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Finding Balance - Prevent a Fall Before it Happens

By Lynda McPhee, Education Coordinator, Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research

Falls hurt. Falls can disable, cause physical and mental distress and seriously diminish quality of life, especially for seniors.

Research shows falls are the result of a complex interaction of risk factors, one of which is age. The risk of falling and being injured increases as people get older. One in three persons over 65 will fall at least once a year.

In Alberta about 62,500 seniors fall every year. In 2003, the year of the latest detailed statistics, fall-related injuries among seniors resulted in about 50 deaths, more than 6,200 hospital admissions and 17,350 emergency department visits.

The hospitalization costs for fall-related injuries currently are estimated at \$88 million per year. These cost do not include visits to emergency departments, physicians, physiotherapists, the costs of medication or home care. Hospitalization costs will reach \$250 million by 2033 unless something is done to counter the trend.

Many falls can be avoided and researchers have identified numerous simple but effective falls prevention strategies.

The Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research (ACICR) in the University of Alberta's School of Public Health and the Alberta Medical Association are developing an information and advocacy campaign called *Finding Balance*, focused on reducing the number of falls among seniors in Alberta.

Finding Balance will be launched early in November on the steps of the Alberta Legislature. The first phase of this multi-year campaign is targeted at independent, well seniors.

The campaign's themes are based on current research and evidence-based

practice. *Finding Balance* is guided by an Advisory Committee of multi-disciplinary health care professionals from all health regions, the Alberta Pharmacists' Association, Alberta Physiotherapy Association and other health care professional associations. It has the full cooperation and support of the Government of Alberta.

The themes of the initial informational materials are:

- Check Your Medications – Talk to your Doctor or Pharmacist
- Keep Active – Exercise for Strength and Balance.

Seniors and caregivers will be able to find falls prevention programs in their communities through Health Link Alberta and the *Finding Balance* website at www.FindingBalanceAlberta.ca.

Finding Balance posters, pamphlets and other support materials will be available in clinics and pharmacies. In November there will be an extensive media support campaign. This will include commercial spots around newscasts on Global TV stations across the province, commercials on radio stations of the Alberta Radio Network, ads in Alberta weekly newspapers, an extensive website promotion and public media interviews with health care professionals talking about steps that can be taken to prevent falls.

Finding Balance is sponsored by the Alberta Medical Association, Government of Alberta, Global, Newcap Radio Alberta and the ACICR.

For more information about the campaign, contact the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research by calling (780) 492-6019 or by emailing acicr@ualberta.ca.



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Updates, news and resources

ACICR welcomes new staff!

Welcome to Bruce Adams, Barry Sallstrom, Dale Friedel and Rob MacInnis. They are the newest regional traffic safety coordinators working with communities to address local and regional traffic safety issues.

Bruce Adams – Region 6
780-920-8441 or
bruce.adams@gov.ab.ca

Barry Sallstrom – Region 7 – East
780-646-2300 or
barry.sallstrom@gov.ab.ca

Dale Friedel – Métis (non-Settlement)
780- 292-0898 or
dale.friedel@gov.ab.ca

Rob MacInnis – Region 3
403-827-6991 or
rob.macinnis@gov.ab.ca

We also welcome Dejan Ozegovic, ACICR's new Research Associate.

Farewell

With mixed emotions, ACICR bids farewell to Jennifer Stark (Drozdowski), Regional Traffic Safety Coordinator Region 1. She has worked tirelessly to promote injury prevention in Alberta in a variety of roles at ACICR and we will miss her! Jennifer has accepted a position as a Community Development Officer with Alberta Culture and Community Spirit.

Families of workplace tragedy find help and healing

By Suzan Butyn, Community Action Program Manager, Threads of Life

Jim Sandford says "People tell us it will get better; it will go away. And I'm telling you, they don't know. We think about Jim every day." Jim's 30 year-old son Jim Jr. died while fixing an elevator.

