

Active ageing in Europe through falls prevention: Joint action plan launched by 17 European health and social care organisations

October 1, 2015. Today, 17 European organisations of professionals in health and social care are issuing a joint commitment to promote active ageing through falls prevention. In a joint action plan these organisations state that evidence shows that falls should no longer be considered an inevitable part of ageing.

Falls can be prevented by involving all relevant professionals and carers who can help older adults to remain active and healthy as long as possible. Although there is strong evidence for the effectiveness of fall-prevention, only a few regions in Europe have consistent and wide implementation of validated interventions.

We all want older adults to enjoy an active and healthy life for as long as possible, to remain independent and to stay engaged in society. Through a joint action plan the Alliance of 17 European associations want to contribute to increase healthy life years, by at least 2 years by 2020, in older people across Europe

Why we need to focus on falls?

Falls are one of the major health threats in older age. Falls are far more common than strokes or heart attacks, and can result in just as serious consequences. One-third of people over the age of 65 who live in the community fall each year and this proportion increases to 50% of those aged 80 years and older. Falls are a significant cause and contributor to premature death, hospitalisation and disability. They can also cause post-fall anxiety, fear and subsequent dependency on family carers or even admittance into nursing care facilities. Falls are also a major indicator of increasing frailty and loss of independence and mobility.

In some EU-regions, a range of falls prevention interventions have been developed. These include clinical assessments and treatment of fall risk factors (e.g. reviewing medication, checking eye sight); exercise programmes that focus on balance and muscle strength training; and multimodal interventions that include exercise, medication management, vision checking and reducing risk through home hazard control and altered behavioural strategies. However, all older people across Europe should be given equal opportunity to access, and benefit from, appropriate services from organisations which aim to support the maintenance of health and well-being, a safe home environment and a safer community environment.

Action plan of 17 European organisations

Taking into account the variety of potential interventions, falls prevention requires a multi-sector commitment involving all segments of society: organisations of professionals in health care and social services; service providers in the private and voluntary sectors; communities; informal carers; and older people themselves.

Seventeen European organisations of professionals in health and social care, fitness and leisure, carers organisations, and older people's interest groups, decided to rise to the challenge of advocating for more concerted actions for falls prevention amongst older people in Europe. Falls, and the injuries they cause, are preventable. By preventing falls and fractures, the quality of life to older people will increase significantly and the costs to health care systems will be reduced.

By engaging multiple sectors of society and partners, the Alliance of seventeen organisations aims to leverage available knowledge, expertise, reach and resources in order to address effectively the challenges of a rapidly ageing society and increasing burden of fall-related threats to health and well-being of older people.

The overall objective is to build a united front of EU-level stakeholder organisations to raise awareness among European, national, regional and local policy makers, to promote transfer of available evidence into practice across Europe and to ensure sustainable programmes for actions in countries and regions.

The objectives of the action plan are to:

- Increase the visibility of the impact of fall-related injuries amongst older people and to share good practice in developing strategies, programmes and actions for promoting active lifestyles and fall prevention interventions amongst older people;
- Enhance the quality of information on fall-related injuries in order to assess more accurately the magnitude and root causes of the problem, to make these data more comparable between countries and regions and to monitor the outcome of all efforts in preventing falls;
- Support national member organisations in integrating appropriate education and training modules within existing curricula for professional development and vocational training and to achieve good coverage across all health, social care, urban design, public transportation, fitness and other professionals working with older people;
- Expand and further develop Fall Awareness Campaigns at national and European level. Advocate for long term EU, national, regional and local level facilitated community programmes for promoting physically active lifestyles and fall prevention amongst older people.

The action plan has been developed in the framework of the three-year EC-funded ProFouND projectⁱ. The action plan will contribute to the EIP- AHAⁱⁱ objective to increase healthy life years, by at least 2 years by 2020, in older people across Europe - by concentrating on actions to reduce falls and fractures, the costs to quality of life to older people themselves and the costs to health care systems.

Promoting falls prevention is everyone's business: individual citizens of Europe, all levels of government, communities, practitioners, family and carers, researchers, the non-profit sector and the private sector, each have a role to play.

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ⁱ ProFouND is an EC-funded Thematic Network. It promotes a wider dissemination and implementation of best practice in falls prevention across Europe, using novel ICT solutions. ProFouND brings together relevant stakeholders to consolidate roadmaps and guidelines regarding fall prevention and facilitates the communication between solution/service providers and key stakeholders (private and voluntary organisations, public authorities) at national, and European level to ensure effective implementation and reach. See also:



ⁱⁱ http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?section=active-healthy-ageing