



Falls Specialist Service

A home based falls prevention service – maintaining independence in older persons

Why do we need the Falls Specialist Service?

Falls and the injuries that result from falls are a significant concern for many older Australians. Even in the absence of injuries, many older adults lose confidence in performing everyday activities due to fear of further falls. This fear may cause older adults to restrict activities that are a normal part of their daily routine. This inactivity can lead to muscle weakness and the deterioration in balance and walking, which can further increase the likelihood of a fall. Importantly, the loss of confidence and restriction of daily activities can impact on a person's quality of life and their ability to manage independently at home.

What is the Falls Specialist Service?

The Falls Specialist Service commenced in 2001 at Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital to assist older adults living in the community to identify and reduce their risk of falls. The service has been expanded across selected sites in the Perth metropolitan area through funding made available by the state and federal governments. The service targets older adults who are at risk of a fall, or have already experienced a fall and would benefit from a detailed assessment of their risk of falling.

What does the service provide?

A physiotherapist or occupational therapist will assess the client in a clinic or their own home. They will conduct a detailed

assessment to determine why the client has fallen previously and/or those risk factors that may contribute to future falls.

Assessment covers the following risk areas:

- Medication screen:
 - identification of high risk medication, supplement use (e.g. calcium, vitamin D) and reported side effects.
- Balance, walking and muscle strength:
- Footwear and foot health:
 - sensory screening, and observation of biomechanical abnormalities and common untreated foot pathologies.
- Vision:
 - client report of known pathologies and eyewear type.
- Performance and confidence in daily activities
- Memory and mood concerns:
 - screening for cognitive deficits and/or depressive symptoms.
- Bladder and bowel function
- Health conditions:
 - relevant past medical history
 - assessment of postural blood pressure and calculation of non BMD fracture risk.
- Home hazard screen

Therapists will discuss the assessment findings with their client and make specific recommendations about how they can reduce their risk of falls. Interventions are either delivered directly by the therapist or indirectly via on-referral to appropriate services. Examples of recommendations include:

- Participation in an exercise program to improve balance, gait and muscle

strength deficits. This can be delivered either as a home, group or gym program.

- Home hazard reduction and home modifications (e.g. installation of grab rails, ramps or box steps).
- The prescription of walking aids, and assistive equipment to facilitate performance of daily activities.
- Podiatry review for foot care or specific advice related to biomechanical deficits and footwear.
- Education related to the development of a “Personalised Falls Action Plan” in the event of a fall at home.
- Behavioural modification and education about actions that may be contributing to the risk of falling.
- Referral for medication review (e.g. Home Medication Review).
- Referral for community support assessment (e.g. HACC or ACAT).
- Advice to visit an Optometrist, Podiatrist, GP or other health care provider (at their usual cost).

The therapist will liaise with the client’s GP with regards to medical or medication issues that require further assessment. Clients may be referred to a multidisciplinary falls clinic which includes assessment by a geriatrician.

How long does a visit with the Falls Specialist take?

Initial assessment takes at least one hour. Subsequent visits are approximately 30 to 40 minutes but vary based on purpose.

What does the service cost?

There is no cost associated with assessment by Falls Specialist Service. There may be costs associated with recommendations suggested by the assessing therapist.

How do older adults access this service?

Referrals are accepted from GPs and health providers in the public or private health system across all clinical areas and settings. Residential aged care referrals may also be accepted but referrers should contact their local service provider for further information. Referrals requesting a ‘Falls Assessment’ should be addressed to their nearest public hospital (Refer to the [Falls Prevention Health Network](#) website for the location and contact details of service sites). Information on how to refer to a public hospital clinic or allied health service can be found at the [Central Referral Service Guide for Referrers](#).

Where is the service available?

The Falls Specialist Service is located at

- Armadale Health Service - Community Rehabilitation
- Bentley Health Service - Community Rehabilitation
- Fremantle Hospital and Health Service - Community and Geriatric Medicine
- Mandurah Community Health
- Osborne Park Hospital – Rehabilitation and Aged Care
- Rockingham General Hospital – Community Rehabilitation
- Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital – Rehabilitation and Aged Care

Further information:

For additional information on falls assessment visit [Health Pathways WA](#) (<https://wa.healthpathways.org.au/>).

Alternatively contact [Stay on Your Feet](#)[®] on 1300 30 35 40 or visit www.stayonyourfeet.com.au/ for access to health professional and consumer resources.