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Standing Together to Prevent Falls

BURLINGTON – As we get older, our bodies, our sense of balance, and gravity all seem to conspire to cause us to fall more frequently – sometimes resulting in injuries that have a long-term impact on our health and quality of life. Last week, more than three dozen people gathered in Montpelier to celebrate the 10th annual Falls Prevention Awareness Day, and to raise awareness of healthy aging strategies and activities available to older Vermonters. Governor Phil Scott declared September as Falls Prevention and Awareness Month.

While falls are the leading cause of both fatal and non-fatal injury for people 65 years of age and older in Vermont, they are not an inevitable part of aging. State officials and partners including Falls Free Vermont, the state’s falls prevention coalition, want Vermonters to know that most falls are avoidable, and that there are many ways to stay safe, strong, and independent as we age.

“As Vermonters, we value our independence. As we age, it’s important that we work to stay as healthy as we can to stay as independent as we can,” said Monica Caserta Hutt, commissioner of the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living. “We all have a role to play in preventing falls – health care professionals, service providers, state agencies, community groups, families and friends. Together, we can make a difference for our loved ones and for our entire Vermont community.”

“Older Vermonters are at a greater risk of falling and being injured,” said Steve DeVoe, with the Injury Prevention program at the Vermont Department of Health. “As we age, our balance becomes less steady, and reduced bone density may lead to bone breaks from even relatively minor falls.” In 2014, there were 20,293 emergency department visits due to falls, and 2,134 hospitalizations resulted in total costs reaching almost \$62 million. According to DeVoe, fall

prevention efforts have included outreach to groups ranging from health care providers to construction contractors. The Health Department recently concluded a two-year project using Vermont's Emergency Medical Service (EMS) providers to implement FallScope, an evidence-based falls prevention program. EMS personnel are in a good position to reach people directly, especially in rural areas.

"Most falls can be prevented," DeVoe said. "What's important is for people to know the simple things to do to prevent falls, and to talk with their doctors and loved ones about concerns, and to let them know of any falls."

The Health Department and the Falls Free Vermont coalition are working to help older adults take action that can significantly reduce their risk of falling:

- **Speak Up** – Talk with your medical provider, family or friends about falling or fear of falling. Have your doctor check medications for any that may cause dizziness. See whether taking vitamin D supplements is right for you to improve bone, muscle, and nerve health.
- **Keep Moving** – Find activities and exercises that help improve strength, mobility and balance. Consider joining a falls prevention class, such as Tai Chi, Matter of Balance, or other courses in your community.
- **Check Your Eyes** – Have your vision checked once a year and update your glasses as needed.
- **Make Your Home Safe** – Most falls happen at home. Keep floors clutter free, remove or secure small rugs, add grab bars to bathrooms, have handrails and lights installed near all staircases, and make sure your home is well-lit. Be watchful of pets who can get underfoot.

Call the statewide Senior Helpline at 1-800-642-5119 to get information about the many community organizations and services that provide falls prevention screenings, as well as classes and activities that help older Vermonters gain strength, improve balance and build confidence.

For more information, visit:

- Vermont Department of Health – <http://www.healthvermont.gov/emergency-preparedness-ems/injury-prevention/prevent-falls>
- Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living – <http://dail.vermont.gov/>
- Falls Free Vermont – www.fallsfreevermont.org

Falls Prevention and Awareness Month Proclamation:

http://dail.vermont.gov/sites/dail/files//documents/Falls_Prevention_Month_proclamation.pdf

About the Falls Free Vermont Coalition

Falls Free Vermont is part of the national Falls Free® Initiative, which includes 42 state-based falls prevention coalitions working together to promote effective state strategies. For more information, visit www.fallsfreevermont.org or <https://www.ncoa.org/healthy-aging/falls-prevention/falls-free-initiative/>.

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