

Older Adults Falls & Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Outreach and Communications Toolkit

September 2023



TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY
Strategic Partnership Advisory Council
of Washington State



Washington State Department of
HEALTH

Older Adults Falls & Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Outreach and Communications Toolkit

Purpose

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and concussion are serious public health problems that affect thousands of people annually in Washington State. Falls are a leading cause of TBI in the older adult population and can be prevented.

The Traumatic Brain Injury Strategic Partnership Advisory Council of Washington State in partnership with Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Aging and Long-Term Support Administration (AL TSA) seeks to increase public awareness about fall prevention and safety in efforts towards reducing TBI and concussions.

Reducing Falls and Traumatic Brain Injuries

This outreach and communications toolkit is meant to act as a supplement to the Washington state fall prevention resources that have been developed. Specifically, this plan seeks to spread awareness on reducing falls leading to concussions and TBI in older adults.

Background

Washington Department of Health has an extensive [Fall Prevention plan with supporting resources](#) and a 2018 Washington State Action Plan for Older Adult Falls Prevention - [Finding Our Balance](#). Additional *Finding Our Balance* flyers can be found in DSHS Publications (22-1901) translated into 13 languages.

FALLS IN WASHINGTON STATE 2020 (Source: [WA Department of Health](#))

- 31% of adults over 65 yrs. experienced a fall in 2020
- 90,535 adults over 62 yrs. experienced a fall, 62% occurred in-home
- Approximately 7,810 fall-related EMS calls each month for adults over 65 yrs
- 29,140 emergency department visits were due to a fall for adults over 60 yrs
- 49% of injury-related deaths for adults over 60 yrs. are due to unintentional falls
- 57% of fall-related deaths are adults over 65+ yrs.
- People with dementia or Alzheimer's disease accounted for 23% of all fall-related hospitalizations in Washington State

FINDING OUR BALANCE: 6 Strategy areas for preventing falls

- Strong and Effective Community Partnerships
- Public Awareness and Education
- Prevention Across the Continuum of Care
- Expanded Reach and Access to Evidence-Based Programs and Community Screenings
- Effective Interventions for High-Risk and Underserved Older Adults
- Improved Safety in Homes and Communities

Goals of Outreach and Education

- Reduce falls among older adults through prevention and awareness
- Educate workforce caring for older adults about risks of falls and TBI
- Emphasize that most falls can be prevented.
- Falls are NOT NORMAL
- Increase TBI public awareness, resources, support, and screening after falls

Approach

Outreach should be a combination of:

- In-person events and direct outreach to high-risk and older adult populations
- Awareness through trusted support networks. Such as caregivers (unpaid and paid), churches, community groups, medical professionals, fire and police
- Social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
- Email directly to providers that support high-risk and older adult populations

Audience

- **High-risk older adults and family members**
- **Caregivers**
 - Caregivers paid and unpaid
 - Organizations
- **Healthcare providers**
 - General practice
 - In-home healthcare providers
 - Residential facilities
 - Fire and emergency medical services
- **Residential care facilities**
- **Local senior, community centers, churches**
- **Retirement organizations**
- **Gyms, athletic facilities, camping and RV parks**

Key Components of Falls Prevention Messaging

- Falls are not normal and can be prevented
- Regular exercise, balance, and strength training helps prevent falls
- Gait training and training with assistive devices – e.g., canes, walkers
- Home safety changes with lighting, grab bars, handrails, and safe footwear
- Medication review and management that can affect balance
- Treatment and management of chronic health problems associated with falling
- Awareness for families and caregivers of prevention strategies for falls

Facts that can be used in Messaging

- More than 1 out of 4 older adults age 65+ falls each year ([CDC](#))
- In 2020 in Washington state 365,282 older adults fell, 31% of population ([CDC](#))
- Falls are leading cause of fatal and nonfatal injuries among older adults ([CDC](#))
- Falls are the leading cause of Traumatic Brain Injury ([CDC](#))
- Falls can result to serious head injuries, that are complicated by other medications, such as blood thinners. Seek medical attention immediately.

The example for Social Media messages, Falls Outreach and Communications Planning calendar, Additional resources page, and the English versions of Finding Our Balance. Are provided to spark ideas and help make future planning successful and stress free.

All of these materials and higher quality graphics for posting and usage can also be found at [Traumatic Brain Injury | DSHS \(wa.gov\)](#).

GRAPHICS and SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS (EXAMPLES ONLY)

Social Media Post (Example)

Example for hashtags with each posting:

#PreventFallsWA #TBIprevention #FindingOurBalance

In Washington state, 31% of adults aged 65 years and older experienced a fall in 2020.

Learn more at: <https://bit.ly/FallsWA> #preventfallswa #FindingOurBalance

#TBIprevention

In Washington state, 49% of all injury-related deaths for adults aged 60 years and older

are due to unintentional falls. Learn more at: <https://bit.ly/FallsWA> #preventfallswa

#FindingOurBalance #TBIprevention

Falls are the leading cause of traumatic brain injury. If you hit your head, seek medical care immediately. #preventfallswa #FindingOurBalance #TBIprevention

Falls are a leading cause of traumatic brain injury – especially dangerous for adults 65 years and older. Prevent falls by removing hazards in your home, doing regular strength building exercises, wearing proper footwear and more. Learn more at:

<https://bit.ly/FallsWA> #preventfallswa #FindingOurBalance #TBIprevention

Falling is NOT a normal part of aging. All falls are preventable. Learn more at:

<https://bit.ly/FallsWA> #preventfallswa #FindingOurBalance #TBIprevention



Source: [Four Types of Exercise and Physical Activity | National Institute on Aging \(nih.gov\)](#)

Social Media Posts (Example)

Example for hashtags with each posting:

#PreventFallsWA #TBIprevention #FindingOurBalance#TBIFalls



Drive Smart, Drive Safe

Driving on icy roads, walking on slippery sidewalks, skiing down snowy slopes. . .winter weather conditions can pose a higher risk for traumatic brain injuries (TBI). A TBI is a hit or blow to your head and it's a major cause of death and disability in the United States.

- When driving on winter roads, slow down and leave more space between cars. Never drive under the influence.
- Give yourself plenty of time to get to your destination.
- Wear sturdy, well-fitting shoes with thick tread and/or traction to grip and balance on slippery surfaces.
- Keep walkways and paths clear of snow and ice.

Falls/slips and car accidents are two of the most common causes of TBI this time of year. Slow down, be safe and enjoy the season injury-free. #TBIprevention #fallsafety #wintersafety

Social Media Posts (Example)

Example for hashtags with each posting:

#PreventFallsWA #TBIprevention #FindingOurBalance

5 LADDER SAFETY TIPS:

- (1) Read and follow all labels/instructions on the ladder
- (2) Inspect the ladder for cracks, damage or instability before use
- (3) Always maintain at least 3-points of contact while on ladder (two hands + foot or two feet + hand)
- (4) Do not use the top step/rung unless it's designed for that purpose
- (5) Have a spotter who can steady the ladder



Spring Cleaning Ladder Safety

Washing windows, cleaning gutters, clearing the roof - spring cleaning can often include climbing up on a ladder. Falling off a ladder is one of the top causes of traumatic brain injuries.

Follow these 5 easy ladder safety tips:

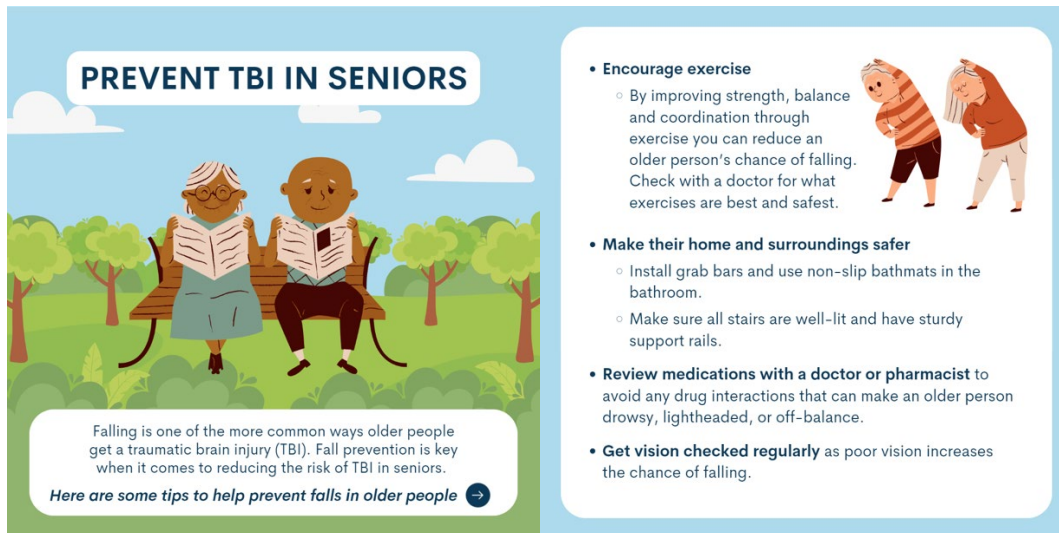
- 1.) Read and follow all labels/instructions on the ladder
- 2.) Inspect the ladder for cracks, damage or instability before use
- 3.) Always maintain at least 3-points of contact while on ladder (two hands + foot or two feet + hand)
- 4.) Do not use the top step/rung unless it's designed for that purpose
- 5.) Have a spotter who can steady the ladder

If you, or someone you know has experienced a TBI the state of Washington has many resources options. Visit [https: **Traumatic Brain Injury | DSHS \(wa.gov\)**](https://www.dshs.wa.gov/traumatic-brain-injury)

Social Media Posts (Example)

Example for hashtags with each posting:

#PreventFallsWA #TBIprevention #FindingOurBalance



Prevent TBI in Older Adults

Falling is one of the more common ways older people get a traumatic brain injury (TBI). Fall prevention is key when it comes to reducing the risk of TBI in older adults.

Here are some tips to help prevent falls in older people:

- Encourage exercise – it's the best way to reduce an older person's chance of falling. Focus on exercises that improve balance and coordination. Check with a doctor for what exercises are best and safest.
- Install grab bars and use non-slip bathmats in the bathroom.
- Make sure all stairs are well-lit and have sturdy support rails.
- Review medications with a doctor or pharmacist to avoid any drug interactions that can make an older person drowsy, lightheaded, or off-balance.
- Get vision checked regularly as poor vision increases the chance of falling.

Do you have tips for preventing TBI in older people? Share them with us.

#tbi #braininjuryawareness #morethanmybraininjury #seniorcare #caregiver

Additional Information and Social Media Resources

[Evidence-Based Falls Prevention Programs Social Media Toolkit](#) (NCOA)

At least six (6) social media posts with associated videos

[Finding Balance British Columbia](#)

Wonderful suggestions for social media campaigns/toolkit

Example for Outreach and Communications Planning

OLDER ADULT FALLS PREVENTION – CALENDAR OF TIMELY TOPICS

Date(s)	Task	Topics	Assigned to:	Status Notes
JANUARY				
January	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter/inclement driving • Emergency preparedness • Icy walkways 		
FEBRUARY				
February	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winter weather safety • Winter/inclement driving • Emergency preparedness 		
	National Senior Independence Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on lifestyle/home changes that can be implemented to keep seniors safe and independent. This includes preventing falls and TBI. 		
MARCH				
March	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wet sidewalks and debris walking hazards 		

Date(s)	Task	Topics	Assigned to:	Status Notes
March	Brain Injury Awareness Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brain Injury Awareness Month 		
March	Ladder Safety Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spread awareness about ladder safety 		
March	Daylight Savings Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A good day/reminder to do a home safety check and look for fall risks/hazards. 		
APRIL				
April	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Windy and wet weather can knock branches, debris in walkways Spring cleaning safety – ladders, gutter cleaning 		
April	Distracted Driving Awareness Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on driver safety, older adult driver safety course 		https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/older_adult_drivers/index.html Workforce driving https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2016-116/pdfs/2016-116.pdf
MAY				
May	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Windy and wet weather can knock branches, debris in walkways Gardening safety 		Move Your Way® Community Resources health.gov