In 2003 a new national not-for-profit organization was launched to help families dealing with a workplace fatality, life-altering injury or occupational disease. The Association for Workplace Tragedy Family Support (known as *Threads of Life*) could only have been conceived by people who are walking the lonely path of losing a family member to a preventable workplace fatality. Shirley Hickman, the Executive Director, lost her 21 year-old son Tim due to an explosion in his workplace at the Silverwoods Arena in London, Ontario in 1996.

Losing someone suddenly is traumatic enough, but when you combine this shock with a confusing occupational health and safety system, ministry of labour investigations and coroners' inquests, you get a glimpse of what these families must cope with in addition to their overwhelming grief.

Although many family members have joined bereavement groups for coping skills, they were finding a disconnect with the other participants who had lost someone through an illness, rather than a traumatic workplace incident. "When the group finds out that you are grieving the loss of a family member through a preventable workplace incident, you get peppered with a lot of questions and you often find yourself on the spot justifying what you've done about it. You end up explaining the situation and living it all over again," says one family member.

What is so unique about the *Threads of Life* Family Support Program is that peer support is provided by trained volunteers (Volunteer Family Guides) who have also experienced their own workplace tragedy. They know what families are going through.

Family members matched to a Volunteer Family Guide have given the program rave reviews. Fran deFilippis, a young widow with two young children,

lost her husband when the platform he was standing on collapsed during the construction of a condo in Toronto. She says, "My Volunteer Family Guide really helped me know what to expect from the occupational health and safety system and the judicial system. Sometimes I needed a boost to get through the next legal phase because it was overwhelming and confusing and I got that support."

Other Family Support Programs include regional Family Forums where families gather to connect with others, honour their loved ones and learn healthy coping mechanisms in an environment of warmth and fellowship. Whether the trauma has been recent or years ago, families have found the Forums help them along their journey of healing.

Families of workplace tragedy can also participate in the Steps for Life – Walking for Victims of Workplace Tragedy event on the first Sunday in May. This fundraising 5K walk event launches the North American Occupational Health and Safety Week (NAOSH) every year. Here families can feel connected to others while driving home the message to the public that workplace injuries are preventable. The funds raised from the walk allow families to attend the Family Forums who otherwise may not be able to do so.

Families can also participate in the popular Speakers Bureau where members present a reality check to workplaces, conferences and schools about their 'new normal' following the loss of a loved one to a fatality or their experience with supporting an injured worker or one suffering from an occupational disease. Through the power of personal testimony they challenge their audiences to reinvest in creating safe workplaces so that at the end of the day every person comes home safe and whole.

For more information, contact *Threads of Life* at 1-888-567-9490 or visit www.threadsoflife.ca.

It's Fire Prevention Week - Prevent home fires!

Provided by Alberta Emergency Management Agency

Fire Prevention Week is October 5-11, 2008 and this year's theme is home fire prevention. In Alberta, there are, on average, 1,500 home fires reported each year to the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. These fires kill an average of 20 people and injure an additional 165. Every year fire causes approximately \$93 million in property loss.

Unattended cooking is the single leading factor contributing to cooking fires. In fact, most cooking-related fires are due to hot cooking stoves or ranges left unattended. People who are multi-tasking in the kitchen may lose track of what is cooking on the stove; people who begin cooking when drowsy, impaired by alcohol or drugs, may be more likely to stop paying attention to what is on the stove or in the oven. Properly maintained smoke alarms provide an important early warning of fires that occur when the cooking is forgotten or the cook falls asleep.

Cooking equipment was involved in 21 per cent of home fires reported in 2002 - 2006

Cooking equipment, most often a range or stove top, is the leading cause of reported home fires and home fire injuries in Alberta. Cooking-related fires refer to fires where cooking equipment provided the heat that started the fire, not that the equipment malfunctioned. More cooking equipment fires are caused by human error than equipment malfunction.

Findings by gender and age

- Males face a disproportionate risk of cooking fire injury relative to the amount of cooking they do.
- Although women do the majority of the cooking, more males are injured in these fires.
- Adults over 65 face a higher risk of death from cooking fires.

