

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 6, 2009

Dear Colleague:

I ask you to sign the attached letter to encourage the Senate Appropriations Committee to allocate \$10 million through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) "Unintentional Injury and Prevention" account to allow the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC) to comprehensively address the widespread, expensive, yet preventable incidence of older adult falls.

CDC reports the mortality rate from falls among older Americans has increased by an alarming 39% between 1999 and 2005. Each year, one in three older Americans falls and about 30% of those who fall require medical treatment. In 2005, approximately 1.8 million older adults were treated in emergency departments for nonfatal injuries from falls, more than 433,000 of these patients were hospitalized, and nearly 16,000 died.

The cost of doing nothing is staggering. CDC reports that \$19.2 billion is spent annually on treating older adults for the effects of falls: \$12 billion for hospitalization, \$4 billion for emergency department visits, and \$3 billion for outpatient care. If we cannot stem this rate of increase, it is projected that direct treatment costs will reach \$54.9 billion annually in 2020, at which time the cost to Medicare would be \$32.4 billion.

As the nation's elderly population dramatically increases, we must act responsibly on their behalf. Existing pilot programs offer promising solutions. Additional federal resources will become a magnet for supplementary state, private, and foundation funding to conduct research, evaluate demonstrations, offer public education, and educate health professionals. Interventions include comprehensive clinical assessments, exercise programs to improve balance and strength, management of medications, correction of vision, and reduction of home hazards.

Your support for this cause is backed by the Falls Free Coalition Advocacy Work Group, including leading experts representing the aging community, public health professions, and safety experts, such as the Home Safety Council, the National Council on Aging, the National Safety Council, the State and Territorial Injury Prevention Directors Association, the American Occupational Therapy Association and the American Physical Therapy Association. While Congress took a major step forward in preventing older adult falls with passage of the *Safety of Seniors Act of 2007* the enactment was after the House and Senate mark-ups of the FY 2009 Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations bills.

Older adult falls are widespread, very costly, and often preventable. Only \$2 million was spent through the CDC in FY 2010 on older adult falls prevention to address a \$19.2 billion and growing problem. We need to invest more to prevent older adult falls. I encourage you to sign this letter and help us prioritize older adult fall prevention. The deadline to sign on is **Tuesday, May 12, 2009**. For more information, please contact contact Mona Shah at 4-4654, or mona_shah@help.senate.gov

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator