medbridge

WHITE PAPER

A New Approach to Fall Prevention: Empowering Safer Aging with Hybrid Care

By Medbridge



Overview

As the number of older adults in the U.S. reaches historic levels, fall-related injuries among this population are becoming increasingly common, putting patients at risk and accounting for over $50 billion in healthcare costs annually.[1] One in four community-dwelling adults over age 65 will experience a fall each year, and an older adult dies from fall-related injuries every 20 minutes.[2,3]

Although most falls are preventable, routine screening and proactive care remain inconsistent. Too often, a patient mentions feeling unsteady during a primary care visit, only for that concern to be recorded in the EMR and not addressed until after a fall occurs.

So, consider this: **What story does your organization want to tell?** Will you be known for proactively identifying and preventing falls in older adults? For pioneering a new standard of care that reduces fall risk, improves outcomes, and empowers your clinicians to practice at the top of their license?

A digitally enabled fall prevention program allows your organization to shift from reactive to proactive care—improving patient outcomes while reducing costs. Pathways, our digital musculoskeletal care platform, supplements in-person therapy programs with a variety of care pathways that provide efficient, effective, and personalized care. With our new Fall Prevention Pathway, clinicians can identify at-risk patients earlier, intervene more effectively, and support safer aging.

IN THIS WHITE PAPER WE'LL COVER:

- Common barriers patients face to fall prevention and how to overcome them
- How hybrid care helps reach patients wherever they are with personalized exercise programs, gamified experiences, and comprehensive education.
- How Medbridge's Fall Prevention Pathway improves patient outcomes, access, and engagement

Table of Contents

The case for a modern fall prevention program 3

How Pathways enhances fall prevention programs 5

Driving referrals and improving access 8

Elena's Journey: without Pathways versus with Pathways 10

Conclusion 11



The case for a modern fall prevention program

Consequences of Untreated Fall Risk

Falls can significantly affect a person's quality of life, leading to short-term or long-term disability, expensive hospital visits, loss of independence, and fear of falling. Even without physical injury, the fear of falling in itself can lead to decreased mobility and increased social isolation.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

- **Injuries:** Falls are a leading cause of serious injuries among older adults, including fractures (especially hip fractures), head injuries, and soft tissue damage. Approximately 95 percent of hip fractures in older adults result from falls.[4]
- **Reduced mobility and independence:** Injuries from falls often lead to decreased mobility, increased dependency on caregivers, and a higher likelihood of enrollment in long-term care. The fear of falling again can cause patients to avoid physical activity, creating a cycle of decline.[5]
- **Increased mortality risk:** Falls can lead to serious physical complications, especially in frail older adults, and increase the risk of mortality. For example, hip fractures among adults aged 65 and older have a one-year postoperative mortality rate of 27.3 percent.[6]

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

- **Fear of falling:** Apprehension about falling is common in older adults and can lead to reduced independence and confidence in daily activities. One study showed that fear of falling affects 40–73 percent of those who have fallen and 20–39 percent of older adults overall. This anxiety can result in decreased physical activity, social withdrawal, and a decline in quality of life.[7]
- **Depression and anxiety:** Research has found a strong association between falls and increased risks of depression and anxiety symptoms in older adults. Recurring falls can contribute to feelings of vulnerability and social withdrawal, and make depressive symptoms worse.[8]
- **Cognitive decline:** A study analyzing Medicare data revealed that older adults who experienced falls had a 21 percent increased risk of being diagnosed with dementia within a year compared to those with other injuries. This suggests that falls might contribute to cognitive decline.[9]

Barriers to Effective Fall Prevention

Despite the well-documented risks and costs associated with falls, most fall prevention efforts remain reactive or limited in scope. Key challenges include:

> **Limited screening in primary care:** Many primary care protocols don't include routine fall risk assessments or structured follow-up. Even when patients express concerns such as feeling unsteady, those observations might be documented in the EMR but not acted on.