Young children are at high risk from non-fire cooking-related burns. Although young children are not at high risk for cooking fire injuries, their risks of thermal burns and scalds from cooking equipment, cookware, tableware or hot foods or beverages are very high. Children may be injured when they reach and pull down

on a cord or container, when they run into or are run into by an adult carrying something hot, or when they touch hot cooking equipment, cookware or tableware.

Many other cooking fires begin because combustibles are too close to cooking heat sources. Combustible material left too close to the cooking equipment can also be a common cause of cooking-related fires. Combustibles include loose clothing, potholders, oven mitts, wooden utensils, paper or plastic bags, food packaging, towels or curtains. Certain types of clothing, including garments with loose, flowing or dangling sleeves, can come in contact with a hot element or flames and ignite. Older adults are at a higher risk for such fire injuries.

Frying is the cooking method with the highest risk

Frying accounts for a majority of cooking fires. Many scald burns from hot oil occur when the oil spills on individuals carrying flaming pans. In some cases, water is thrown on a flaming pan or pot of oil and makes the fire worse as an explosion of tiny burning oil droplets can spread the fire and inflict severe burn injuries.

The combination of unattended cooking and a pan or pot of oil heating on a stove is a dangerous one. When cooking oil is heated above 200°C, it can catch fire. This is why temperature-controlled skillets or deep-fat fryers, which have a factory-set upper limit of 200°C, are the best option for frying.

For more information or to obtain a copy of the Fire Prevention Week Kit, visit www.aema.alberta.ca/pa_index.cfm.

CALENDAR

National Safe Communities Day

October 1, 2008
Safe Communities Canada
Phone: (416) 964-0008
Website: www.safecommunities.ca

National School Safety Week

Canada Safety Council
October 17-23, 2008
Phone: (613) 739-1535
Website: www.safety-council.org

School Bus Safety Week

Alberta Student Transportation
Advisory Council
October 19-25, 2008
Website: www.staa.ab.ca/news.html

National Seniors Safety Week

Canada Safety Council
November 6-12, 2008
Phone: (613) 739-1535
Website: www.safety-council.org

World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims

World Health Organization
November 16, 2008
Phone: +41 22 791 3480
Website: www.who.int/roadsafety/projects/world_day/en/index.html

Public Health & the Agricultural Rural Ecosystem (PHARE) - Sixth International Symposium

October 19-23, 2008
Delta Bessborough Hotel
Saskatoon, SK, Canada
Phone: (306) 966-7888
Email: phare.symposium2008@usask.ca
Website: <http://cchsaccssma.usask.ca/pharesymposium2008/>

Driving Home Safety - Community and Industry Working Together XIII Injury in Alberta Conference

November 18-20, 2008
Delta Edmonton South
Edmonton, AB
Phone: (780) 492-6019
Email: acicr@ualberta.ca
Website: www.acicr.ualberta.ca

BC Injury Prevention Conference, 2008

November 19-20, 2008
Coast Plaza Hotel & Suites
Vancouver, BC
E-mail: conference2008@cw.bc.ca
Website: www.injuryresearch.bc.ca

In Alberta, over a 3 year period from 2003 to 2005, on average there were 2,177 head injury-related hospital admissions each year.

Males accounted for 70 per cent of the head injury admissions with an average of 1,519 admissions each year. Females accounted for the remaining 30 per cent with an average of 658 admissions each year.

