



Southern Grampians & Glenelg Primary Care Partnership

"Striking A Balance" Falls Prevention Project February 2004 – April 2007 Final Report

Executive Summary

Background

The Southern Grampians and Glenelg PCP Falls Prevention project was funded by the Department of Human Services. It aimed to reduce the number and severity of falls in people over 65 years of age across the Southern Grampians and Glenelg Shires. The project implemented a multidisciplinary approach with initiatives targeting the following 5 components:

- education/awareness
- exercise and balance programs
- referral and reporting
- assessment
- environmental factors

The project was overseen by a Steering Committee representing local, state and national stakeholders. Local community engagement was achieved via community coalitions in small townships across the two Shires. These coalitions agreed on local action plans to reduce the number and severity of falls in their town and district.

Project Activities

1. **Education/awareness:**

- Training/education sessions with over 100 service providers, including GPs, pharmacists, nurses, Home and Community Care staff and other health professionals.
- Over 3,500 older adults received falls risk assessment booklets and 860 primary school students participated in class activities regarding falls prevention. 180 women participated in from 'the Cowshed to the Catwalk', fashion show aiming to raise awareness of the risks and impacts of falls and demystifying the barrier of wearing hip protectors for 'at risk' women due to fashion/body image.

2. **Exercise/balance programs**

- 9 community based strength and balance programs have been established and sustained in small townships across the Shires.
- **On average, 250 older adults are involved in strength/balance and Tai Chi programs each week.** An evaluation of 5 programs with 130 weekly participants reveals that there were 99 new seniors participating in physical activity and 61 people reported they were not previously active.
- Impact evaluation of a representative strength and balance program revealed: **83% of participants perceived that both their health and their fitness had improved** and 87% of participants reported improved social connectedness. Sequential assessment of clinical indicators over 10 weeks revealed that 33% of participants decreased blood pressure (9 people) BP < 130/80; and 82% (23 people) enhanced strength hand grip and 4% self-reported a fall (1 person).

- A local Instructor's Network, with 15 members, has been formed to support peer mentoring.
- 3. Referral and reporting**
- Referral guidelines and other resources were developed and circulated to relevant agencies to assist referral practice.
- 4. Risk assessment**
- A 'Falls Risk Assessment Guide' was developed for circulation to community members by service providers.
- A self assessment risk screen tool for the target group was developed and disseminated to over 3,500 people via awareness programs.
- 5. Environmental factors**
- 'Paint the Line on the Step' was first implemented at Heywood and with a 50% response rate from local businesses in painting their steps with visual strips. The most recent launch at Coleraine involved over 33 businesses registering. After some consideration, recent support has been gained to implement the initiative in Casterton.

Project Outcomes:

1. Community Outcomes

- 250 older adults are involved weekly in accessible activity programs across the catchment with participants reporting increased health and fitness and social connectedness
- Victorian Accident and Emergency Data reveals that there has been a reduction in the number and severity of falls between 2002 and 2006.
 - **total number of falls has reduced**, in adults over 65 yrs, reaching a 50% reduction in 2005/2006 across all accident and emergency departments in SG&G Shire
 - **severity of falls has reduced**, evidenced by the reduction in the proportion of hip fractures from 59% in 2003/04 to 36.7% in 2005/06.

2. Agency feedback

- Service providers report that the project **has been effective** and their expectations have been met;
 - **unintended outcomes**/benefits identified by provides include community adoption of the 'paint the line on the step' initiative; residential units implementing adapted strength training programs; self-employment for 4 fitness instructors;
 - agencies report a positive **change in falls prevention practice** in their organisation;
 - the Project Officer, Fiona Heenan, has been a **key enabler** for the success of the project.

Recommendations:

1. The SGG PCP together with the SWSA continue to monitor the progress of the SGG Fitness Instructors Network and assist them to acquire funding to support locally provided expert training as identified by the membership with accreditation points attached;
2. Continue the investment in the local coalitions by utilising the partnerships and relationships built with local communities in future programs e.g. Integrated Chronic Disease Management – "Go For Your Life";
3. SGG PCP website to link to the DHS Victorian FP resource website so service providers can continue to access evidence based resources for various community programs;
4. All agencies engaging consumers should develop a Consumer Reimbursement Policy – travel, time, local knowledge and experience is a precious commodity + build reimbursement of consumers into budget/business plan;
5. HACC Services and primary care services should be provided with regular in-servicing and staff orientation on falls prevention strategies and reporting/referral pathways.