> **Stigma and denial among patients:** Older adults might minimize or avoid reporting fall risk due to fear of losing independence, embarrassment, or a belief that falling is an inevitable part of aging.

> **Access barriers to therapy:** In-person physical therapy is an effective intervention for fall risk, but it isn't always accessible. Especially when patients face mobility limitations, the logistical challenges of getting to a clinic might be too much. In addition, high co-pays can cause patients to avoid seeking care.

> **Underestimation of digital readiness:** Some clinicians might assume that older adults aren't willing or able to engage with digital tools, when in reality, many patients are open to virtual or hybrid care models if they are user-friendly.

The Opportunity: Proactive, Personalized, Preventive Care

With the right tools and processes, fall prevention doesn't have to begin after a fall—it can start at the first sign of risk. Digital care platforms like Medbridge Pathways enable healthcare organizations to deliver early, evidence-based interventions that can help patients improve strength, balance, confidence, and the ability to age safely and independently.

Pathways provides an effective, evidence-based program for helping patients avoid falls, whether that's someone with osteoarthritis who casually mentions feeling unsteady at her wellness visit or someone recovering from a knee injury who is experiencing new concerns about balance. Pathways enables easier outreach to many patients at high risk for falls who might already be in your organization's system for previous conditions.

Whether you leverage the program as an independent digital app or support more thoroughly with remote monitoring, the Medbridge Fall Prevention Pathway allows providers to intervene early and promote patient confidence and safety at home.

More than 1 in 4 older Americans have a fall event each year, and falls are the leading cause of injury and injury death among adults 65 and over. [10, 11]

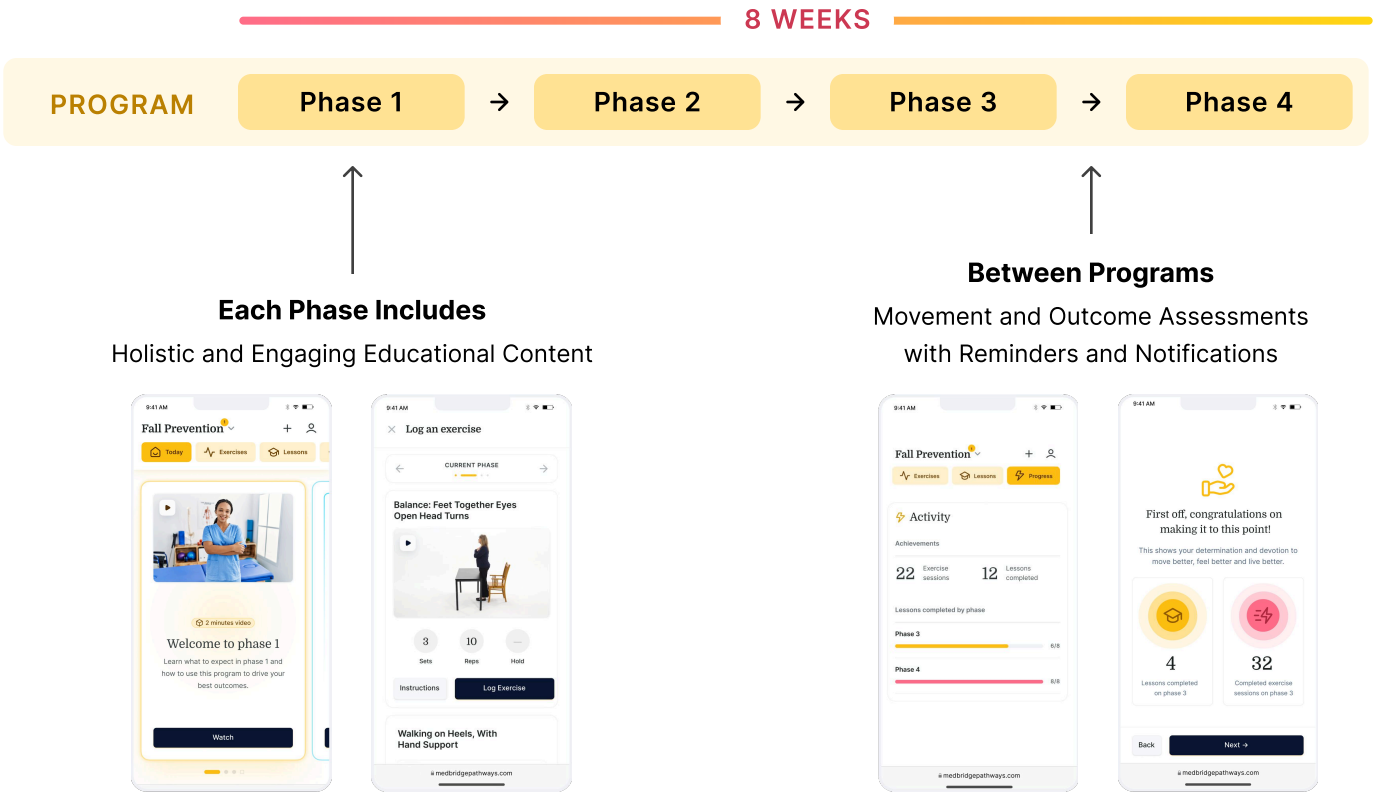
How Pathways enhances fall prevention programs



