



## Background to Falls Prevention issues:

Generally, Falls are an increasing problem for older people:

- One in 3 people over 65 years living in the community and (1 in 2 over 80) are likely to fall in any one year. (National Ageing Research Institute –NARI-2000)
- The most common place for falls to occur is in the home (65% ) and in the community (25%) – (Dept. Human Services -DHS Vic 2005)
- For the frail aged group (av. age over 86), 52% are likely to fall, mostly at home, with 6% of those falls resulting in serious injury/ fractures. – (DHS Vic 2005)

The cost of falls injuries is an increasing health issue. Locally, the overall older population (over 65) in the Upper Hume catchment area was approx. 6,400 in 2001, (with approx. 1500 people over 80) and is likely to rise to over 11,000 people over 65 by 2011(UHPCP Health profile 05).

However, Falls and related injuries can be preventable -by understanding and minimising older people's risk factors (such as health, medication, vision, activity levels, built environment).(DHS Vic 2005). Therefore a health promotion partnership approach to falls prevention and safer communities was developed for the Upper Hume PCP area.

## Aims and Objectives of Upper Hume PCP Falls Prevention project:

The Upper Hume PCP Falls Prevention project was funded by the Department of Human Services through UH PCP and Upper Hume Community Health Service (UHCHS) for 3 years (from April 2004 –March 2007) in the shires of Alpine, Indigo, Towong and City of Wodonga areas in North East Victoria. It is a community based project –called “Foothold on Safety – from strength to strength”. In previous years, UHCHS had developed, and still runs, a range of successful falls prevention exercise programs for older people.

The **aim** of the PCP project was to

**”Reduce the risks, the number of falls, and the impact and severity of injuries from falls among older people living in their own homes, in the Upper Hume region of Victoria”.**

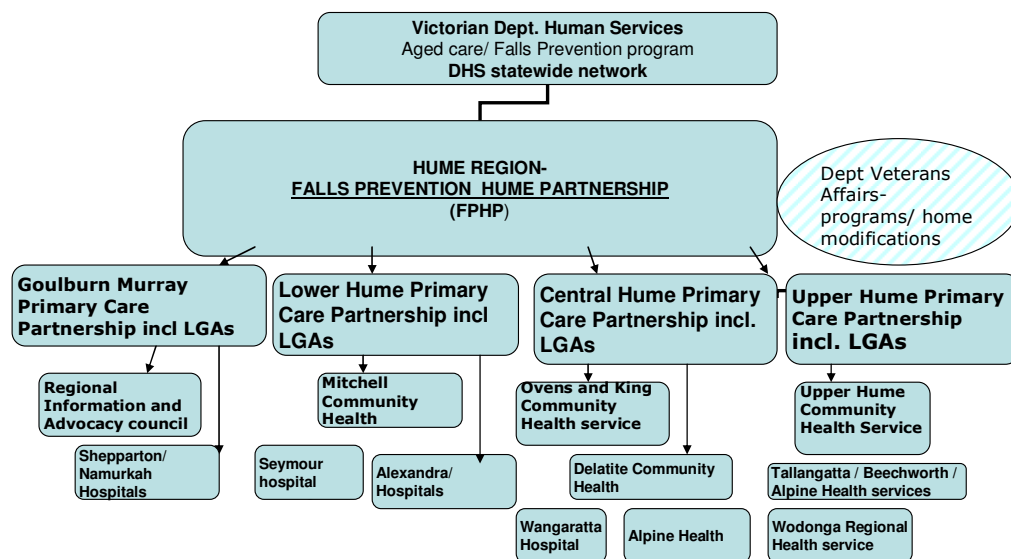
The **key objectives** of the project were:

1. Increase community recognition of falls as a “whole of Community” responsibility
2. Increase community understanding that falls are not an inevitable part of growing older, and challenge the myths and perceptions associated with growing older.
3. Through the PCP and other service providers, integrate into practice, falls prevention strategies and community activities that will be sustained beyond the life of the project.
4. Increase the proportion of people over the age of 80 who live independently in the Upper Hume region who actively participate in reducing their risk of falling and as a consequence continue to enjoy an independent and healthy lifestyle
5. Increase the safety of local environments for current and future generations.

