

Appreciating **AGE**



Together, we can make New Zealand a great place to age

Issue 45 ~ Autumn 2026



1 in 3 people over age 65 fall each year, rising to 1 in 2 people over age 85.

The Good News?

There are many simple, positive steps we can take to reduce risks



CEO Update

Karen Billings-Jensen

Kia ora koutou,

As we step into autumn, I'm reminded just how quickly the seasons turn here in Aotearoa New Zealand. The cooler mornings, the crisp air, and the sight of leaves gathering along footpaths always make me pause, not just to admire the colours at this time of year, but to reflect on how important it is that we all stay safe, warm, and connected.

Like many of you, I use this time to check in on older family members and neighbours, making sure they have what they need as the weather shifts. Those conversations often remind me why our work at Age Concern New Zealand matters so deeply. Autumn brings more slippery footpaths and shorter daylight hours, and with that, a rise in the risk of falls. One in three people over 65 will experience a fall this year, and for those over 85, that rises to one in two. I've spoken to many older people whose confidence and independence were shaken after a fall, but I've also seen firsthand the difference that simple strength, balance, and wellbeing activities can make. Falls are not an inevitable part of ageing, and together we can help people remain active, confident, and connected.

This season also brings important conversations about how older people access the services and support they need. In February, I met with NZ Post to talk around the possible impact of the changes to their retail network. Within the next ten years, the number of people aged 65+ is expected to reach 1.2 million, with the 85+ group growing the fastest. While we're proud of our digital literacy support, delivered with the

help of ANZ, we continue to hear about increasing barriers for those who rely on paper-based resources. As more essential services move online only, we risk isolating people who aren't digitally connected.

This was also a core message in our submission on Modernising the Census. We believe it is vital that any annual survey or government data collection be available in multiple formats so no one is excluded because of limited online access. As people live longer and our population shifts, our data and systems must reflect that diversity. We can no longer rely solely on a "65+" category to represent an entire generation. The first pledge of the Aotearoa New Zealand National Forum for the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing is Better Data on Ageing, and I wholeheartedly agree.

As we embrace autumn, I encourage you to stay active, stay connected, and make use of the wonderful strength and balance classes, social groups, and events offered by your local Age Concern. If you haven't already, signing up for your local newsletter is a great way to keep in the loop.

Together, through small steps and shared advocacy, we can support safer, more inclusive, and healthier ageing for everyone.

Ngā mihi nui,

Karen Billings-Jensen

Chief Executive,

Age Concern New Zealand



Change the way we report on older generations by disaggregating data and highlighting strengths and contributions not just challenges and need



Stepping into Autumn: Staying Safe, Warm, and Connected



Autumn brings colder weather, slippery leaves, and wet footpaths, all of which make strength and balance more important than ever. Building leg strength, improving core stability, and practising balance exercises help you move confidently and react quickly on uncertain surfaces.

Falls remain the leading cause of injury for older New Zealanders impacting both physical health, and mental health. The good news is, there are many simple, positive steps we can take to reduce fall risk, while boosting wellbeing at the same time.

Strength & Balance: Small steps for a safe you

One Age Concern exercise class is called Steady as You Go®. The gentle peer-led exercises are designed to improve balance, leg strength, flexibility, spatial awareness, general fitness and well-being. Here's a Steady as You Go® exercise you can try at home.

Weight Shifts - keeping your balance strong



Find a sturdy support like a dining table. You can use this to stabilise your balance during the exercise. Stand with your feet a little wider than shoulder-width apart. Bend your knees slightly and keep your body tall and relaxed.



Slowly move your weight onto one leg, keeping both heels on the floor. Then gently shift your weight across to the other leg. Keep your knees softly bent, your spine upright, and your movements slow and controlled. Repeat a few times in a calm side-to-side rhythm.



Now, imagine you're crossing a river on stepping stones. Stand on one leg and lightly place your other foot a little in front of you, and in line with shoulder width, with no weight on it. Slowly, transfer your weight forward on to the front foot. Notice whether the floor feels secure beneath you and adjust to be stable. Keep your back heel down and your body tall.



Shift your weight gently back to your starting foot. Lift in your front foot and place your other foot forward in line with shoulder width and repeat the weight shifting. Return to standing tall and give your legs a gentle rub to warm them and relax the muscles.

Contact your local Age Concern to find out about activities in your area.



Remember to keep breathing regularly during the exercises and always check the stability of the table or bench you use for support. Stop immediately if you feel short of breath, dizzy or have chest pains.



Autumn nutrition

Eating well supports muscle health, immune function, and bone strength, key factors in preventing falls. Great autumn foods to enjoy:

Root vegetables: kūmara, carrots, beetroot, parsnips

Leafy greens: silverbeet, spinach, kale

Seasonal fruits: apples, pears, feijoas, grapes

Whole grains: oats, barley, quinoa, wholegrain bread

Protein sources: eggs, beans, lentils, lean meats, oily fish

Nuts & seeds: almonds, walnuts, chia, pumpkin seeds

Dairy or fortified alternatives: milk, yoghurt, cheese, plant milks (with calcium)

Warming meals like soups, casseroles, and slow-cooker dishes are perfect for incorporating these seasonal ingredients.

Stay comfortable & safe at home

Staying warm helps reduce stiffness, maintain mobility, and supports overall wellbeing. Here are some simple steps for a warm, safe home this autumn:

- Air out your blankets, pull your curtain earlier to keep in the heat, find your things to use as draught stoppers as the days start to cool faster in the evenings.
- Check whether you can save on costs. Consumer POWERSWITCH website
- www.powerswitch.co.nz enables you to compare electricity prices in your area and the government offers Warmer Kiwi Homes grants through www.ecca.govt.nz.
- Check your electric blanket and heaters for safe and proper operation and check the batteries on your smoke alarms. Make sure any cords are positioned or taped down to prevent trip hazards.
- Think about what vaccinations you want to reduce the impact of illnesses over the colder months.
- Ensure you have non-slip mats at door entries to prevent falls due to wet paths and steps

A warm home helps you stay flexible, relaxed, and better able to move safely.

Stay Connected - even when it's cold & wet

Connecting with other people and having good conversations is just as important as physical strength. But autumn weather can make getting out harder. Planning ahead helps ensure you don't miss the activities that keep you energised and connected. Our *Life Without a Car* booklet provides helpful information on different transport options that may help with your planning.



Your Support Matters

We're working hard to elevate the realities facing older New Zealanders to champion the wellbeing of our ageing population. While we advocate for a fairer, more supportive future, your financial help allows us to continue our work to ensure older people aren't left behind and we are able to support Age Concerns across the country.

Donate to ensure we can keep supporting all older New Zealanders.

Donate today at ageconcern.org.nz