

TASKFORCESUBMISSION: submission

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POSITION: President

ORGANISATION: Australian and New Zealand Falls Prevention Society

SUBMISSION1: Australian and New Zealand Falls Prevention Society

Response to Australia: The Healthiest Country by 2020

The Australian and New Zealand Falls Prevention Society (ANZFPS) endorses the submission made by the Public Health Association Injury Special Interest Group and submits that injury prevention needs to be included and integrated into preventative health measures in Australia. We are pleased that injury is identified as an important area of preventative health and will be considered in the next phase of the Taskforce's work in 2009. In this submission we draw attention to the importance of falls and falls injury as a public health issue to provide a supporting rationale as to why the Taskforce should include injury, and falls injury prevention in particular, in the next phase of its work.

Australian studies indicate that one third of older people living in the community suffer a fall at least once a year and many suffer multiple falls. Falls are the leading cause of injury-related death and hospitalisation in older persons. Falls can also result in disability, restriction of activity and fear of falling - all of which reduce quality of life and independence. Furthermore, falls can contribute to the placement of an older person into institutional care.

With at least a third of people aged 65 years and over falling one or more times every year, the community burden from falls is enormous. It has been projected that, by 2051, the total annual Australian health bill for fall-related injury will increase almost threefold to \$1.4 billion. The ageing of Australia's population - estimates suggest that by 2021 more than 5 million Australians will be aged 65 years and over - means this problem is increasing. Developing and implementing strategies to prevent falls and fall-related injuries among older people is therefore an urgent public health challenge and one of the key priority areas previously identified by Commonwealth and State health departments.

Risk factors for falls and falls injury and opportunities for prevention strategies are diverse, and cross conventional boundaries of many sectors and organisations. However, great headway has been made over the last 10 years in identifying effective falls prevention initiatives in carefully conducted randomised controlled trials. It is important now to ensure that this evidence can be implemented into policy and practice. Importantly, interventions to prevent fall-related injuries can

immediately reduce demands on hospitals, general practitioners and medical services, and other institutions such as residential aged care facilities. Preventing falls in older people should therefore be a key component of the Government's promotion of healthy active ageing.

To build upon the gains made in the awareness of falls prevention strategies, further work is required to increase the leadership of Australian Government in the area of injury prevention. This would include strengthening the injury prevention section of the Department of Health and Ageing, and establishing processes for cross-sectorial collaboration (both within and external to government). Greater communication is also required between researchers, policy makers and practitioners. The ANZFPS believe that the Taskforce provides an ideal platform for achieving these goals. We seek your support to ensure that injury prevention features prominently in the Taskforce's next phase of work.

PRIVACY: yes

SUBMIT: Submit