

APTA MI 2026 conference EBP proposal

Title: Physical Therapist-Led Falls Prevention: Evidence, Barriers, and Opportunities in Community-Based Care

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Abstract:

Background and Identification of Practice Problem: Falls and fall-related injuries are one of the leading causes of mortality and morbidity, particularly among older adults. Although effective fall prevention interventions exist, these services are underutilized. In addition, significant practice and administrative barriers can limit physical therapists (PTs) ability to provide upstream, prevention-focused fall prevention services.

Purpose: This session will describe factors influencing healthcare utilization for balance impairments among community-dwelling older adults and present key components of a comprehensive, PT-led, evidence-based falls prevention program.

Relevance: Physical therapists are essential healthcare providers in the design and delivery of multimodal fall prevention interventions. Shifting practice toward upstream, prevention-focused care enables PTs to improve safety, reduce fall risk, and support aging in place.

Literature Review and Analysis: Research indicates that nearly 70% of U.S. adults in middle to late adulthood are unaware of their performance-based balance deficits, a major contributor to fall risk. This highlights the urgent need for community-based initiatives that integrate public health and healthcare partnerships to improve fall prevention services.

Application and Discussion: As movement and balance experts, physical therapists are well positioned to design and deliver multimodal fall prevention interventions, including those aimed at prevention, risk reduction, and improved safety. However, practice and administrative barriers continue to limit broader implementation of upstream fall prevention services. Originating in Michigan, HOP-UP-PT (Home-Based Older Persons Upstream Prevention Physical Therapy) has demonstrated an eight-fold reduction in falls among participants across varying levels of fall risk. This multimodal program incorporates evidence-based differential diagnosis, standardized outcome measures, and assessments of environmental and physical risk factors to guide individualized intervention planning..

Beyond the clinical impact, this session will highlight the economic value of fall prevention programming, including evidence supporting reimbursement pathways for both in-person and virtual care models. In addition, the presenters will share their approach to collaborating with funding agencies, state and local governmental organizations, and 2-1-1 services to develop a statewide falls prevention resource portal aimed at expanding access to evidence-based, community-focused interventions led by PTs.

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