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# Older Adult Fall Prevention Education

## **Issue**

The population of persons aged 65 years and older is one of the fastest growing age groups in America. Oklahoma is home to over 500,000 men and women aged 65 years and older. This population represents about 14% of all Oklahomans and is expected to double in the next 20 years. This population also has a disproportionate burden of morbidity and mortality related to unintentional falls. One in three adults aged 65 years and older falls every year, with 20% to 30% sustaining a moderate or severe injury. Between 2012 and 2014, a total of 100 Oklahomans less than 55 years of age died from fall-related injuries, compared to 658 adults 85 years and older. Fall-related hospitalizations and deaths are much more common among Oklahomans 65 years of age and older than all other ages combined. According to Oklahoma Vital Statistics death data and the Oklahoma Hospital Inpatient Discharge Database, falls result in the hospitalization of approximately 7,000 older adults and the death of more than 450 older adults each year. Acute care hospital charges alone total more than \$250 million per year.

## **Intervention**

To reduce the number of fall-related injuries and deaths, the Injury Prevention Service (IPS) provided fall-related educational and programmatic information to Oklahomans 65 years of age and older and other stakeholders, in addition to championing the *Tai Chi: Moving for Better Balance (TCMBB)* program. The *TCMBB* program is an evidence-based community fall prevention program designed to promote balance, strength, mobility, and confidence in older adults. Program participants can reduce their fall risk by up to 55%, and the program can be modified and tailored to meet the individual participant's needs. In an effort to increase the availability of community classes across the state, the IPS conducted instructor trainings across the state, with particular focus on communities with few or no instructors and/or classes.

Although the key outcome is the reduction of fall risk among community-dwelling adults, *TCMBB* has been shown to promote a wide variety of health benefits, including reducing blood pressure and depression; enhancing mental well-being; and improving muscular strength, balance, postural control, sleep quality, and overall quality of life. Increasing the number of instructors, and thereby classes, in the state is the key to giving older adults the opportunity to participate in *TCMBB*, and ultimately to reducing falls and fall-related injuries and deaths.

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## ***Impact***

Since October 2015, the IPS created and distributed one news release statewide, conducted three *TCMBB* instructor trainings in communities with few or no classes, and identified six opportunities to disseminate information on older adult fall prevention and the growing problem of older adult fall-related deaths and hospitalizations.

Since the *TCMBB* program began in 2010, the IPS has:

- Conducted over 30 *TCMBB* instructor trainings, resulting in more than 350 trained community instructors across the state;
- Promoted the 100 active *TCMBB* classes in 50 different cities; and
- Collaborated with Dr. Fuzhong Li to conduct two train-the-trainer workshops, resulting in 28 master trainers in Oklahoma.

## ***Quotes***

“Tai Chi has significantly improved my balance and flexibility. My joint stiffness has also improved. I am a widow who lives alone on an acreage, so it is important to me to maintain my ability to live alone and maintain my property for as long as possible. Moreover, the practice is a stress reliever and provides me the incentive to get out of the house and do something with other people. I feel Tai Chi has improved my ability to live independently for a longer time.” – *TCMBB* participant

“I have Parkinson’s and due to this condition I am very unstable. I am in my second 12 week session. Tai Chi has made a big difference in my awareness of how I walk. It has strengthened my legs, and my endurance for activities has increased. I am a believer in this program and have encouraged friends and family to be involved.” – *TCMBB* participant