A **multi strategy** (A+ approach) Falls Prevention project was set up, including:

- **Awareness raising** -education/ training / promotion (educate health workers, locals)
- **Assessments** –people and places (physical / environmental)
- **Activities** ( for balance, strength, coordination)
- **Accessible programs and places** -supportive environments (increase access to physical activities for isolated older people and identify/ reduce falls hazards in homes/ local places)
- **Assistance through Partnerships.** (linking strategies, agencies and develop local sustainability)

## Falls Prevention Hume Partnership Structure/ regional partnerships



**The UH FOS steering committee** (UHFOSSC -started May 2004) includes 13 representative regional PCP agencies and meets bi monthly, in Wodonga, usually with 7-9 people attending. This committee oversees the development and regional integration of the Upper Hume project.

**The Falls Prevention Hume Partnership** (FPHP -set up in April 2004) includes four DHS funded Hume region Falls prevention projects (community and hospital based) agencies in the Upper Hume, Central Hume, Lower Hume, and Goulburn Valley Primary Care Partnership areas. This network meets 2-3 monthly.

**Interagency meetings** Regular interagency meetings includes bimonthly Upper Hume HACC Best Practice meeting; Upper Hume PCP Integrated Health Promotion /Physical Activities group meetings: monthly Wodonga, Indigo and Towong Shire disability access group meetings and some meetings with the Mt Beauty Alpine Health Community / Health Advisory committee.

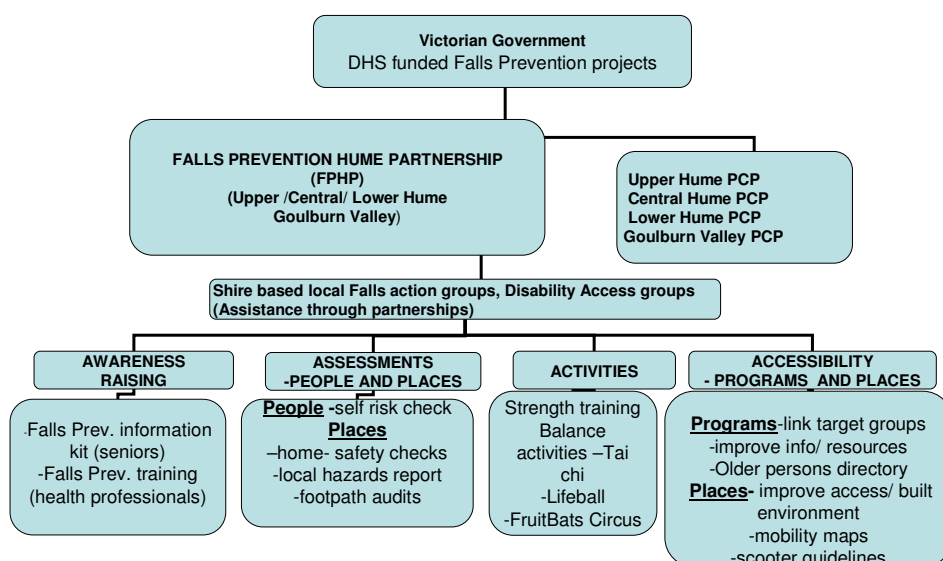
**Participation of older people** Older people, people with disabilities and local stakeholder/ health agencies are involved in “local falls action groups” through the local interagency disability access groups. They are involved in developing local action plans for access issues and assisting with falls related activities’ days and project dissemination (eg advising on local mobility maps, and Rural Health Week /community safety month / Seniors Week activities/ scooter forums / Lifeball days).

## **PROJECT OUTCOMES**

Outcomes have been measured under five broad strategy (A+) headings:

- Awareness raising,
- Assessments (people and places),
- Activities,
- Accessibility (programs and places) and
- Assistance through partnerships”.

## Falls Prevention Hume Partnership Key Strategies-A+



### Awareness raising – helps people gain access to relevant information about falls

#### Resource Development

**Regionally** - In cooperation with the Falls Prevention Hume Partnership several resources were developed and /or distributed. These included the Fridge magnet “What to do if You Fall”, self Assessment tools for personal and home safety risks, posters (for walking, tai chi, balance & strength training, and the Acrobats circus), brochures promoting the Falls Prevention Project in the Hume Region, and booklets ( the “FOS Guide for seniors” and the DHS “Don’t fall for it – Falls don’t just happen”).

**Locally:** Mobility Maps were produced for Mt Beauty and Wodonga (and are being planned for Indigo and Towong shires). An Older Persons Physical Activity Directory was developed for the Upper Hume area (1000 copies printed 2006, 200 copies reprinted Mar 07 ). These resources have been distributed through regular forums.

