

## Media Release

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Attention: Chiefs of staff / health reporters

### **MONASH EXPERT WARNS OF FALL INJURY EPIDEMIC**

A leading Monash University injury prevention expert has warned governments must act quickly to prevent a looming epidemic of fall-related deaths and injuries among elderly Victorians.

Director of the Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit at the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC), Erin Cassell, said new data showed a 43 percent increase in the rate of people aged 65 and older who are suffering fall-related deaths.

“As a community we are not doing enough to prevent fall injuries among a growing population of ageing baby boomers and there is nothing to suggest this alarming trend won’t continue,” Ms Cassell said. “The demand on emergency departments, hospitals and aged care facilities is tremendous and will balloon out further if these rates are not arrested.”

MUARC analysis of ABS data found the rate of fall-related deaths of Victorian seniors rose from 43 deaths for every 100,000 Victorian seniors in 1996 to 66 deaths per 100,000 in 2005. The increase was partly due to better reporting.

Falls are the leading cause of accident-related deaths for Victorian seniors, accounting for 1192 deaths between 2003 and 2005.

Researchers also analysed the latest Victorian hospital admissions data and found the rate of seniors with fall-related injuries increased by 19 per cent in a decade, from 2,567 for every 100,000 Victorian seniors in 1997 to 2,992 in 2006.

The main injuries were hip fractures (19 per cent of admissions), open head wounds (9 per cent), forearm/elbow fractures (8 per cent), fractures of the abdomen/lower back/lumbar spine/pelvis (6 per cent), and shoulder/upper arm fractures (6 per cent).

The study also found:

- Between 2004 and 2006, Victorian seniors with fall injuries accounted for 61,486 hospital admissions and 28,195 emergency department presentations;
- In 2006 alone, Victorian seniors with fall injuries accounted for 157,303 hospital bed days; and
- Seniors stayed in hospital an average of seven days after being admitted with a fall injury.

Ms Cassell said governments had recently employed a number of initiatives to prevent fall injuries including exercise programs to address seniors’ balance and strength, promoting the wearing of hip protectors, consumption of Vitamin D and calcium supplements, and reducing the use of medications associated with falls, such as sleeping pills.

“These are positive moves but governments need to intensify their efforts and allocate far more resources to protect seniors from an epidemic,” Ms Cassell said.

The study, *Preventing injury in Victorian seniors aged 65 years and older* is published in today’s edition of Hazard Magazine. It can be viewed at <http://www.monash.edu.au/muarc/VISU/hazard.index.html>

**For additional information and interviews please contact Ms Erin Cassell on (03) 9905 1857 or Colin Vickery, Media Officer, MUARC on 0411 535 045.**