

KEY FACTS:



Approx 1/3 of people aged 65+ fall at least once a year away from the home...



... with many suffering multiple falls



Outdoor falls are more common than indoor falls



Men are more likely to fall outdoors than women



Very active people are more likely to fall outdoors than people with frailties

What do we currently know about falling over outdoors?

Getting outdoors is a key factor in preserving good physical, mental and social health in all age groups, but is particularly important for those aged 65+¹.

Why then do many older people spend less time outside than they would like to, either for recreation, or for practical reasons?

Research has shown that a fear of falling is one of the main barriers²; with falls being linked to disability and decreased mobility³. They are the leading cause of hospitalisation in people aged 65+, and of accidental death for the over 75's.

What role does the outdoor environment have to play?

In recent research by Inclusive Design for Getting Outdoors⁴, 15% of questionnaire respondents (n=972) had stumbled or fallen outside within the last 12 months. The real figure is likely to be higher, since past-year falls are often under-reported⁵. Research has shown that many of the environmental risk factors associated with outdoor falls appear to be preventable through better design and maintenance; factors including pavement quality, dilapidation and kerb height⁶. Not related to gardens, they have thus been neglected in the limited research done on falling over outdoors to date.

What is the research challenge?

Programmes such as the UK Department of Health's 'Prevention Package for Older People' have highlighted the imbalance between studies focusing on indoor falls and those relating to outdoor falls.

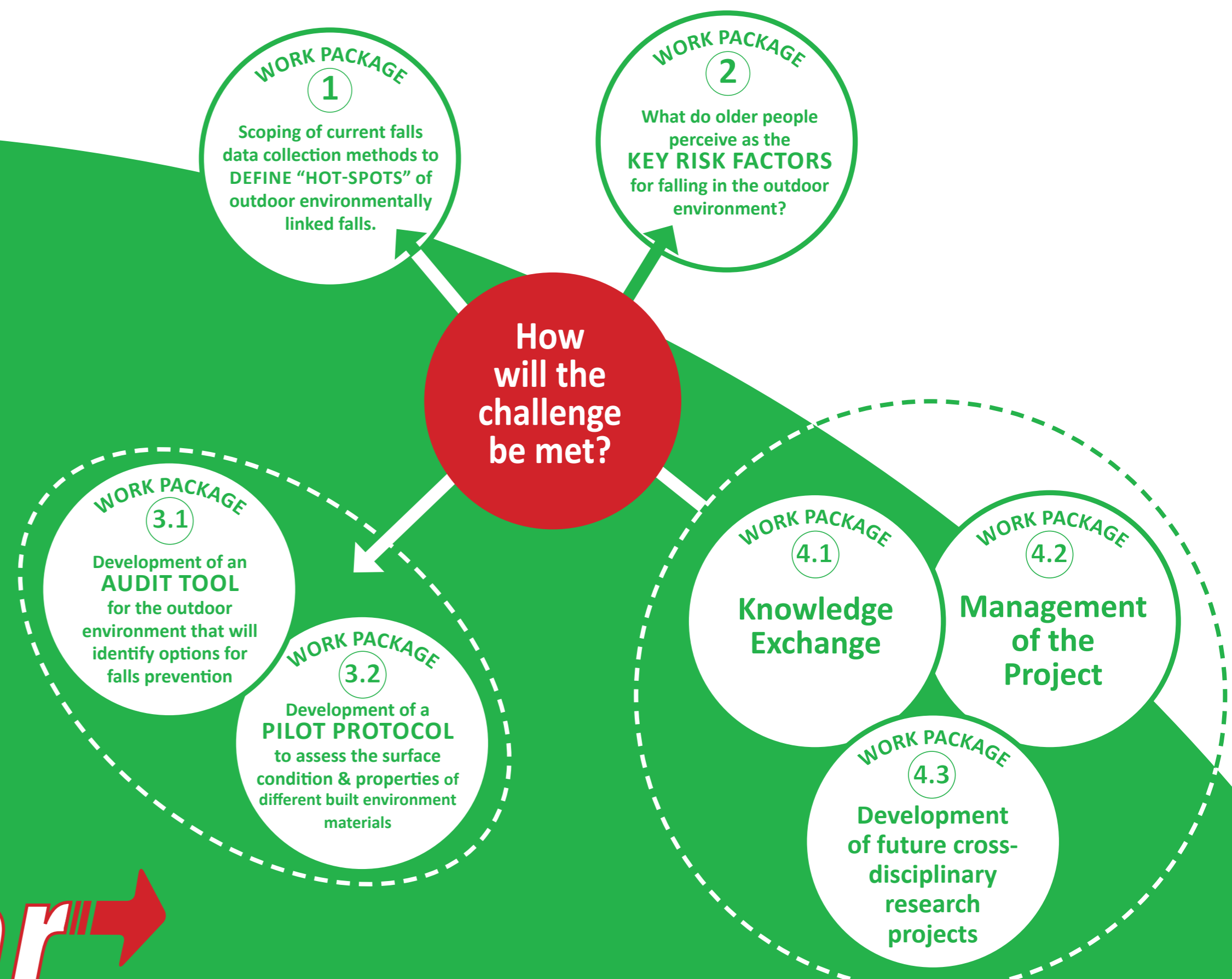
Partly this is to do with a lack of standardised methods for evaluating environmental hazards (especially over space and time), but also limited opportunity for testing concepts such as person-environment 'fit' in relation to falls.

