

Copy for **Profane** (July 08)

Pamela Holmes Healthy Ageing Programme, Help the Aged

Over 600 events, four based outside of the UK, promoted this year's National – and International – Falls Awareness Day on 24 June. The theme of this year, 'Stepping out' highlighted poorly repaired pavements as a rallying issue for many older people. For example, in London they acted as detectives to ask members of the public why more is not being done to prevent falls on pavements. Not all events focused on pavements, however; there were 'falls drama' productions, information days, assisted walks and exercise sessions – all aiming to raise awareness about the increased risk of falling as we age.

Why the focus on poor pavements? New figures from this year's Spotlight Report<sup>1</sup> show that more than 2,300 older people fall on broken pavements every day and nearly 80,000 of those who fall each year say they are then afraid to leave the house.

The Charity determined to find out more and on NFAD published *Falling Short the state of our pavements; an investigation for the National Falls Awareness Day campaign*. This report revealed local authorities in England, Wales and Scotland hold back millions of pounds to cover the potential cost of personal injury claims when people fall on pavements. This is at a time when many councils also say they face funding shortfalls to keep public walkways safe.

The 66 councils which responded to the Charity's questionnaire set aside an average of £250,000 each to cover potential legal costs when people fall. The Charity believes some of the funds councils hold in legal and compensation reserves could be better spent on making pavements safer.

To support local campaigners, Help the Aged produced pavement reporting postcards. One part of the postcard is sent to the local authority to identify an area of bad paving and alert the council to the problem. The other half is sent to the Charity which then follows up with the local authority to see how repairs are going. The Charity is calling for safer pavements to be pushed further up the local government agenda and has lobbied 90 councils in this way since the work began in 2007.

Poor pavements repair is clearly a topic that strikes a chord with many. There was extensive media coverage in the UK; breakfast TV on both channels, national newspapers and local radio stations all ran stories featuring Help the Aged spokespeople and in some cases, older people who had experienced horrific falls on bad pavements.

Anyone who wants to report a poorly maintained or broken pavement can obtain a pavement postcard by calling 020 7239 1982, collecting one from a Help the Aged shop or ordering one from [www.helptheaged.org.uk/fallsday](http://www.helptheaged.org.uk/fallsday).

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<sup>1</sup> Spotlight Report 2008 Help the Aged

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