

# Preventing Elder Spills: Down-Falls in Communication

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## Description of Population of Focus

Study Population: People 65 years of age or older living in the Greater Worcester Area at risk of falls.

- People over the age of 75 had the highest prevalence of falls in 2010 according to the CDC.
- The National Council on Aging (NCOA) states 1/3 of Americans over the age of 65 will fall each year, and that every 29 minutes an elder dies as a result from a fall.
- According to the World Health Organization falls are the second leading cause of accidental deaths worldwide resulting in approximately 424, 000 deaths.

## Service Project

New England Dream Center:

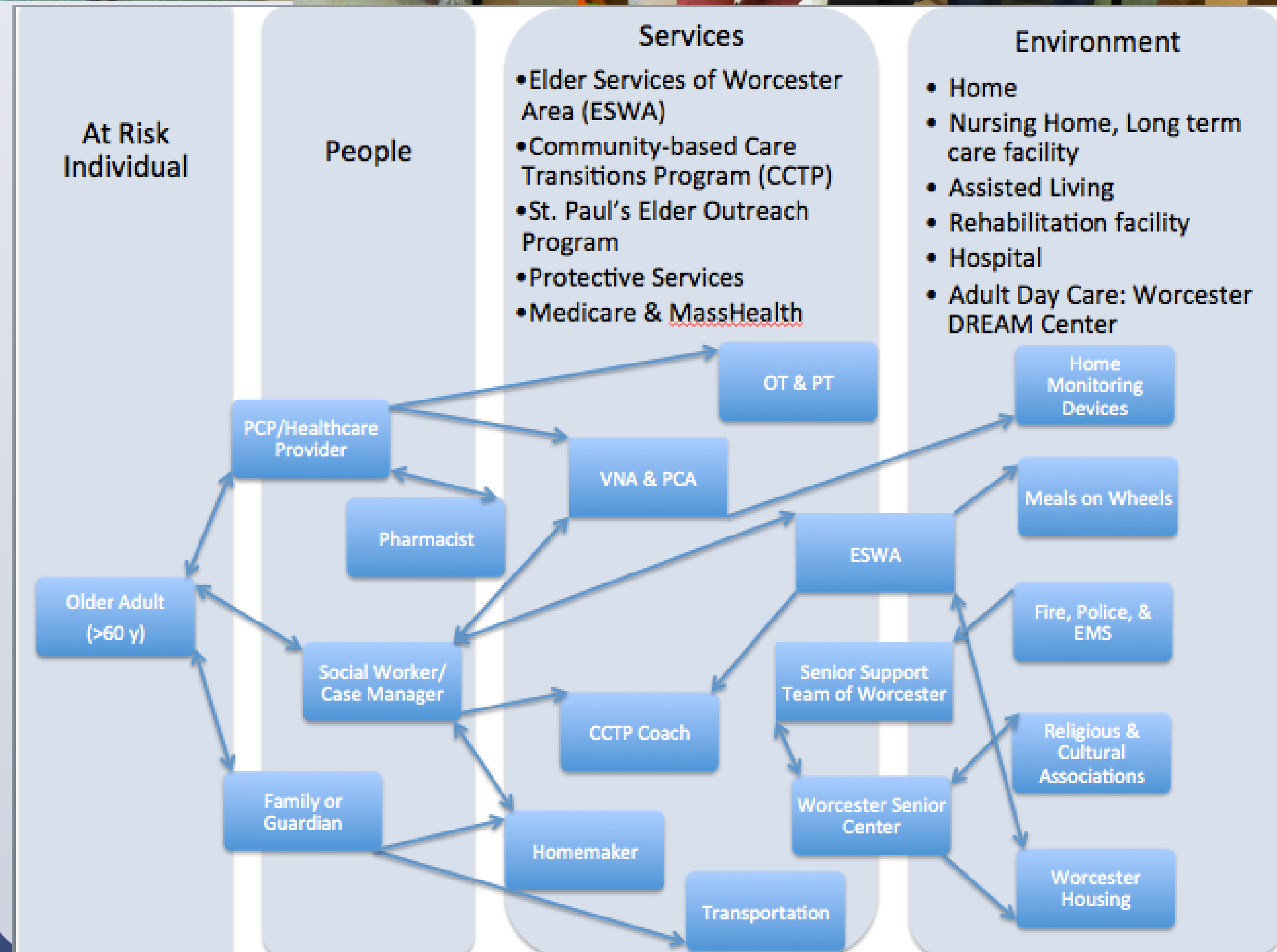
- Provided free-of-charge fall assessments using both the Timed Up and Go (TUG) Test and a Functional Reach Test
- Counseled at risk patients about home risks through a home survey
- Wrote personalized recommendations for patients regarding medication-related and environmental risks
- Engaged the seniors in an invented educational game, "Fall Prevention Bingo"
- Gave prizes that enhance the safety of their homes: night lights and traction socks

3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Senior Health and Safety Fair:

- Performed 30-Second Chair Stand Test, challenging seniors to stand and sit as many times as possible in the given 30 seconds
- Explained test results and discussed patient's previous falls and or worries regarding falls
- Referred "at risk" patients for home assessments to be performed by the Fallon Health Group

Centro Las Americanas:

- Provided free-of-charge fall assessments using both the Timed Up and Go (TUG) Test and a Functional Reach Test for 30 Hispanic elders
- Distributed pharmacy outreach flyers, falls prevention guides, and Worcester Senior Center informational pamphlets
- Gave participants traction socks



## Lessons Learned

Falls are multifocal, risk factors include:

- Age over 75
- Polypharmacy: Antipsychotic, antidepressants, hypoglycemic agents, benzodiazepines, sedatives, and cardiac medication.
- Visual Impairments
- Osteoporosis
- Cognitive Impairment
- Neuropathy
- Inappropriately Fitting footwear
- Living in a Cluttered Environment
- Poor Lighting Conditions
- Alcohol Consumption

## Recommendations

- Older adults are vulnerable during transitions in medical care. Pilot programs such as the Community-based Care Transitions Program (CCTP) are providing patients with transition coaches. Coaches encourage patients to set personal goals around symptom management, functional recovery, and quality of life. Programs such as these have been shown to reduce the number of hospital readmissions.
- A significant number of older adults who are considered at-risk do not know that they are at risk for a fall. Healthcare providers must do a better job to identify at-risk individuals through a more thorough assessment and better communication with family and case managers who may observe the individual in other settings.
- A simple questionnaire filled out in the waiting room can spawn a conversation that goes deep enough to identify key modifiable risk factors that often go overlooked. The Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths & Injuries (STEADI) tool kit developed by the CDC can be employed by care providers as a step off point to discussing fall prevention with elders and evaluating their risk.

## References

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## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Worcester Senior Center, Elder Services of Worcester Area, St. Francis Rehabilitation, Worcester DREAM Center, MCPHS, Tatnuck Park Assisted Living, UMMHC Spine Center, Centro Las Americas