

**Testimony**  
**Senate Special Committee on Aging**

*Preventing Falls, Preserving Independence: Technology, Community Programs, and  
Innovation in Senior Safety*

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Chairman Scott, Ranking Member Gillibrand, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Alliance of New York State YMCAs, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important topic.

For 175 years, YMCAs have been dedicated to strengthening communities through the core areas of impact: youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility. Across New York State, YMCAs serve large and small, urban and rural communities. YMCAs are the largest provider of afterschool in the state with over 35,000 licensed slots, are a partner in poverty prevention by housing more than 13,000 individuals, have provided over 1.4 million meals to food insecure families and older adults, and delivered over 120,000 swim lessons to New Yorkers last year.

The holistic nature of the YMCA allows us to reach older adults not in isolated situations, but as part of a continuum of care and connection.

As this Committee examines the role of technology, community programs, and innovation in senior safety, the YMCA's experience delivering in-person programs and a statewide virtual falls prevention program demonstrates that technology can be a powerful tool to expand access to programs for older adults facing barriers such as transportation, mobility, or isolation. However, this experience with program delivery has demonstrated that technology is most effective when used as a supplemental tool to strengthen trusted community-based relationships and in-person connections. The success of the statewide Falls Prevention Initiative reflects how federal investments through the Administration for Community Living (ACL) can help community organizations use innovation to reach more older adults, preserve independence, and improve overall quality of life.

Falls remain the leading cause of injury and accident-related death for adults over the age of 65. According to the most recent Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data, over 14 million, or one in four, adults reported falling in a year, including over 766,000 adults in New York State alone.<sup>1</sup> Falls are devastating for the individual and for their families and are a driver of long-term issues and health costs. According to the CDC, falls among older adults result in approximately \$50

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<sup>1</sup> [Older Adult Falls Data | Older Adult Fall Prevention | CDC](#)

billion annually in medical costs<sup>2</sup> and this enormous cost billed to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid does not include the cost of caregiving.

As a community-based provider dedicated to empowering and improving wellbeing across the lifespan, the YMCA is committed to addressing these entirely preventable accidents.

The Alliance of New York State YMCAs is currently managing a grant to the New York State YMCA Foundation from the Administration for Community Living (ACL) to fund the Falls Prevention Initiative. Currently in Year 2, the ACL grant funding has supported this initiative to expand access to evidence-based falls prevention programs that help older adults build strength, improve balance, reduce isolation, and maintain independence. Through this funding, YMCAs across New York State have trained certified instructors and expanded the availability of falls prevention programs. By offering these programs in both community settings and virtually, YMCAs across the state have built capacity to reach more older adults.

Just 2 years into the initiative:

- 120 new instructors have been trained
- 1,000 new older adult participants are engaged in programming
- Half of the YMCAs in the state are currently participating as delivery partners

A core tenet of the YMCA's work is to be responsive to the unique needs of a community. The community-based delivery model has allowed the program to be administered not only in YMCA facilities, but in locations ranging from libraries to even an abandoned Joanne's fabric store in upstate New York. In areas of the state where transportation and access are a barrier, the virtual program component has increased participation and bolstered the ongoing work - significantly expanding the statewide impact.

A survey of program participants demonstrates the powerful outcomes:

- 50% of older adults in the program reported improved changes in feelings of social isolation and loneliness.
- 96% reported that they plan to continue participating in exercise (one of the most proven strategies to reduce injury/healthcare costs)
- 80% of participants said they feel more comfortable talking to their family about falls because of this program.
- 71% felt more comfortable talking with their health care provider about falls.
- 83% report feeling more satisfied with life because of this program.
- 63% made safety modifications to their home because of what they learned in the program.

Beyond the data, YMCA instructors have heard countless stories about the impact of these offerings. One participant, Maryanne, was an isolated adult living in a New

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<sup>2</sup> [Older Adult Falls Data | Older Adult Fall Prevention | CDC](#)

York City apartment. Maryanne joined a virtual YMCA A Matter of Balance class last year and learned strategies to reduce risk in her home. She met other nearby older adults with similar issues. Although Maryanne was previously too fearful to venture outside onto the city streets with her walker, she learned through the program that there was a nearby senior center and ended up joining, making friends, and starting physical therapy to gain confidence and balance skills. She remains active in her center and lives independently to this day.

