

Safe & Healthy Aging

Research-based strategies to reduce the rate of adverse drug events (ADEs) and falls in residents age 65+



Howard remains independent through the support of United Way's Safe and Healthy Aging Initiative.

Dane County is aging. Up to 18% of the county's population, a 130% expected growth, will be age 65 and older by 2030. There will be considerably more seniors than ever who will require assistance through caregivers to remain safe and independent in their homes. In 2011, Dane County was estimated to have 70,000 unpaid caregivers for seniors and people with disabilities.

Falls and adverse drug events (ADEs) which include negative drug interactions or medication mismanagement, are found to be the two acute triggers of functional decline of aging adults.

When a loved one suffers an ADE or fall, they often need deeper support from their caregiver, or institutional care. United Way's Delegation on Safe and Healthy Aging concluded that ADEs and falls are often preventable and need our community's immediate attention.

Dane County older adults are taking an average of 6.4 prescription medications, putting them at high risk for suffering an ADE. Some of the symptoms may include nausea, dizziness, memory loss, falls, incontinence and easy bruising. Physicians and pharmacists indicate that the number of medications is a critical component in predicting the risk of an ADE. Seniors who take more than 5 medications are 50% more likely to have an ADE; those who are taking 8 medications or more are 100% more likely to have an ADE.

To keep seniors safe, healthy, and independent, United Way's Delegation on Safe and Healthy Aging developed four strategies that bring together health care providers, community-based pharmacists, social service providers, caregivers, media, and United Way 2-1-1.

Our goal is to reduce the rate and number of adverse drug events and falls among Dane County older adults by 15% by 2015.

Key Strategy #1: Identify & Assess

Almost 19% of seniors admitted to emergency rooms or hospitals in 2009 were involved in adverse drug events (ADEs) and falls. Correct identification and assessment can reduce the risk for ADEs and falls.

We will identify and assess the risks for ADEs and falls in four ways:

- 1.** Develop a program of comprehensive medication review through qualified pharmacists.
- 2.** Implement an in-home assessment that will be performed by trained volunteers.
- 3.** Engage physicians and medical communities in creating a “senior” vital sign to identify at-risk patients by asking “Have you fallen within the past six months?”.
- 4.** Create easily accessible tools for seniors and informal caregivers to assess the risk of ADEs and falls.



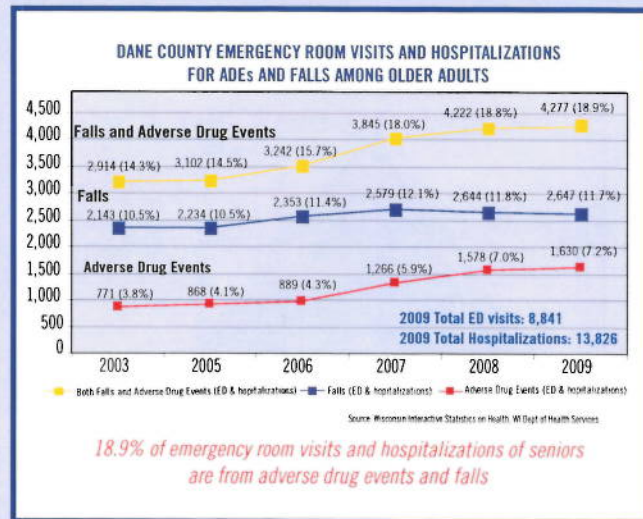
A Dane County senior's medications are reviewed for the risk of ADEs at the North/Eastside Senior Coalition Multicultural Senior Health Fair.

Our community has convened a network of qualified and trained pharmacists to offer comprehensive medication reviews. The service assesses the risk of ADEs, and if the risk is found, communicates with the physician to potentially change to prescriptions.

Key Strategy #2: *Improve Connections*

Connecting physicians and health care providers with community-based organizations will create a continuum of care for older adults to improve their safety and health conditions.

Physicians, pharmacists, other health care providers, and community based organizations are often concerned about the safety of home-bound seniors with non-medical needs. Resources such as United Way 2-1-1, the Safe and Healthy Aging website, geriatric tool kits (which include a falls checklist, information on adverse drug events and prevention steps) and comprehensive medication reviews will strengthen the connection of all types of service providers.



**For more information call United Way 2-1-1
or visit www.safeandhealthyaging.org**

Key Strategy #3: *Provide Access to Resources*

Unpaid caregivers can play major roles in improving the choices made by seniors that lead to safer and healthier lives.

Health care services that are provided by family/unpaid caregivers are growing and are vitally important to helping seniors remain independent. They not only assist with daily activities, but they may also provide assistance with pain management, supervision of medication, use of medical equipment and skilled nursing care.

United Way will provide caregivers with the necessary tools and resources to help them understand the risks and prevention of adverse drug events and falls. Through education, caregivers can better serve as advocates between the seniors they care for and health care providers.

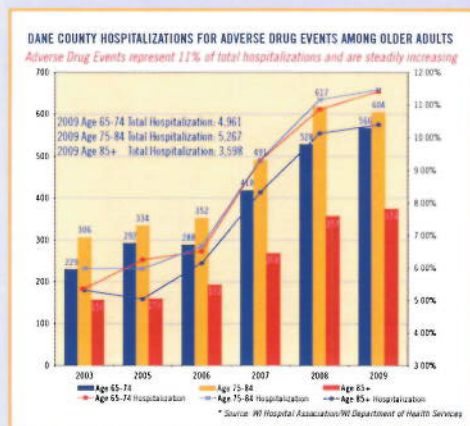


Jim participates in exercise classes to help with his balance and Anna Marie, Jim's caregiver, also receives respite services from United Way partner, Colonial Club.

Geriatric tool kits are a key information and assessment tool to better understand the risk of ADEs and falls. These are available for health care providers, social service providers and caregivers/volunteers through United Way of Dane County at www.safeandhealthyaging.org.

Key Strategy #4: *Educate the Community*

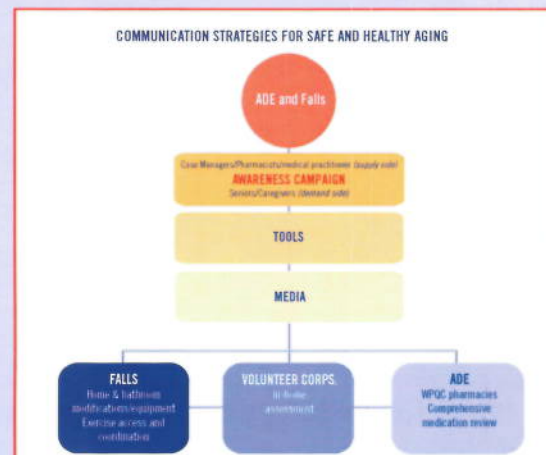
Wisconsin ranks second in the nation for the number of older adults who die from falls.



Physicians report that timely community and/or medical interventions can reduce up to 90% of adverse drug events and up to 65% of falls.

But preventive action won't happen without providing caregivers and family members with an understanding of the risk factors and prevention strategies involved. Educating the public about the risks of ADEs will increase their ability to advocate for prevention.

In collaboration with local media and corporate partners, United Way will develop and execute a community-wide campaign to increase education about the awareness of the dangers of ADEs and falls. Through traditional and non-traditional media outlets we can educate the public that falls and ADEs are not a normal part of aging and lead to an increase in medical costs and negative patient outcomes.



Agenda For Change

Seniors and people with disabilities are able to stay in their homes.