Date(s)	Task	Topics	Assigned to:	Status Notes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring cleaning safety – ladders, gutter cleaning 		
May	Older Americans Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on aging American needs including home/fall safety. 		
May	National Stroke Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Falls can be more common after a stroke. 		
May	Arthritis Awareness Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint pain is linked to an increased risk of falls. 		
May 31	National Senior Health and Fitness Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seniors are invited to local health and wellness events around the country. Opportunity to highlight fall safety via booth or presentations. 		
JUNE				
June	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer shoe safety – avoiding flip flops or backless sandals Gardening safety 		
June	National Safety Month	Stand up to Falls campaign		https://blogs.cdc.gov/pub/healthmatters/2017/06/take-a-stand-against-older-adult-falls/

Date(s)	Task	Topics	Assigned to:	Status Notes
JULY				
July	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer walking safety (good shoes, water, sidewalk caution) • Gardening safety • Heat safety – avoid dehydration which can cause dizziness and falls 		
AUGUST				
August	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yawn care/sidewalk safety • Heat safety – avoid dehydration which can cause dizziness and falls 		
SEPTEMBER				
September	Falls Safety Prevention Awareness Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaves, branches, debris from trees can create extra hazards when walking • Return of rain – be careful with wet shoes, wet floors, wet roads • Changing seasons can make walkways slippery • If winterizing home (cleaning gutters, changing light bulbs, etc), practice ladder safety • Good lighting – both inside and outside -as days get darker 		

Date(s)	Task	Topics	Assigned to:	Status Notes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remain active, even during colder seasons – indoor exercises to maintain strength and balance 		
September 15, 2023	National Concussion Awareness Day (3 rd Friday of September)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote TBI/concussion awareness via social media platforms, share any local events 		
September 18-22, 2023	Falls Prevention Awareness Week			
OCTOBER				
October	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall clean-up/ladder safety • Good lighting – both inside and outside -as days get darker • Remain active, even during colder seasons – indoor exercises to maintain strength and balance 		
October	Long-Term Planning Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on importance of present and future care needs. 		
October 1	International Day of Older Persons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Nations designated Oct 1 as International Day of Older Persons. Opportunity to acknowledge contributions, wisdom, dignity and needs of our senior citizens. 		

Date(s)	Task	Topics	Assigned to:	Status Notes
October 3	Active Aging Week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week of awareness to promote healthy living into adulthood. Spread awareness about active lifestyle and fall safety. 		
NOVEMBER				
November	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclement weather safety • Caution walking on ice/snow covered steps or walkways. Need proper handrails. • Sturdy shoes with good traction for walking on slippery surfaces • Choose winter clothing that will keep you warm, fits well and will not restrict movement or catch on nearby objects. • Caregivers can speak up about safety to prevent falls in home. • Good lighting – both inside and outside -as days get darker • Remain active, even during colder seasons – indoor exercises to maintain strength and balance. 		
November	National Family Caregivers Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote caregiver resources • Caregiver support groups 		
November	National Home Care and Hospice Month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on home care – and safety – for patients, providers, caregivers, and home care assistance 		

Date(s)	Task	Topics	Assigned to:	Status Notes
November 5, 2023	Daylight Savings time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good day/reminder to do a home safety check and look for fall risks/ hazards. 		
DECEMBER				
December	TBI Prevention & Awareness Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caution walking on ice/snow covered steps or walkways. Need proper handrails. • Sturdy shoes with good traction for walking on slippery surfaces • Choose winter clothing that will keep you warm, fits well and will not restrict movement or catch on nearby objects. • Tripping hazards of clutter or décor from holiday décor • Good lighting – both inside and outside -as days get darker. 		