The Medbridge Fall Prevention Pathway is designed to help providers identify, engage, and support at-risk older adults before a fall occurs. Based on the latest evidence and behavioral science, the program addresses the multifactorial nature of fall risk while offering engaging, accessible care that can be personalized to individual patient needs. It offers:

Tiered, Progressive Exercise Pathways

The Fall Prevention Pathway includes an eight-week exercise progression divided into four phases, with tracks customized for low, medium, and high functional ability levels. Each phase integrates lower-body strength, balance, aerobic activity, and dual-task practice to improve functional movement and improve general deconditioning. The pathway is based on research showing that fall rates can be reduced by up to 42 percent with a level of intensity and dosage that exceeds what's typically feasible in a standard weekly PT visit.[12] Pathways bridges this gap by enabling patients to complete a full dose of balance and strength training at home, in a structured, progressive way.



Integrated Functional Assessments

The program incorporates standardized assessments validated for use in community-dwelling older adults:

> The Stop Elderly Accidents, Deaths, and Injuries (STEADI) fall risk screen

> Motion capture assessments: the 30-second sit-to-stand test and the four-stage balance test

> Falls Efficacy Short Scale (Short FES-I) to measure fear of falling

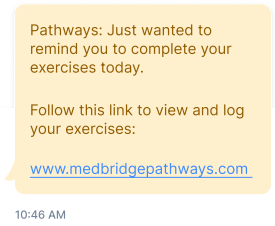
These tools help identify patients at risk, track progress, and prompt clinical oversight when red flags arise. They also help patients build confidence by tracking and demonstrating improvements in function and confidence over time.

Robust Patient Education

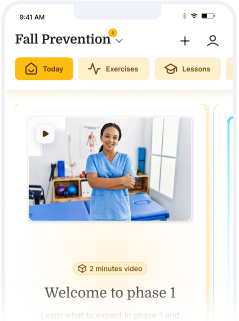
Patient education is a fundamental component of Pathways. In our fall prevention program, video- and article-based content addresses key fall-related risks—including home hazards, medication effects, visual changes, and safe footwear—and aims to reduce stigma while reinforcing preventive behaviors. Our education materials use clear language, engaging illustrations, and a positive, empowering tone.

