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“The greatest risk for any senior aging in place in their home is the danger of falling”, says Donna Burns, Assistant Director of the Barnstable Senior Center. The danger of falls to seniors has become so great that preventing falls has become a national health priority. In fact, according to the National Council on Aging, falls are the leading cause of fatal and non-fatal injuries for older Americans. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one-third of Americans aged 65+ falls each year. Every thirty seconds, an older adult is treated in an emergency room for a fall; every 20 minutes, an older adult dies from a fall. About one third of the elder population over 65 falls each year, and the risks of falls increases proportionately with age, with over half of people over 80 falling annually.

Most falls actually happen in the home, where older adults spend most of their time. As people grow older, common things in their home environment begin to pose a greater hazard to their well-being. Stairs, dimly lit areas, carpets and rugs, and that extra little clutter around the house can prove to be a dangerous tripping hazard. A home safety check can help identify potential fall hazards that need to be removed or changed, or minimized. All that it takes is some time and someone who can assist a senior in determining what changes can be made to make them safer.

“Claudia Borden, Outreach Coordinator for the Barnstable Senior Center, had a great idea for a program that would help seniors identify risks in their home, which would allow us to make small changes that can make a big difference.”, says Burns. With generous grant funding from the Hyannis Rotary and the Friends of the Barnstable Council on Aging, they are now able to bring that program to the older residents in the seven villages of Barnstable. The Home Safety Program would involve a visit by a Barnstable Senior Center Outreach Worker and Volunteer to an elder’s home who may be at risk of falling. An assessment of potential risk factors in the home would be identified by using an NCOA Safety Checklist. “We would be prepared and ready, at no charge to the homeowner, to change lightbulbs, replace smoke detector batteries, change lightbulbs to brighter, long life, energy efficient ones, install nightlights in bathrooms and bedrooms, provide small flashlights for bedside tables and discuss removing dangerous clutter and scatter rugs with homeowners. We would also provide a “File of Life” magnetized file for medications. Additionally, we will provide printed flyers with safety information, tips and community resources which will be of value to the seniors.” according to Burns.

“Basically we will be looking at your home with new eyes”, says Borden. “So often we walk by small hazards so often that we no longer see them. We will come in and not only identify potential hazards; we will assist, as we can, with their removal, making everything a bit safer for the older adult in their home.” This program is free to local older residents, and those who would like a home safety assessment can call Claudia Borden at (508) 862-4754 to schedule an appointment. There will also be a workshop explaining the Home Safety Awareness Program at the Barnstable Senior Center on Wednesday, February 22nd at 1:30 PM.