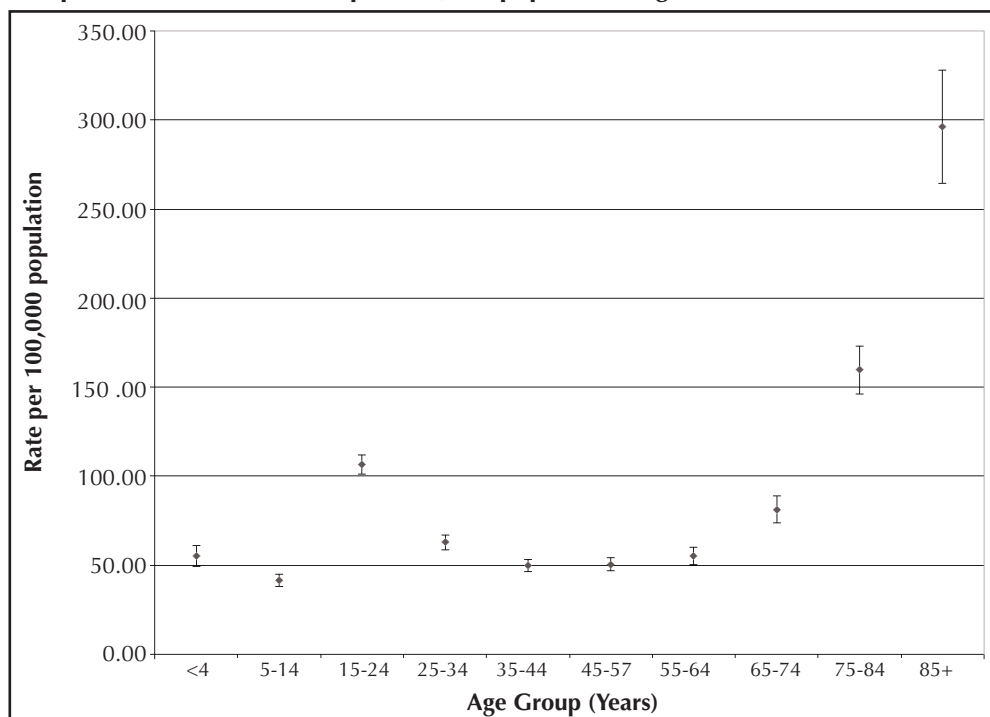
Overall, falls were the leading cause of head injury hospital admissions and accounted for 37 per cent, with an average of 814 admissions each year.

Motor vehicle collisions were the second leading cause of head injury hospital admissions and accounted for 27 per cent, with an average of 588 admissions each year.

Although residents 75 years of age and older had the highest admission rates, Albertans between 15 and 24 years of age had the highest number of head injury admissions. They accounted for 23 per cent of the head injury admissions with an average of 499 each year and a rate of 106.47 admissions per 100,000 population. Those 75 years of age and older had a hospital admission rate of 296.15 admissions per 100,000 population and an average 111 admissions each year.

Head injuries, Alberta, 2003-2005

Hospital admission visit rate per 100,000 population (age-standardized)



Other Facts¹

- Injuries to the brain and spinal cord are the number one killer of children up to age 24.
- Incidents involving brain and spinal cord injuries involve alcohol in almost one-third of the cases.
- Using seat belts or child restraints reduces the risk of death in a motor vehicle collision by 75 per cent and reduces the chance of injury by 55 per cent.
- Almost two-thirds of those who die in bicycle crashes each year sustained a brain injury.
- Bicycle helmets are 85 per cent effective in preventing head or brain injury.

Costs²

- In Canada in 2000-2001, head injuries accounted for \$151 million in direct costs (hospital care, physician care and drug expenses).

References:

1. ThinkFirst Foundation of Canada. *Facts you need to know*. [cited 2008 June 25]. Available from: www.thinkfirst.ca/know_facts.asp.
2. Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), *The burden of neurological diseases, disorders, and injuries in Canada*, (Ottawa: CIHI, 2007). [cited 2008 June 25]. Available from: http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/dispPage.jsp?cw_page=AR_1689_E.

Source: Canadian Institute for Health Information, *Trauma E-reports. Head and Spinal Cord Injuries-Cause of Injury by Age, Sex, Discharge Status, and Province/Territory*.

For ICD-10CA code includes of head and spinal cord injuries please go to the CIHI website, *Trauma E-Reports Technical Notes. NTR MDS Definition of Head and Spinal Cord Injuries UID*. Available from: https://eservices.cihi.ca/NTR_MDS/pub_login_ntr_mds_Tech_Meth_Notes_e.jsp?page=techNotes.