

2025 Innovations in Falls Prevention: Summary of Grantees' Experiences

First Responders/EMS

University of Nevada, Reno

The University of Nevada, Reno, Sanford Center for Aging's Falls Navigation Program (July 2025–May 2026) piloted a telephone-based falls prevention model in Washoe County, Nevada, connecting older adults to education and resources, following a fall-related EMS call.

Partnering with REMSA and the Reno Fire Department, the project established referral workflows (including an EMR-integrated screening tool with REMSA), trained three staff members as falls-prevention coaches, and received 114 referrals from 98 unique individuals, of whom 23 completed a full risk assessment and received individualized resources.

Early outcomes were encouraging:

- 65% of assessed participants reported increased confidence in reducing their fall risk
- Several took concrete actions such as starting exercises, obtaining assistive devices, or initiating physical therapy, though limited follow-up response rates constrained full outcome measurement

Key lessons included the:

- Critical importance of embedding referrals into partner systems (as REMSA did, unlike RFD)
- Need for experienced staff to conduct assessments given participants' medical complexity
- Value of additional check-in calls to boost engagement

The project strengthened community partnerships—particularly with REMSA, which is exploring expanded collaboration—and generated national interest after a conference presentation, while core tools (the screening instrument, resource compilation, and training materials) will be sustained through Falls Prevention Awareness Week events, the Sanford Assessment program, and future collaboration with UNR's Doctor of Physical Therapy Program.

Washington State Department of Health

The Washington State Department of Health's Innovations in Falls Prevention project (July 2025–May 2026) built on an existing decade-old Physical Therapy Referral Program in rural Mason County, Washington, by adding a Falls Prevention Specialist and expanding services county-wide through a partnership between North Mason Regional Fire Authority's (NMRFA) Mobile Integrated Health Program (MIHP) and South Mason Fire & Rescue (SMFR).

Serving a county where 25.2% of residents are 65+ (well above state and national averages) and geographic isolation limits health care access, the program established a post-911 referral pathway, generating 89 referrals from 189 falls-related EMS calls, completing 112 home appointments (61 comprehensive home safety assessments and 28 follow-up visits), and making 20 physical therapy referrals.

A qualitative survey of 58 community members revealed significant misconceptions (47 believed falls are just part of aging) and identified key barriers: lack of nearby PT clinics, transportation challenges, and uncertainty about resources, which validated the program's home-based service model.

A major mid-project challenge was the closure of the only PT clinic in North Mason County, prompting the team to develop a Pharmacy Rack Card with fall-prevention tips and lean more heavily on in-home Falls Prevention Specialist services. The team also launched a new transportation assistance program with Mason County EDC. Notable successes:

- Installing a wheelchair ramp for two disabled veterans
- Building trust with previously hard-to-reach rural residents

Nutrition

Harrisburg Area YMCA's Nutrition and Aging

The Harrisburg Area YMCA's Nutrition and Aging project focused on delivering nutrition education programming to older adults across Cumberland, Dauphin, and Perry Counties, Pennsylvania, leveraging the YMCA's existing membership base of over 30,000 check-ins across multiple branches.

In partnership with Weis Markets and Penn State Master Gardeners, the organization hosted a series of tailored events, including safe snacking, low-sodium recipes, summer smoothie demos, and gardening workshops designed to build practical nutrition skills and increase access to fresh produce, with pre-registration and participant surveys used to track attendance and gather feedback.

The project reached older adults through senior centers and partnerships with disability organizations, and participants reported meaningful behavior changes, including one attendee who began home gardening with herbs from a workshop to help offset grocery costs.

Key lessons included the need to:

- Accommodate vision and hearing needs at events
- Provide low-tech registration options
- Establish feedback mechanisms earlier in the process

The YMCA also pivoted from its original plan to hire a dedicated registered dietitian nutritionist, finding that leveraging existing community partnerships was more effective. Challenges included

weather disruptions, inconsistent attendance despite pre-registration, and no-shows, which the team addressed by maintaining surplus materials (donated when unused) and refining registration practices.

Looking ahead, the YMCA plans to sustain and expand these partnerships and programming based on continued community interest, with funding from ongoing grant applications and its annual giving campaign.

Housing

City of Hartford Department of Health and Human Services

The "Keeping Falls Top of Mind" project of the City of Hartford Department of Health and Human Services piloted a technology-based fall prevention intervention using Amazon Echo Show devices and paired smart plugs across four low-income senior housing communities (Capitol Towers, St. Monica's, Ida B. Wells, and Victory Cathedral), serving 50 older adults (median age 78, 86% female, 98% living alone, 98% people of color, 44% Spanish-speaking) in a city where older adults face pronounced differences in income, education, and chronic disease compared to state averages.

The project achieved 100% installation of 50 devices and 100 smart plugs, with 100% of participants completing fall risk surveys (58% screened as elevated risk) and demonstrating device proficiency. Among the 44 final survey respondents:

- 82% felt safer at home
- 71% used medication reminders regularly
85% would recommend the technology
- Zero falls were reported during the project period

Twenty-nine at-risk participants were referred to the city's evidence-based "A Matter of Balance" classes (70% attendance at the first session), and a peer-led "Tech Buddy" model emerged organically as the most effective tool for overcoming residents' privacy concerns about Amazon devices, exemplified by a resident named "Ms. Betty" whose demonstrations convinced reluctant neighbors to enroll.

Key challenges included:

- Privacy concerns
- Unreliable Wi-Fi and forgotten account credentials
- A lack of bilingual staff despite a large Spanish-speaking cohort
- Underutilization of voice-activated lighting features

The team responded by adding two housing sites to boost enrollment, providing hands-on tech support, and using Language Line for interpretation. While grant funding will not continue and the department has been unable to secure new funding, HHS envisions a second-phase expansion that incorporates iPads, stipend-funded peer educators, and partnerships with the Hartford Public

Library and the UConn School of Social Work to explore technology's potential to slow cognitive decline.

ONEgeneration

ONEgeneration's Innovations in Fall Prevention Grant (July 2025–May 2026) leveraged the organization's 45+ years of service and 50+ community partnerships in Los Angeles County's San Fernando Valley to address fall risk among vulnerable older adults through three integrated approaches.

First, the project screened 633 clients—including Adult Protective Services/case management clients and Buried in Treasures participants—using the Morse Fall Scale and In-Home Fall Prevention Checklist, resulting in 106 direct interventions (grab bars, shower chairs, walkers, ramps, and other home modifications) funded through NCOA dollars plus in-kind contributions. Second, an eight-person cohort completed a 16-week evidence-based "Buried in Treasures" program addressing hoarding/clutter-related fall risks and transitioned into an ongoing peer-led support group, with one participant's case resulting in the dismissal of an eviction due to her documented progress. Third, a multilingual (English, Spanish, Armenian, Russian) county-wide outreach campaign reached 3,188 individuals through 60+ events and 13 in-person presentations at senior centers and housing sites, distributing 1,553 flyers and yielding 19 additional interventions—exceeding the project's original outreach goal of 2,500.

Key challenges included:

- Language barriers
- Reduced client enrollment tied to federal funding cuts
- The loss of a food pantry partner
- Difficulty gaining access to senior housing communities

The team addressed the challenges through:

- Bilingual staff
- A new partnership with the LA Regional Food Bank
- Leveraging existing Homebound Meal Delivery relationships

Looking ahead, ONEgeneration plans to sustain Buried in Treasures at least twice annually using a co-facilitation model with graduate social work students, while continuing fall-risk assessments and interventions through its ongoing case management infrastructure, supported by foundation grants and existing City of LA and APS funding streams.