention coalitions that are dedicated to improving the safety and health of older Americans.

### **CDC Activity in Falls Prevention among Older Adults**

If the CDC Injury Center's falls prevention budget is increased by \$10 million, the next steps would be to:

1. Develop additional program demonstrations to test and replicate the most cost effective interventions to reduce the risk of falls;
2. Undertake additional extramural research into the causes of falls; and
3. Develop more public education programs to raise awareness about falls and what individuals, family members, professionals, non-profit organizations, and the private sector can do to reduce them.

On behalf of the Home Safety Council and our supporting organizations, thank you for the opportunity to share our FY 2010 Appropriations request for the CDC Injury Center on the very costly, but often preventable problem of falls among older adults.

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