Stories like Maryanne's demonstrate how federal investments through the ACL are directly improving quality of life for older adults. These investments in prevention reduce long-term costs to health systems and are helping older people remain healthy, independent, and connected in communities.

In addition to falls prevention programs like YMCA Moving for a Better Balance and A Matter of Balance, the YMCA has long partnered with federal, state, and local health entities to deliver a suite of evidence-based chronic disease prevention and health management programs, including: the *Blood Pressure Self-Monitoring Program*, *EnhanceFitness and Walk With Ease for arthritis*, *Livestrong® at the YMCA for cancer survivors*, and the *Diabetes Prevention Program*, of which Ys are the largest in-person provider.

The statewide Falls Prevention initiative both builds upon and complements the existing work of YMCAs through expanded virtual and technology-supported programming to reach older adults who may otherwise face barriers to participation. As the program progresses, participants learn about local community resources, can connect to physical therapy options to improve balance, and are encouraged to be involved in additional activities that reduce fall risk. Ys across the state have seen firsthand how participation in the virtual program has provided a meaningful "doorway" into broader engagement with other YMCA programs, particularly for older adults and their caregivers who may feel isolated, can't leave their home, or are hesitant to participate initially in person. As confidence and social connection grow, participants may feel empowered to join an in-person tai-chi or arthritis management class, participate in a community walk with their caregiver or friend, or engage in other wellness opportunities that support long-term health and independence.

This work has also created the opportunity for YMCAs to partner with Uniper TV by Ardent Solutions to help address barriers related to internet connectivity. Through Ardent Solutions Inc., supported by the Mother Cabrini Foundation, rural areas of the state have expanded capacity for participation in the virtual program through this pilot. Eligible older adults in rural places receive equipment to connect and access live and on-demand wellness programming and YMCA offerings directly through their television, with internet access and technical support provided when needed. While the pilot is in beginning stages, additional funding would expand this opportunity to connect more eligible older adults.

These efforts have amplified the community impact and ongoing work of YMCAs in unique and scaled ways across the state. This use of technology to expand the

reach and delivery of the program has expanded access to even the most rural, removed communities. Though the profile of New York State is unique – from the vast mountainous regions to major cities – at the Y, we believe every individual deserves the chance to thrive. No one is ever turned away based on financial need or ability.

The YMCA is deeply concerned about proposals to eliminate federal funding for ACL grants that support community-based healthy aging and falls prevention programs like the New York State initiative. We are also concerned about proposals to eliminate funding for CDC chronic disease and injury prevention, which funds many of the programs mentioned that the older adults engaged in falls prevention classes also benefit from.

Every dollar invested in community-based organizations like YMCAs is maximized and returned. In addition to the data on falls, the CDC estimates that ninety percent of the nation's \$4.9 trillion in annual health care expenditures are for people with chronic conditions.<sup>3</sup> Organizations like the YMCA see firsthand that health and wellness programs are highly effective – in both direct and indirect ways. Not only do these programs work to prevent chronic illness from ever occurring, but actively manage symptoms, connect participants to resources, and improve quality of life through connection to others. This sense of belonging and connection in a community space is difficult to quantify with a dollar amount but is felt when older adults linger over a cup of coffee after a YMCA Moving for Better Balance class, sharing stories and encouragement. In the background, volunteers coordinate a local food or school-supply drive, building camaraderie as they work side by side, and sneakers squeak in the gym as students play basketball. These everyday moments create a powerful sense of belonging—where generations overlap, relationships grow, and community comes to life. Federal investments in prevention are investments in independence, dignity, and connection. They are investments in health care cost savings and more confident aging.

New York State YMCAs look forward to continuing this critical work in communities across the state. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for the work of this committee on behalf of older adults.