

## **World Guidelines for Falls Prevention and Management for Older Adults:**

### **A Global Initiative: Published October 2022**

*“It takes a child one year to acquire independent movement and ten years to acquire independent mobility. An older person can lose both in a day”<sup>1</sup>*

The *World Guidelines for Falls Prevention and Management for Older Adults* were published by the World Falls Task Force in October 2022, and Tai Chi received a “*Strong Recommendation*” as an exercise for falls prevention in older adults. The *World Guidelines* were prepared with input from 96 internationally recognised researchers in falls prevention and aging, from 39 countries, 10 of whom are from Australian Research Institutes. Of these, 3 Australian researchers were members of the Task Force Steering Committee and 7 were leaders of Working Groups tasked with various aspects of falls assessment and prevention. A significant achievement for research on aging in Australia and globally.

The *World Guidelines* are meant for use by medical and health professionals as a framework and expert recommendations on how to identify and assess the risk of falls in older adults. The *Guidelines* recommend that older adults who are at low risk of having falls, should aim to engage in “...150 to 300 minutes per week of intermediate-intensity physical activity or 75 to 150 minutes per week of vigorous-intensity physical activity”<sup>1</sup>.

For preventing falls among older adults living in the community, regardless of their risk of falls or age, the *Guidelines* recommend that exercise programs should include “...balance challenging and functional exercises (e.g. sit-to-stand, stepping etc.) and should be offered with sessions three times or more weekly which are individualised, progressed in intensity for at least 12 weeks and continued longer for greater effect”. This received a “*Strong Recommendation*” based on “*High Quality Evidence*”<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, it is recommended that “...Tai Chi and/or additional individualised progressive resistance strength training...”, be included. This received a “*Strong Recommendation*” as an additional intervention based on “*Intermediate Quality Evidence*”, meaning that further research is likely to have an impact on the confidence in its estimated effects. The *Guidelines* state that “*The three most convincing forms of exercise (delivered as group or home-based programmes) are those classified as balance and functional training, Tai Chi, or multicomponent exercise (programmes that involve multiple exercise types, usually balance and functional exercise plus resistance exercise)*”<sup>1</sup>.

As well, Tai Chi received recommendations as a balance training exercise for older adults with a cognitive impairment (ranging from mild memory loss to dementia) and for some with Parkinson’s Disease.

These *Guidelines* probably come as no surprise to TCAA members, because if you’ve practised Tai Chi often enough and for some time, you will have noticed that your legs and body are stronger, your balance is better, you are more physically and mentally relaxed and your awareness of your body’s position, movements and actions will have improved over time. These are all part of the multicomponent aspects of Tai Chi that are so important in preventing falls and improving balance as we age.

Of equal importance though, is that these *Guidelines* will raise the profile of Tai Chi as an evidence-based, internationally recognised exercise intervention for falls prevention. We hope that medical doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, exercise physiologists, and researchers will take note of the recommendations in the *Guidelines* so that older Australians can learn about their local Tai Chi group, and that more can enjoy its benefits. Remember to spread the word about these great benefits of Tai Chi.

1. To read more about the *World Guidelines*, go to:

<https://www.bgs.org.uk/policy-and-media/landmark-publication-of-world-falls-guidelines-0>

For more information: *The Australian & New Zealand Falls Prevention Society* website:

<https://www.anzfallsprevention.org/>