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FALLS-FREE COALITION IDENTIFIES CREATIVE PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES RELATED TO REDUCING HOME HAZARDS — Waterford at Fairway Village will start Fall Reduction and Awareness Program this year

BEAVERTON, Ore. — The Falls-Free Coalition has identified 10 creative programs and practices in home assessment and modification that can reduce home hazards. Touchmark's Fall Reduction and Awareness Program was among those recognized at the recent joint conference of the American Society on Aging and National Council on Aging and is the only one selected in the Northwest — and any state where Touchmark is located.

The Touchmark program was developed last year by Vice President of Wellness & Programs Marge Coalman, EdD, and by the end of this year will be introduced at all Touchmark communities. The essence of the program is the partnership created with community residents to enhance balance and mobility, support independence and thus reduce the risk of falls.

A qualified Touchmark health professional does an in-home survey to determine if anything needs to be changed to support greater freedom of movement and the reduction of fall risks. The survey addresses such things as lighting, electrical cords, throw rugs and furniture placement. Home features that can fall-proof a home include no loose carpets or scatter rugs, bright lighting, grab bars in bathrooms, sliding shelves in cupboards and use of night lights.

In addition to the survey, Touchmark is offering special assessment and fitness classes to help improve balance and mobility.

“The goal of the Touchmark Fall Awareness and Reduction Program is to take the process from information and education to the reality of reducing injury-related falls,” says Coalman. “Our initial efforts have been even more successful than we’d hoped when designing the program,” she points out, citing the average 72-percent improvement among people who participated in an eight-week pilot program that included six weeks of personal training.

The Coalition is dedicated to preventing falls in older adults. A year ago, it introduced the

Falls-Free National Action Plan. In 2003, falls resulted in 13,700 deaths, 460,000 hospitalizations and over 1.3 million emergency-room visits. In addition to the pain and suffering, medical costs resulting from fall-related injuries were over \$19 billion in 2000.

“Falls are not a normal part of aging, and there are many risks that can be addressed that will reduce the number of falls in older adults,” says James Firman, NCOA president and CEO.

Over the past nine months, the Home Safety Workgroup of the Coalition designed and conducted a national search for creative programs and practices. This effort was funded by the national nonprofit Home Safety Council, a coalition and workgroup member. Members of the Workgroup are leading experts in home safety who worked together using the available research evidence to develop a self-nomination survey that resulted in over 60 completed self-nominations.

Bonita Beattie, director of the NCOA’s Center for Healthy Aging and chair of the Coalition notes, “The research is clear that home safety assessment and modification is effective only when it is part of a larger risk-factor assessment and intervention program. And home modification must accompany assessment, if warranted.”

“Falls are such a serious public health issue, and it’s exciting to see innovative approaches to helping the public, especially older adults, understand their risks,” said Meri-K Appy, president of the Home Safety Council. “We are hopeful that employing creativity in home assessment and modification programs will go a long way toward helping families realize the importance of making changes to help prevent falls.”

The Workgroup believes all programs should implement a continuous quality assurance strategy and strive to measure appropriate outcomes — and should analyze and use those outcomes data in a variety of ways that improve the reach, effectiveness and sustainability of the program.

Some important lessons learned from these programs and practices were that home assessments and subsequent modifications are complex activities that require careful planning, oversight and follow-up at all stages. Also, creative strategies noted included collaborating with first responders and other key partners, making use of trained volunteers and integrating a fall risk assessment program into a larger safety program aimed at keeping older adults in their homes. It was also clear from these examples that collecting objective feedback and employing that feedback to improve programs and processes was uneven.

The Coalition will publish a report later this year that will provide readers with home assessment and modification programs and practices that can be adapted to local communities to promote the safety and well-being of older adults when used in conjunction with a larger fall prevention intervention. The report also will include creative practices from programs reviewed in

the selection process that address use of volunteers, community partners and funding strategies.

The 10 Creative Programs

- Home Injury Prevention Program: Neighborhood Senior Services — Ann Arbor, MI
- Senior HealthLink: Neighborhood Health Agencies — West Chester, PA
- SPICE for Life: Pitt County Council on Aging — Greenville, NC
- Touchmark's Fall Reduction and Awareness Program: Retirement Community Health & Fitness Clubs — Beaverton, OR
- Fall Risk Reduction Project:: Saint Elizabeth Home Care Services — Lincoln, NE
- Steady Strides: VNA of Care New England — Warwick, RI
- TriHealth Senior Link Home Safety Check: TriHealth Senior Link (Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly/PACE Program) — Cincinnati, OH
- Community Outreach Services Home Safety Unit: Open Hands — Sante Fe, NM
- Farewell to Falls: Stanford University Medical Center Trauma and Emergency Services — Stanford, CA
- LifeAssess: Holy Redeemer Home Care — Philadelphia, PA

About Touchmark

Touchmark was established in 1980 and is a leader in planning, building and operating communities for those 55-plus years. Located in eight states and a Canadian province, Touchmark communities provide a broad range of homes and lifestyle options. Touchmark Health & Fitness clubs are open to the public and serve people aged 40-plus.

About NCOA

The National Council on Aging's mission is to improve the lives of older Americans. NCOA programs help older people remain healthy and independent, find jobs, increase access to benefits programs and discover meaningful ways to continue contributing to society. A charitable organization with a national network of more than 14,000 organizations and leaders, NCOA was founded in 1950 and is based in Washington, DC.

About Home Safety Council

The Home Safety Council (HSC) is the only national nonprofit organization solely dedicated to preventing home-related injuries that result in nearly 20,000 deaths and 21 million medical visits on average each year. Through national programs, partnerships and the support of volunteers, HSC educates people of all ages to be safer in and around their homes. The Home Safety Council is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization located in Washington, DC.