

National Falls Prevention Initiatives include B.C. Communities

Health Canada and Veterans Affairs Canada have established a community-based health promotion initiative to help identify effective strategies for preventing falls in the community among veterans and seniors. In 2000, Veterans Affairs Canada committed \$10 million to be allocated over a four-year period for this health promotion initiative. The goal is to pilot approved projects in the regions and nationally and projects are to be completed by March of 2004.

- The initiative recognizes that falls among the elderly have multiple facets that need to be addressed with strategies promoting the involvement of a diversity of sectors and players, including seniors and veterans themselves. The initiative provides funding to sustainable community-based projects aimed at enhancing the independence and quality of life of community-dwelling veterans and seniors by preventing falls and reducing their severity. Projects that were funded demonstrated active involvement by seniors and veterans, such as using participants as peer volunteers who are trained to help deliver the program to other seniors.

Five community-based projects are currently being funded in British Columbia. Highlights of the programs include:

- **Vernon:** This project is coordinated by the Social Planning Council for the North Okanagan, and will include veterans and local seniors, along with the regional health authority, municipal building and engineering departments, health providers and emergency services. Interested seniors will be trained as peer volunteers to increase awareness among seniors. Pharmacists and nurses will support a medication review. See their Web site at: <http://www.spcno.bc.ca/seniors/falls>
- **Prince George Region:** The Northern Health Authority will coordinate a project that focuses on increasing awareness about fall risks among seniors and reducing environmental hazards in five northern communities. The multi-dimensional program, which involves veterans and seniors in the project design and delivery, will include a system for reporting and reducing environmental hazards in public places.
- **Burnaby/Ridge Meadows:** Delivered by the Fraser North Health Service, the project will deliver a falls risk reduction program to veterans and seniors living in the two communities, through seniors' centers, housing complexes and outreach programs. Key program components include: educational workshops; forums to increase awareness and knowledge of risk factors, fall hazards and prevention strategies; fall risk assessments and the subsequent development of individualized fall reduction programs for participants; and peer and community support for interventions such as exercise programs and environmental changes. A social marketing/public awareness campaign will be conducted to complement and reinforce the overall strategy and encourage seniors to participate.

- **Vancouver:** Located at the 411 Seniors Centre Society in central Vancouver, the project is coordinated by a multi-stakeholder committee including representation from veterans, seniors' organizations, city social planning departments, community health professionals and ethno-cultural representatives. The project goal is to reduce fall risks in seniors and veterans in Vancouver by providing them with fall prevention information and support in order to enable them to make changes in personal health practices that contribute to falls. Senior and veteran volunteers are being recruited and trained to offer the program. Special efforts will be directed to adapting materials and outreach strategies to ensure the participation of Chinese and Punjabi speaking seniors.
- **Victoria:** Sponsored by the Vancouver Island Health Authority, the project goals are: to reduce falls among seniors and veterans through a community development process and to develop, test, and share a falls prevention model that may be replicated in various settings and jurisdictions. The program will be developed and tested in seniors' housing complexes and veterans' clubs/day centers. Seniors will be trained to deliver the strategy, but physiotherapists, occupational therapists, nurses, apartment managers, center activity workers, housing staff and home support workers may also be involved in the implementation of the action plans. A falls inquiry line and Web site have been created at: www.victoriafallsproject.com

Other Falls Prevention Research in B.C.

University of B.C.

- Research has found that more than 350 women age 70 and older visit Vancouver Hospital Emergency Department with fall-related injuries every year. Since this group is at high risk of further injury, researchers from the University of B.C. lead by Dr. Karim Khan and Dr. Heather McKay, have implemented a pilot "Falls Research Clinic" to provide optimum care to these people, based on the American Geriatrics Society Guidelines. The researchers have applied for funding to study the effectiveness and cost-benefit of such a clinic compared with usual clinical management. In addition, all participants receive a novel screening for fall risk (FallScreen) (Lord & Menz, 2003). It is hoped that this instrument will help to provide a simple office screening method to identify patients who require more advanced fall prevention intervention. The UBC-based researchers are also examining the clinical pathways that are offered to patients who present with wrist fractures and hip fractures, to see if their management matches current guidelines. If, as preliminary data suggest, these patients receive sub-optimal management, it would provide an opportunity for knowledge translation to reduce future injury after these initial fractures occur.

Simon Fraser University

The Injury Prevention and Mobility Laboratory at Simon Fraser University, under the direction of Dr. Stephen Robinovitch, assistant professor of kinesiology, is focused on developing improved methods for preventing falls and fall-related injuries. Safe experiments with human subjects are used in combination with mathematical models to assess how age-related declines in neuromuscular performance alter one's ability to prevent falls, and avoid injury in the event of a fall. Engineering tools are being used to develop and evaluate specific fracture prevention strategies, from exercise training to hip pads and energy-absorbing floors (for lessening impact force). The research lab is also examining the links between age-related changes in sensory-motor function, cognition, and balance, and the mechanics and prevention of forearm fractures from falls on the outstretched hand (the most common fracture in the under-65 population).