

Falls Prevention in Medicare Advantage

BETTER MEDICARE
ALLIANCE

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Key Facts

- For older adults, falls are the leading cause of injuries and injury related deaths, resulting in physical and emotional stress for the injured person, hospitalizations and 27,000 deaths each year.
- Treating injuries related to falls costs Medicare \$31 billion each year.
- Medicare Advantage plans promote falls prevention programs by increasing awareness, identifying and encouraging at-risk beneficiaries to participate in falls prevention programs.
- Community-based organizations provide falls prevention programs which lead to significant behavioral changes for the beneficiary and reduce medical costs.
- Medicare Advantage plans have new flexibility that allow them to offer home modifications to prevent falls as a supplemental benefit.
- Reducing the risk of falls is a quality measure in Medicare Advantage which incentivizes plans to make falls prevention a priority.

Medicare Advantage focuses on falls prevention through innovative partnerships with community-based organizations to provide evidence-based falls prevention programs and by offering new supplemental benefits aimed at reducing seniors' risk of falls.

Every 11 seconds, an older adult is treated in an emergency department for a fall-related injury. Two out of three seniors who are admitted to the hospital because of a fall are discharged to nursing homes. Every 19 minutes an older adult dies from a fall, and each year 27,000 older adults die from falls. Fall injuries are among the 20 most expensive medical conditions. The average hospital cost for a fall injury is over \$30,000. The costs of treating fall injuries increases as seniors age. Currently, \$31 billion of Medicare costs are related to falls each year, and this number is expected to rise to \$67.7 billion by 2020.

Falls Prevention Programs Help Older Adults

Evidence-based falls prevention programs and interventions are designed to reduce risk of falls in older adults. Most falls prevention programs incorporate physical activity and fitness to improve balance, flexibility, coordination, muscle strength, and endurance. In addition to reducing falls risk and fear of falling in older adults, falls prevention programs have also been shown to help older adults safely remain in their homes by addressing vision issues, managing medications, and building self-confidence. Examples of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Approved Evidence-Based Falls Prevention Programs include:

- *A Matter of Balance* – 8-session workshop to increase physical activity among older adults and reduce fear of falling. Results achieved \$938 savings in unplanned medical costs per Medicare beneficiary.
- *Stepping On* – 7-week program that offers older adults strategies to reduce falls and increase self-confidence while averting \$134 direct medical costs per participant.
- *Otago Exercise Program* – Individual program of balance exercises and muscle strengthening prescribed by a physical therapist for frail seniors living at home (aged 80+). In effect, \$429 direct medical costs were averted per participant.
- *YMCA Moving for Better Balance* – Balance and gait training program for older adults and people with balance disorders. \$530 direct medical costs were averted per participant.

Medicare Advantage Provides Access to Falls Prevention Programs

Medicare Advantage plans use data to identify beneficiaries at high-risk for falls. Based on the data collected, Medicare Advantage plans often partner with community-based organizations to provide evidence-based falls prevention programs. These programs help older adults identify their fall risks, change behaviors to reduce their risk, and increase fitness and exercise.

More recently, Medicare Advantage plans have been provided new flexibilities and expansions to allowable supplemental benefits, including the ability to offer home modifications, targeted education, and access to fitness benefits. In 2019, there was a 36 percent increase in the number of plans offering home and bathroom safety devices and modifications. These types of modifications, which include grab bars, improved lighting, and ramps are critical environmental adaptations used to prevent falls and better enable older adults to live safely in their own homes.

Medicare Advantage has been credited with helping to provide sustainable financing of community falls prevention programs. The plans actively encourage at-risk beneficiaries by mailing falls prevention program information to enrollees. Medicare Advantage plans in states including Utah, Florida, Massachusetts and California have been successful in supporting sustainability to falls prevention programs. Medicare Advantage plans typically reimburse community-based organizations based on beneficiary sign-ups or on the number of classes that beneficiaries attend.

Falls Prevention is a Star Ratings Quality Measure

In Medicare Advantage, reducing the risk of falls is a quality measure on which all plans are measured. The metric is determined by calculating the percentage of patients ages 65 or older who have had a fall or had issues with balance or walking in the past year (denominator), and the number of patients who then received a fall risk intervention from their provider (numerator). Quality measures serve both to ensure public accountability for quality care and as an incentive to work towards high performance in the areas measured.