FALL Prevention Resources

[Fall Prevention Awareness Toolkit](#), Washington Department of Health

[Older Adults | DSHS \(wa.gov\)](#), TBI Council

[Falls & Prevention](#), Washington Department of Social and Health Services, ALTSA

[Falls Prevention Awareness Toolkit](#), National Council on Aging *Available in English and Spanish*

[Let's Talk about Falls: 5 Easy Ways to Talk to Your Family and Friends about Preventing Falls](#), National Council on Aging

[Finding Our Balance - Prevent Slips, Trips and Stumbles](#) (PDF) Washington Department of Health

[Check for Safety - A Home Fall Prevention Checklist for Older Adults](#) (PDF) Washington Department of Health

[Fall Prevention Exercise Program](#) (PDF) Washington Department of Health Available in other languages

[Steps to Safety program](#)

The NFPA Steps to Safety™ Prevent Fire and Falls at Home program pairs fire and EMS professionals with community partners to educate older adults about home fire and fall safety through group presentations, home visits, and the creation of a local resource network.

- VIDEO – [Aging Wisely: Fall Prevention for Seniors](#), Pierce County
- VIDEO – [The Good News about Fall Prevention](#), Seattle Pacific University
- VIDEO – [Independent Living and Traumatic Brain Injury or TBI](#), TBI Council / Tim Corey



Learn more at
[Traumatic Brain Injury](#)



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Finding Our Balance

PREVENT SLIPS, TRIPS & STUMBLES

Falls can cause Traumatic Brain Injury.
Identify and remove hazards at home that increase the risk of falls.

Shoes

- Wear comfortable, non-slip, close-toed, low-heeled supportive shoes that can be securely fastened.

Floors

- Remove throw rugs and secure loose carpets.
- Keep walkways clear of clutter.
- Tape cords and wires next to the wall.

Lighting

- Install motion-activated and/or night lights throughout the house to adequately light all walkways, halls and stairways.
- Lamps and light switches should be easy to reach.

Steps and Stairways

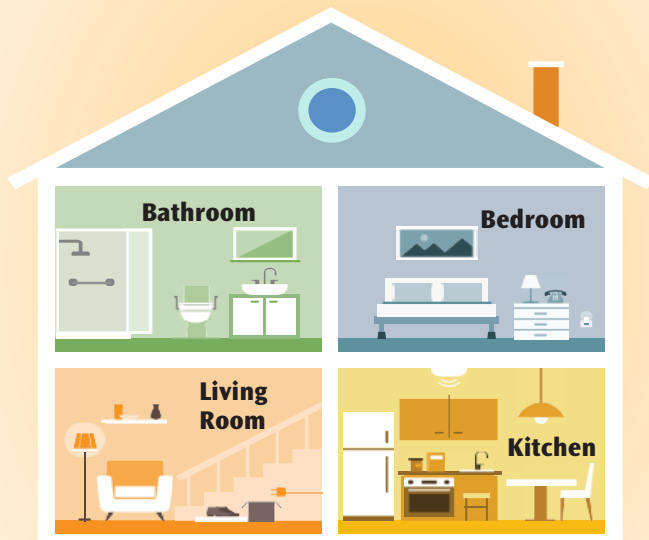
- Fix loose handrails or have new ones installed on both sides of the stairs.
- Fix loose or uneven steps.
- Make sure stairways have good lighting.
- Place light switches at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Keep stairs free of clutter.
- Paint the top edge of steps a contrasting color to make them easier to see.

Living Room / Bedroom / Kitchen

- Use furniture that is easy to get in and out of (knee height or higher).
- Rearrange rooms to create clear walking spaces.
- Keep frequently used items within easy reach.
- Keep phone and flashlight/lamp on bedside table for easy access.
- Keep the floor clear from bedding on all sides.

Bathroom

- Place a non-skid rug in front of your tub or shower.
- Install wall bars inside the shower or tub and next to the toilet.
- Use a shower chair and a handheld shower-head.
- Use a nonskid bathmat or adhesive strips in the tub or shower.
- Install night lights.



Scan this QR code
to learn more. ↓



More information:

- [Traumatic Brain Injury Resources WA](#)
- [Community Living Connections](#)
- [Older Adult Falls | WA DOH](#)
- [Stand Strong WA | Seniors Fall Prevention](#)