To address these gaps, a multi-disciplinary consortium of international researchers is undertaking a year-long pilot study. The objectives of this project – known as Going Outdoors: Falls, Ageing & Resilience (Go Far) are to:

- consider the role of the outdoor environment in shaping health inequalities;
- explore older people's experiences of falling (and fear of falling) outdoors;
- develop and test innovative tools and techniques to evaluate the relationship between at-risk people and the outdoor environment;
- develop a clear road map for future cross-disciplinary research in this area.

The overall aim is to shape effective environmental interventions that may lead to improved health and quality of life in older age while respecting the diverse capabilities and 'personal projects' of individuals.

To fulfil its four key research objectives, the GoFar project is delivering seven work packages; enabling both focused, specialist enquiry and cross-cutting, multi-disciplinary working:



About Go Far...

Go Far brings together academics from eight UK Higher Education Institutions; partnering early-career researchers with experts in the field and specialists new to ageing research with those well-established in gerontological enquiry. Additionally, the project involves a Canadian expert in rehabilitation engineering and UK researchers working in the public sector and advocacy, while also drawing on over 50 existing strategic partnerships with policymakers, professional institutions, practitioners and not-for-profit organisations.

The project is funded by a Strategic Grant from the major cross-council initiative, Lifelong Health & Wellbeing. Led by the Medical Research Council, and now in its third phase, this programme supports research on extending the health, wellbeing, independence and quality of life of older people.

Who is involved in Go Far?

Led by the SURFACE Inclusive Design Research Centre at the School of the Built Environment, University of Salford, the core team comprises:

- Professor Emeritus Peter Aspinall, Heriot-Watt University
- Dr Claire Ballinger, University of Southampton
- Mr Ricardo Codinhoto, University of Salford
- Professor Geoff Fernie, University of Toronto & Toronto Rehab
- Professor James Goodwin, Age UK
- Ms Rita Newton, University of Salford
- Dr Samuel Nyman, Bournemouth University
- Professor Marcus Ormerod, University of Salford
- Professor Jamie Pearce, University of Edinburgh
- Professor Judith Phillips, Swansea University
- Mr Rob Shaw, UK Health & Safety Laboratory
- Dr Dawn Skelton, Glasgow Caledonian University
- Professor Catharine Ward Thompson, University of Edinburgh

Where can I find out more?

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References ¹ Sugiyama T, Ward Thompson, C. (2007). Older people's health, outdoor activity and supportiveness of neighbourhood environments. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 83:168-175. | ² Wijlhuizen GJ et al. (2007). Older persons afraid of falling reduce physical activity to prevent outdoor falls. *Prev Med*. 44(3):260-4. | ³ Skelton DA, Todd C. (2004). What are the main risk factors for falls amongst older people and what are the most effective interventions to prevent these falls? How should interventions to prevent falls be implemented? *World Health Organisation Health Evidence Network for Policy Makers*, Denmark. | ⁴ Newton, R, Ormerod, M, Burton, E, Mitchell, L, Ward-Thompson, C (2010). Increasing independence for older people through good street design. *Journal of Integrated Care*, Vol, 18, Issue 3, pp 24-29. | ⁵ Hauer K et al. (2006). Systematic review of definitions and methods of measuring falls in randomised controlled fall prevention trials. *Age and Ageing*, 35: 5-10. | ⁶ Li W et al. (2006). Outdoor Falls Among Middle-Aged and Older Adults: A Neglected Public Health Problem. *Am J Public Health*, 96(7):1192-1200