Behavioral Science-Driven Engagement

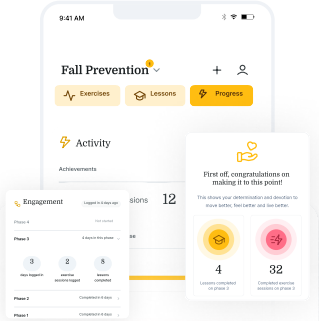
Pathways incorporates behavioral engagement strategies to help patients build and maintain habits. These include:



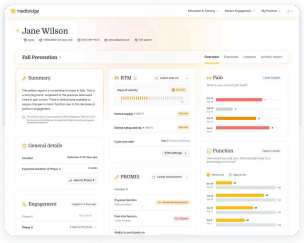
SMS reminders and motivational messaging



Progressive content delivery to reduce overwhelm



Gamified goal tracking and progress markers



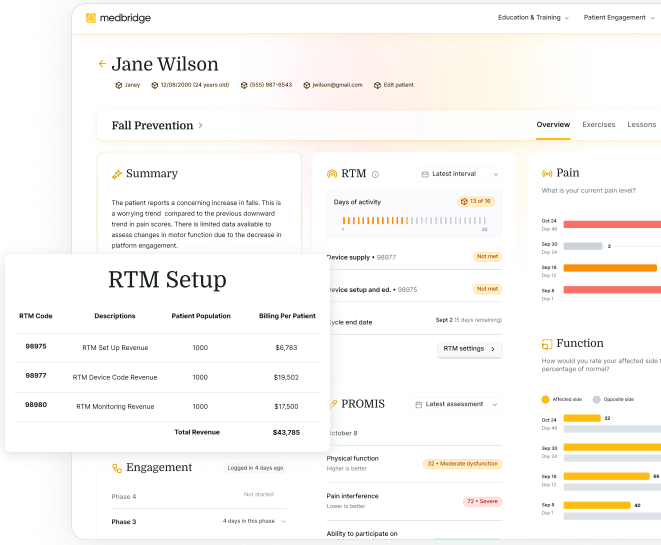
Integrated workflows for case managers and care teams

Digital Accessibility and Motion Capture Integration

Digital delivery ensures that older adults in rural or mobility-limited settings can access high-quality care. Pathways also supports motion capture capabilities and remote therapeutic monitoring (RTM) to deliver real-time feedback, flag concerns, and improve coordination between patients and their care teams. By keeping care within the health system, Pathways improves both clinical oversight and cost-efficiency.

Remote Therapeutic Monitoring

With Pathways, you can enable **remote therapeutic monitoring** for patients and automatically collect patient engagement data as they progress. Pathways provides care coordination dashboards that allow providers to monitor patient progress, get feedback, and document their interactions for codes 98980 and 98981. Providers can also interact with patients in Pathways via messaging in between visits, which they can use to check on patient status, respond to feedback, and more.



For patients engaging with the Medbridge Fall Prevention Pathway:

60%

move from high fall risk to medium fall risk.

Over 80%

reduce fear of falling, with an average improvement of 21% (reducing the score from 13 to 10.2).

Driving referrals and improving access



Effectively reducing fall risk across aging populations requires targeted strategies to address referral barriers, expand access, and engage patients early—before a fall occurs. This includes not only rethinking how and when patients are identified and referred but also how digital tools can be used to overcome logistical barriers and sustain engagement.

Barriers to Referral

Despite the scale and cost of falls among older adults, fall prevention remains underprioritized in many clinical settings. Falls are often seen as a lower clinical priority by primary care providers, who might be managing multiple comorbidities in a short visit. And patients often don't recognize that they're at risk for a fall until after an incident, particularly if they associate therapy with injury recovery rather than prevention.

In addition, PTs might assume that their older patients won't be willing or able to engage with digital care, despite growing evidence to the contrary. In fact, Medbridge data shows that with the proper support from clinicians, older adults engage consistently with and benefit from digital tools—often at rates equal to or exceeding that of younger patients.

Participants in a Pathways user study reported:

90%
found Pathways easy to navigate

87%
are likely to recommend Pathways

98%
are willing to use Pathways again in the future

100%
never had a healthcare provider offer a digital program like Pathways before

Find out more about how older adults engaged with Pathways in our white paper.

