



# Senior Update

Commission  
on  
Aging

*Published by the Alameda County Advisory Commission on Aging*

## — ISSUES IN DEPTH —

### The Senior Injury Prevention Project (SIPP)

September/October 2003

by Colleen Campbell



Falls have been identified as the most common cause of accidental injury to people over the age of 65. In the United States, one of every three persons over the age of 65 falls each year, and two thirds of those who fall will do so again within six months. Among people over the age of 65, falls are the leading cause of hospitalizations due to injuries and injury related deaths. For that reason SIPP's initial focus is on preventing falls, because - **falls are preventable!**

On July 1st the SIPP Coordinator, Colleen Campbell, moved her office to Alameda County Social Services. The goal of this move is to expand opportunities for collaboration between SIPP and Aging Services throughout Alameda County.

SIPP is a coalition of non-profit and public sector agencies led by the Alameda County Public Health Department and United Seniors of Oakland and Alameda County. SIPP is working to reduce preventable injuries to the older population in Alameda County and to raise awareness regarding the need for injury prevention programs for older adults.

Injury Prevention Programs came into being during the baby boomer years and have traditionally been focused solely on children. Today the 60+ population is the fastest growing population in the United States. As their population increases it will be crucial to have programs in place to assist older adults to live safely and independently longer. In the year 2000 people aged 65 and older represented 10.2% of the population of Alameda County. That 10% of the population accounted for 43% of the hospitalizations due to unintentional injuries.

The majority of falls are caused by a combination of factors such as; poor lighting combined with a balance impairment, and being in a hurry. The balance impairment alone may be caused by medications, leg or foot problems, poor physical fitness, or dehydration. In

order to address the multiple factors that can contribute to falls an effective Falls Prevention Program must have a multi-faceted approach. SIPP's Falls Prevention Program stresses the importance of physical fitness, modifying risky behaviors, healthy nutrition, medication management, and home safety checks.

SIPP leads interactive Falls Prevention Discussion Groups with older adults throughout the county. These discussion groups are free of charge and can be held anywhere 15 or more older adults want to gather to discuss preventing falls. Each attendee is also provided with a Falls Prevention Manual. SIPP has also held a peer training session where four older adults completed a course to become Falls Prevention Discussion Group Leaders. These discussion group leaders are now scheduling their own Falls Prevention Discussion Groups throughout Alameda County. For more information or to schedule a Falls Prevention Discussion Group call Colleen Campbell at (510) 567-8053.

SIPP is working with discharge planners to develop protocols to include falls risk assessment in hospital discharge planning. When developed, this protocol would assist discharge planners in identifying older adults who are being discharged from the hospital and might be at risk for a fall. Once identified as being "at risk" the older adult would be referred to an appropriate service to work on reducing or eliminating the cause of the risk. The referral might be for Physical Therapy,

Medication Review, Education, a Fitness Program and/or on-going case management.

SIPP is also assisting to develop Fall Referral Programs within each Fire Department throughout Alameda County. It is not unusual for older adults who have fallen in their homes to call 911 for assistance. Often these older adults are not injured but require help in getting up. Unfortunately, many will call 911 repeatedly because they have fallen and are unable to get up without help. SIPP is working to identify Case Management Agencies and create linkages with each Fire Department so that each time Fire responds to a "Fall Call" where the victim is uninjured they will refer that "fall victim" to a case manager (with the fall victim's permission). The case manager will contact the "fall victim" and perform an assessment in order to determine why the falls are occurring and implement suitable interventions.

SIPP has created a countywide Injury Prevention Resource Directory and a Falls Prevention Manual that is distributed to Falls Discussion Group attendees. SIPP developed a Best Practices Model that was distributed to fitness centers to encourage them to offer programs appropriate for older adults. In addition, SIPP hosts a statewide Annual Senior Injury Prevention Conference each May in conjunction with the Center for Injury Prevention Policy & Practice.

Relocating the SIPP Coordinator's office to Social Services provides an excellent opportunity for collaboration with Adult and Aging Services to integrate falls prevention activities into the many services provided for older adults.

If you have any questions about the Senior Injury Prevention Project or are interested in older adult injury prevention, please call Colleen Campbell, SIPP Coordinator, at 510-567-8053.

## Simple Steps to Prevent Falls

- **Take your time, don't try to do too many things at once, focus on the task at hand.**
- **Maintain a regular exercise program to improve balance, strength and coordination.**
- **Have a pharmacist review all your medications, including herbal remedies and non-prescription medications (cough syrup, aspirin, vitamins and supplements).**
- **Eat a well balanced diet and drink plenty of non-caffeinated beverages to prevent dehydration.**
- **Make your home a safe home. Put non-skid strips in your bathtub or shower, install grab bars next to the toilet and tub or shower, use handrails, and put nightlights in to light your way to the bathroom. Call SIPP (567-8053) for a free home safety checklist for more information on how to improve safety in your home.**
- **Have your vision checked every year.**
- **Wear comfortable shoes with thin rubber soles.**
- **Pick up your feet when you walk. Dragging your feet can cause you to trip over cracks and bumps in the sidewalk.**
- **Each time you have a trip or stumble, take a few moments to stop and figure out what caused it, and what you can do to prevent it from happening again. Preventing trips and stumbles will prevent falls. Create your own personal Falls Prevention Program.**

We would like to extend an invitation to all readers to submit articles for consideration in future issues. Also, if you have any specific topic you would like to see presented, please let us know. Articles for the November/December issue should be submitted by September 22, 2003. Contact Mary Kaufmann at [mkaufman@co.alameda.ca.us](mailto:mkaufman@co.alameda.ca.us) or at 510-567-8048 for more information.

This background paper is produced by the *Senior Update* editorial board of the Advisory Commission on Aging, Alameda County Area Agency on Aging, 8000 Edgewater Drive, Oakland, CA 94621, 510-567-8048