

36th

Institute on Aging Annual Colloquium



Keynote

The Social Genome: How Connection Shapes Healthy Aging

Steven W. Cole, PhD, UCLA

Human social genomics reveals how social connection, stress, purpose, and culture shape gene activity in ways that influence health and aging. This work also uncovers molecular roots of resilience, offering a biologically grounded view of what it means to thrive. In a dawning era of genomic self-awareness, this research reveals a powerful message: we can actively shape our own molecular well-being, offering new opportunities to promote health, vitality, and longevity.



Bridging Alzheimer's Disease and Autism Research

Cara Westmark, PhD, UW-Madison

This talk will explore how discoveries in Alzheimer's disease and autism research may benefit one another. Drawing from our work and others, I will examine how changes at the synapse—the tiny communication points between brain cells—shape both age-related neurodegeneration and early life neurodevelopmental disorders. I will discuss how proteins such as amyloid beta and fragile X messenger ribonucleoprotein (FMRP) influence brain function across the lifespan, and how factors like diet and nutrition may affect these pathways. By connecting Alzheimer's and autism biology, this talk will highlight emerging evidence that may open new avenues for prevention and treatment.



Mindful Eco-Wellness: Steps Towards Healthier Living for People and Planet

Bruce Barrett, MD, PhD, UW-Madison

An aspirational definition of “eco-wellness” has to do with living your life to achieve maximum health and happiness, while also supporting environmental sustainability and ecological integrity. An “eco-wellness behavior” is any choice, habit, or other behavior that contributes to both personal health (mental and/or physical) and environmental sustainability. We are now living in a time of multi-crises, with global warming, climate change, earth's sixth mass extinction event, and increasing societal and international discord threatening both humanity and the ecological systems in which we live. By choosing and practicing eco-wellness behaviors, we can support the health of ourselves and our planet.



Supporting Wisconsin's Caregiving Future: Resources, Tools, and Policies that Help

Beth Fields, PhD, OTR/L, BCG, UW-Madison

Family caregiving is critical to the health and well-being of older adults, yet many caregivers struggle to find the information, services, and tools they need. In this talk, Dr. Fields will describe Wisconsin's caregiving landscape and the challenges families commonly face. She will share her team's work to improve caregiver identification and develop assessment tools that enable more timely and appropriate support. She will also highlight key state and national policies shaping the future of care. Together, these insights show how timely resources can strengthen caregiver well-being and improve outcomes for older adults.



Wednesday Oct. 14, 2026

8:30am-1:30pm on the
UW-Madison campus

*Includes speakers, a
Health & Resource Fair
with local aging
organizations, and
a Poster Session
showcasing recent
aging research.*

- **FREE**
- **OPEN to the PUBLIC**

Registration opens the
first Monday in August and
usually fills up quickly.

Sign up to receive
event details at:

aging.wisc.edu



or contact:
(608) 262-1818
aging@ssc.wisc.edu



Institute on Aging
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

RESERVE YOUR SPOT | REGISTRATION OPENS 8/3/26