

Healthy Aging Communication Network

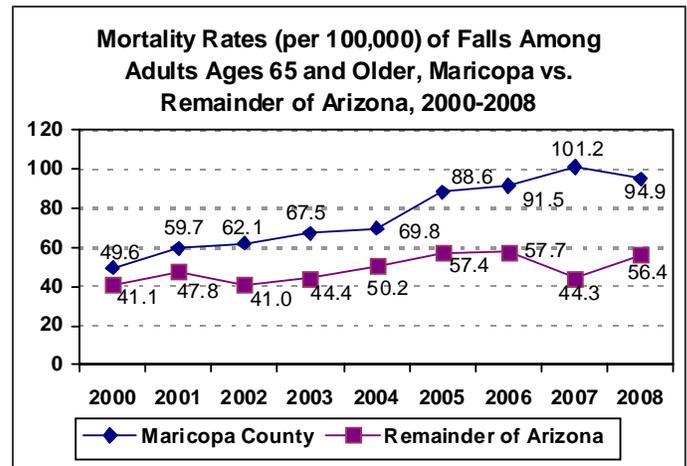
Living Stronger & Longer

Falls among Maricopa County Residents 65 Years and Older

Magnitude of the problem:

Unintentional falls are a public health problem that impacts the lives of thousands of Arizona residents each year. In 2006, Arizona ranked 5th in the nation for unintentional fall-related deaths among adults age 65 years and older.¹ Between 2000 and 2008, the death rate for falls among older Maricopa County adults increased from 49.6 deaths per 100,000 residents to 94.9 deaths per 100,000 residents. **This represents a 91 percent increase in the rate of deaths over nine years.**

In 2008, falls accounted for 71 percent of unintentional injury deaths among older adult residents of Maricopa County (n=423). Additionally, there were 5,333 inpatient hospitalizations and 12,519 emergency department visits due to unintentional fall-related injuries among older adult residents of Maricopa County. Hospitalizations and emergency department visits do not include data from federal or tribal hospitals (Indian Health Services and the Veterans Administration).



Cost of unintentional falls:

For the 5,333 hospitalizations due to unintentional falls among older adult residents of Maricopa County:

- The average length of stay was 4.9 days; the longest stay was 52 days.
- The average charge per hospitalization to a Maricopa County resident was \$43,496; this is 25% higher than the average cost per hospitalization for residents from the remainder of the state.
- Total hospitalization charges were more than \$231 million (does not include costs related to physician care, rehabilitation, or long-term disability).
- 95 percent of these hospitalizations were paid for by Medicare (n=5,063).
- 54 percent were discharged to skilled nursing facilities (n=2,898).

Who is at risk?

Established risk factors include:

- advanced age
- physical frailty
- chronic diseases
- poor lower body strength
- difficulty climbing stairs
- difficulty rising from chairs
- medications (number & type)
- safety hazards in home
- frequent dizziness
- history of falls
- poor vision
- poor balance

What can be done to reduce the risk of unintentional falls?

Many falls are preventable. The most effective way to prevent falls among older adults is a comprehensive approach that includes all of the following:

- Maintain a regular exercise program to increase strength, balance, and coordination.
- Regularly review medications with a healthcare provider.
- Have yearly eye exams.
- Modify home environments to reduce hazards such as slippery floors and poor lighting.

Please visit the Healthy Aging Arizona website at
<http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/healthyagingarizona/index.htm>

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¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Centers for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS) [online]. (2006) [cited 2009 August 31]. Available from URL: www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars.