36th Institute on Aging Annual Colloquium



Free Public Event

Wed., Oct. 14, 2026

in Madison, WI

Registration opens 8/3/26

aging.wisc.edu



Institute on Aging
University of Wisconsin–Madison
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Madison, WI 53706-1510

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36th IOA Annual Colloquium

Registration Opens Monday, August 3

Free and Open to the Public

Register Early • Space is Limited

Registration opens the first Monday in August on 8/3/26

If your plans change, please cancel before Sept. 28, 2026, so we can place an accurate lunch order. Because we have a waiting list, no walk-ins will be accepted.

Register Online: aging.wisc.edu

Indicate Your Preference for:

Free Box Lunch Included: Choose either the meat or the vegetarian option. Some special meals can be provided for those with serious dietary restrictions.

Continuing Education Units: 0.3 CEUs are available for attending all four lectures (none are available for partial attendance). You must sign in at the event table after the last speaker. (CEUs are required in some professions to remain licensed.)

Special Accommodations: If you need accommodations (assisted hearing devices, wheelchair seating, etc.), please send your request to *Jenni.Suplinski@wisc.edu* before September 14th.



Recordings: *By participating in the event, you grant IOA permission to use photos & videos of you taken by event staff, if any, in future promotional materials.*

Questions?

608-262-1818 • aging@ssc.wisc.edu

Location and Transportation

The Gordon Dining and Event Center

770 W. Dayton St.
Madison, WI

The 1st floor of Gordon is a public dining hall. The 2nd floor event center is reserved for the Colloquium.

For directions and parking information see:

aging.wisc.edu/annual-colloquium



We Recommend Purchasing Campus Parking in Advance:

- Several self-pay public parking lots, both campus & city run, are available within 1-3 blocks of the event.
- To guarantee parking, you can purchase a campus parking permit in advance (by Fri., Sept. 18). An application will be available on our website.
- The event is also easily accessible via city buses. See: *www.cityofmadison.com/metro/how-to-ride*

Thanks to Our Sponsors

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Senior Helpers • Visiting Angels

Schedule • Wed., Oct. 14, 2026

8:30 am	Registration (2nd Floor) / Health & Resource Fair / Posters
9:30 am	Welcome by IOA Director Carol Ryff, PhD
9:35 am	Bridging Alzheimer's Disease and Autism Research Cara Westmark, PhD
10:10 am	Tai Chi Stretch Break Rachel Sandretto, Director of Tai Chi Health, LLC
10:20 am	Mindful Eco-Wellness Bruce Barrett, MD, PhD
10:55 am	Health & Resource Fair / Posters
11:25 am	Supporting Wisconsin's Caregiving Future Beth Fields, PhD, OTR/L, BCG
Noon	Box lunch & New Investigator Award Presentation
12:20-1:30 pm	The Social Genome: How Connection Shapes Healthy Aging Keynote Speaker: Steven W. Cole, PhD



Who Should Attend?

Anyone interested in positive aging, including the general public, students interested in aging-related fields, and professionals working with older adults.

Health and Resource Fair

Local organizations will offer resources to improve quality of life as we age.

Poster Session and Awards

UW–Madison faculty, students & advanced trainees will present research posters & compete for a new investigator award in aging research.

IOA Annual Colloquium • Speakers

Keynote

The Social Genome: How Connection Shapes Healthy Aging



Steven W. Cole, PhD *Professor of Medicine, School of Medicine & Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, 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. *Dr. Cole's research utilizes molecular genetics and computational bioinformatics to analyze the pathways by which social and environmental factors influence the activity of the human genome, as well as viral and cancer genomes. He pioneered the field of human social genomics, and discovered the "Conserved Transcriptional Response to Adversity" that mediates health disparities via neural regulation of inflammatory and antiviral genes. He collaborates with more than 200 research groups worldwide through his role as Director of the UCLA Social Genomics Core Laboratory.*

Bridging Alzheimer's Disease and Autism Research



Cara Westmark, PhD *Associate Professor, Dept. of Neurology; Associate Director, Molecular Environmental Toxicology, 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. *Dr. Westmark completed her PhD in Biochemistry from the University of Notre Dame and her postdoctoral work in Molecular Biology and Neuroscience at the UW as a trainee in the Institute on Aging (IOA) on the NIH Biology of Aging and Age-Related Diseases Training Grant. She is a past recipient of the IOA New Investigator Award for Excellence in Biomedical Research. Her current work focuses on molecular mechanisms that influence brain development, synaptic function, and neurodegeneration. Through translational and interdisciplinary approaches, she aims to uncover novel strategies to improve diagnosis, prevention, and treatment for neurodevelopmental and neurodegenerative diseases.*

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



Bruce Barrett, MD, PhD *Professor, Department of Family Medicine and Community Health, 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. *Dr. Barrett is a family physician and tenured professor at the UW. His research has focused on design and interpretation of randomized trials, alternative/complementary/integrative medicine, mind-body interactions, mindfulness meditation, placebo effects, and assessment of patient-oriented outcomes. Over the past several years Dr. Barrett has led an interdisciplinary team of physicians, scientists, and mindfulness instructors to develop "Mindful Eco-Wellness: Steps to Healthier Living," which is an educational and behavior change program aimed at helping people decrease their carbon footprints while enhancing their personal health and happiness. The goal is to employ rigorous science to develop, assess, and disseminate this program, and to bring its benefits to as many people as possible.*

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



Beth Fields, PhD, OTR/L, BCG *Associate Professor, Dept. of Kinesiology; Director, Geriatric Health Services Research Lab, 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. *Dr. Fields is a board-certified occupational therapist and Associate Professor at UW whose research focuses on caregiving and geriatric health services. She develops and implements person and family-centered assessments and interventions to improve care quality for older adults and their caregivers in hospital and community settings. Actively involved in national and state-level caregiving initiatives, Dr. Fields is committed to bridging research, policy, and practice to drive meaningful systems change.*