

Falls prevention

Preventing falls in supported residential services (SRS)



Falls can happen to anyone; however, they occur more frequently for older people and people with chronic health conditions.

Older people are more likely to injure themselves when they fall, injuries can lead to a loss of independence and a need for increased support.

What causes people to fall?

As people age, changes in the body such as weakening muscles, stiffening joints and vision problems can increase the chances of falling.

Factors that can increase the risk of a person falling include:

- hazards inside, such as rugs on the floor and steps without hand rails
- sensory and balance problems, such as low vision and muscle weakness
- the effects of some medications
- chronic health conditions, such as stroke, diabetes, Parkinson's disease, arthritis, osteoporosis, incontinence and dementia
- temporary illnesses
- a fall in the past six months.

What to do if a resident falls

If a resident falls and they have injured themselves, call an ambulance on triple zero (000). Calm them down and keep them as comfortable as possible.

If they are not badly injured and feel they can get themselves up, bring a sturdy chair over to them, and talk them through getting up using the chair to assist. The *Don't fall for it* guide, listed on page 2, outlines how to do this.

If it is not an emergency and you need advice phone NURSE-ON-CALL 1300 60 60 24.

Arrange for a review with their GP as soon as possible.

What you can do to help prevent falls in your SRS

Encourage and support residents to:

- maintain an active lifestyle with regular exercise to prevent muscle weakening
- wear safe, supportive footwear
- make sure walking aids are handy and used at all times
- eat healthy and nutritious foods
- take medications only as prescribed
- speak to health professionals about falls prevention strategies.

Make the SRS environment safe:

- remove slip or trip hazards like loose rugs and mats
- wipe up spills immediately
- mark the edge of steps so they are easy to see
- install hand rails on steps and stairs, and grab rails in bathrooms
- make sure there is adequate lighting, especially at night time
- allow enough space for people who have walking aids to move easily
- keep corridors clear
- make sure the height of chairs allows residents to stand easily.

SRS proprietor's responsibilities

If a resident falls, the SRS proprietor is responsible for:

- keeping an appropriate record of the fall in the SRS' incident record system
- making sure the resident receives appropriate health care, if required
- informing the resident's nominated person or guardian after a fall
- if a fall results in a serious injury, notifying the Department of Health and Human Services by the end of the next business day
- reviewing and updating the resident's personal support plan if their support needs have changed
- ensuring any changes made to a resident's personal support plan are made in consultation with the resident, their nominated person and their health care providers
- ensuring each resident's personal support plan is carried out and safe work practices are followed.

Who can help?

- A resident's **general practitioner (GP)** can assist with falls prevention. They may review a resident's medications to determine if any changes are needed, or make referrals to other healthcare professionals.
- **Physiotherapists** can assist people who have balance problems or muscle weakness.
- **Occupational therapists** can complete home safety assessments. They can look at how a person manages tasks within their environment, and provide strategies to increase their level of independence.
- An **optometrist** can review a person's eyesight. Australian College of Optometry runs an outreach program to all SRS in Victoria.
- A **podiatrist** can provide advice about footwear.

Discuss concerns about medications with the resident's **GP** or a **pharmacist**.

Where to go for further information

- Speak to the resident's **health care providers**.
- You can refer residents to **My Aged Care** <<https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/>> or phone the My Aged Care contact centre on 1800 200 422.
- **Don't fall for it. Falls can be prevented! A guide to preventing falls for older people** is available on the Australian Government Department of Health website <<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/content/phd-pub-injury-dontfall-cnt.htm>>.
- **Worksafe Victoria** provides information to help you ensure your personal health and safety in the workplace. Visit Worksafe Victorian, **Aged Care** <<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/pages/safety-and-prevention/your-industry/aged-care>>.

To receive this publication in an accessible format **[email the supported residential services unit](mailto:srs@dhhs.vic.gov.au)** <srs@dhhs.vic.gov.au>

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