#### Information Sessions

A range of talks (40+) for over 600 people have been given throughout the UH region. This included verbal and Power point presentations for groups such as HACC workers, senior citizens, community lunches, Local Area Health Services and Local Councils. The FPHP also ran a regional Falls Forum (Benalla, August 05) for over 90 Health workers. An Osteoporosis 10 wk course was run in Mt Beauty in 2006 and conference papers have been accepted and presented to the National Injury Prevention (Sydney, Sept. 2006) and Australian Falls Prevention conferences (Brisbane, Oct. 2006).

### Assessments -helps people check their falls risks.

A range of people and place based assessments have been developed and undertaken, mostly by older people themselves. People- based assessments included Personal falls risk self assessments (pink form); “Quickscreen” falls assessments for physical activity groups, and, in the Alpine shire, “Active script” assessments to prescribe physical activities.

Places-based or built environment assessments included Home safety self assessments (blue form); Accessible home design checklists (green form); Local area access assessments/ hazard report (pink form); and the Footpath accessibility audits.

### Activities-helps people reduce falls by maintaining mobility, balance and strength

Promoting Physical Activity helps reduce the incidence of falls by helping maintain joint mobility and muscle strength, and reduce health problems. As well as promoting the continuance of the existing exercise programs for older people, a range of newer activities have also been developed and promoted (through the Older Persons Physical Activities Directory -OPPAD and the CARN Pathways

kit)). This has included walking activities such as “Lifeball”, Pole walking and balance activities ie “FruitBats” older persons circus.

## Accessibility-helps people gain better and safer access to places and programs

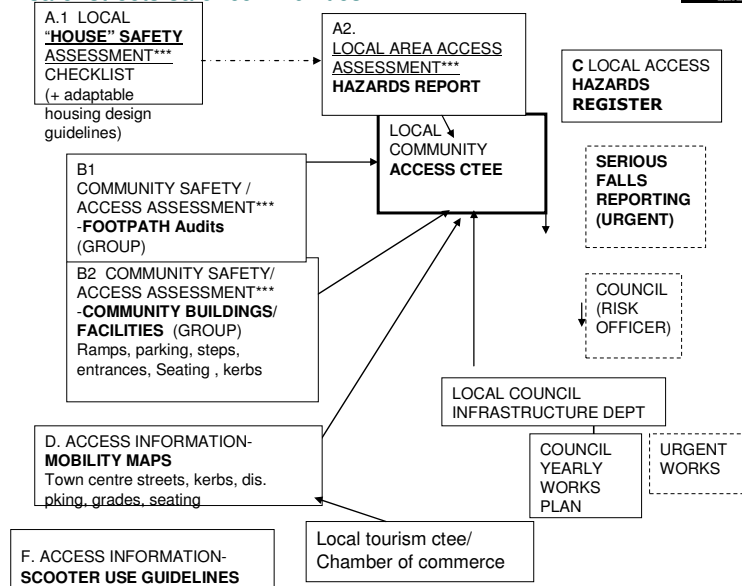
Developing more Accessible programs and places has included :

-Creating a ”Safer streets, Safer communities” built environment framework for improving safety and accessibility in homes and local areas. (see below)

### Falls Prevention Hume Partnership

#### Assessments- Built environment access/safety framework

“safer streets-safer communities”



This has involved close links with local disability access groups, Rural Access workers and local council planning /works departments and work on local accessibility issues and projects (eg portable ramps for Indigo shire halls).

The Falls Forum, Benalla (05) held a “safer built environments workshop” to discuss home safety checklists, designing for accessible homes, footpath audits, mobility maps /scooter guidelines. Since then completed projects have included mobility maps and footpath audits (Wodonga, Mt Beauty); and scooter use workshops (Tallangatta, Yackandandah).

## Assistance through partnerships –helps people and agencies work together, locally

Health Promotion Partnerships have developed in each shire/LGA between local councils and health agencies, and local community older persons and disability access groups.

Falls prevention program partnerships have developed across the region with the 4 projects in the Falls Prevention Hume Partnership (FPHP) –developing /sharing resources / training,

Innovative community-based, multi-agency partnership projects include the new “Lifeball” game”, portable ramps for local shire halls, community footpath audits, local hazard reports and town mobility maps.

Links with other local and regional health promotion and community events (such as Community Safety month, the Seniors Festival and Rural Health Week) were also important to help build regular local involvement /ownership, local capacity and ongoing sustainability.

Further sustainability will be through distributing the Falls Resource Kit, OPPAD and FPHP newsletter to other community/ health promotion agencies in UHPCP and encouraging them to take up/ continue regular falls forums / talks / activities / events.

## **Conclusion:**

**“Activities and Accessibility projects help encourage Healthy Ageing –for individuals!  
Partnerships with local health promotion and built environment agencies help build safer, accessible places –for whole communities, for generations!”**