Strategies to Drive Referrals

To bridge these gaps, your organization can implement referral and access strategies such as:

- Embedding PTs into primary care settings to provide consults or co-visits, helping providers identify at-risk patients in real time.
- Using evidence-based tools such as the STEADI framework, 30-second sit-to-stand test, and Short FES-I to assess fall risk.
- Offering proactive wellness visits or standardized fall prevention screenings to reach at-risk patients sooner.
- Educating primary care, emergency departments, and urgent care providers on the value of referring patients to fall prevention programs before a fall occurs.

Digital Accessibility and Patient Engagement

Incorporating digital tools into your fall prevention program is a powerful way to reduce logistical barriers and encourage ongoing patient engagement. Digital care options allow providers to reach patients in rural areas, minimize visit burdens, and reduce co-pays—all common access barriers for older adults.

In addition, digital fall prevention pathways can be framed as proactive wellness initiatives rather than reactive care. Focusing on messaging such as independence, longevity, and functional improvements can resonate with older adults and improve motivation.

Several key best practices for using digital tools include:

- **Combine digital care with clinician guidance and motivational interviewing.** This allows providers to shift patient mindsets and build trust, increasing willingness to participate.
- **Create a case manager role** to help patients with the transition to digital care. Patients supported by case managers engage 2.4 times more than those without support.[13]
- **Use the SMS and reminder strategies** built into Medbridge Pathways, which significantly boost patient activation and adherence.

Referring a patient to physical therapy for fall prevention can result in a net healthcare savings of approximately $2,100 per episode.[14]

Elena's Journey: without Pathways versus with Pathways

WITHOUT PATHWAYS



Elena, 75, visits her PCP for an annual wellness exam, where she casually mentions feeling unsteady at times.

The PCP records this information but no formal screening is done.

A few months later, Elena falls while entering her house, fractures her hip, and is hospitalized.

After surgery, Elena begins physical therapy.

WITH PATHWAYS



Elena, 75, visits her PCP for an annual wellness exam, where she casually mentions feeling unsteady at times.

The PCP assigns Elena a tailored Fall Prevention Pathway and refers her to a PT.

Elena begins at-home exercises, receives education on home safety, logs weekly assessments, and builds strength, balance, and confidence.

Elena avoids a fall, improves her quality of life, and maintains her independence.

Conclusion



The Future of Fall Prevention Is Proactive

Falls aren't inevitable. With the right digital care solution, organizations can create an effective fall prevention strategy that improves patient safety, reduces costs, and supports healthy aging.

Medbridge Pathways makes it possible to:

- Proactively identify and engage at-risk patients.
- Deliver personalized, progressive fall prevention programs.
- Extend care beyond the clinic.

To learn how your organization can strengthen its fall prevention efforts, **request a demo of Medbridge Pathways today.**

References

1. https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/122747
2. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7235a1.htm
3. https://www.cdc.gov/falls/about/index.html
4. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7689902/
5. https://www.mdpi.com/2076-3417/12/15/7934
6. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3118151/
7. https://wire.auburn.edu/content/ocm/2024/09/201104-fear-of-falling-ea.php
8. https://agmr.hapres.com/htmls/AGMR_1682_Detail.html
9. https://www.health.com/falling-increased-dementia-risk-older-adults-8721561
10. https://agsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/jgs.17375
11. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/wr/mm7235a1.htm
12. https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-020-01041-3
13. Medbridge internal data
14. https://www.valueofpt.com/

About medbridge

Combining powerful digital patient care with the highest quality content, Medbridge builds exceptional education and care experiences. Expert-led, dynamic education ensures compliance, boosts clinical productivity, and uplevels the practice of every provider. Pre-built and custom digital care integrated into workflows expands access to care, improves engagement, and delivers better outcomes. With products that leverage over a decade of insight from more than 350,000 clinicians and 25 million patients, Medbridge helps organizations across the continuum provide better care. **Learn more.**

See how Medbridge can help your organization.
Contact us to request a demo.