

Art and Science of Aging  
Conference



21ST ANNUAL ART & SCIENCE OF AGING CONFERENCE

AGING WELL TOGETHER:  
Innovation, Inclusion, and Impact

FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2026 | 7:30 AM - 3:00 PM



Grand Valley State University | Richard M. DeVos Center | 401 W. Fulton Street | Building E | Grand Rapids, MI 49504  
[www.GVSU.edu/AgingConference](http://www.GVSU.edu/AgingConference) | Facebook | Twitter



# About the Art & Science of Aging Conference

The GVSU Art and Science of Aging Conference is a one-day educational event dedicated to broadening dialogue about aging in West Michigan and beyond. Now in its 21st year, the conference brings together professionals, students, older adults, and community members who share an interest in understanding and improving the aging experience. The conference provides a forum for participants to gain new knowledge and practical skills grounded in multi-disciplinary research, innovation, and evidence-based best practices related to healthy aging. It also highlights essential local and regional resources and strategies that support independence, inclusion, and quality of life in later years. As the number of older adults continues to grow, the conference remains committed to helping individuals, organizations, and communities prepare for the opportunities and challenges of an aging society.

## Conference Structure:

Each year, the conference centers on a timely theme related to aging. The 2026 theme, “Aging Well Together: Innovation, Inclusion & Impact,” emphasizes collaborative and forward-looking approaches that help older adults thrive across diverse settings. A nationally recognized keynote speaker opens the conference by sharing current research, emerging trends, and best practices connected to the annual theme. All speakers translate study and professional experience into practical strategies that participants can apply in personal, professional, and community contexts.

Following the keynote session, the conference offers three rounds of concurrent breakout workshops, each lasting approximately 60 minutes. These sessions are led by knowledgeable faculty, practitioners, and community leaders and cover a range of aging-related topics relevant to healthcare, education, policy, caregiving, technology, and community services. Both professionals who work with older adults and older adults themselves can deepen their understanding through these interactive sessions. The conference concludes with a closing session that brings all participants together for shared reflection and learning.

The conference also features student poster presentations, where college students share the results of course-based research on aging topics and engage in discussion with attendees during the lunch period. In addition, sponsor and community resource tables are available throughout the day, providing opportunities to learn about programs, services, and innovations that support healthy and engaged aging.

The 21st Annual Art & Science of Aging Conference will be held on Friday, March 13, 2026, at the GVSU Richard M. DeVos Center, 401 W. Fulton Street, Grand Rapids. The one-day event runs from 7:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and includes a light breakfast, lunch, and refreshment breaks. Participants also enjoy opportunities to network and learn from sponsor exhibits and resource displays. Shuttle service is available from designated parking locations to the conference venue.

# Acknowledgment

Grand Valley State University sponsors the Annual Art & Science of Aging Conference in partnership with sponsors from across GVSU and the community. Our lead sponsor this year is Reliance Community Care Partners.

Special thanks go to the following individuals who have actively participated in the Aging Conference Planning Committee:

- Anna Hammersmith – GVSU – Sociology
- Chad Sutcliffe – GVSU – Allied Health Sciences
- Dawn DeVries – GVSU – Therapeutic Recreation
- Jan Amato – Emmanuel Hospice
- Jane Royer – Age-Friendly Grand Rapids
- Jing Chen – GVSU – Psychology
- Julie Bekius, GVSU, KCON
- Katie Scheuerle – GVSU – Social Work
- Kendrick Heinlein – Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan
- Kurt Boeve – Meals on Wheels Western Michigan
- Priscilla Kimboko – GVSU – SCLD
- Protiva Talukder – GVSU GA SCLD
- Raymond Higbea – GVSU – SCLD
- Sarah Joseph – GVSU – Health Research and Data Librarian
- Sherry Moyer – GVSU – SCLD
- Steve Velzen-Haner – Reliance Community Care Partners
- Suzanne Callahan – Senior Neighbors
- Taryn Dale - Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan
- Tejaswi Manchineella – GVSU – College of Computing
- Tom Muszynski – Care Resources



## Keynote Speaker

### **JEANETTE LEARDI, SOCIAL GERONTOLOGIST & COMMUNITY EDUCATOR**

Jeanette Leardi is the author of *Aging Sideways: Changing Our Perspectives on Getting Older* and an aging wellness leader who helps people rethink aging and push back against ageism. She delivers engaging in-person and virtual keynotes, workshops, and classes; writes for national publications; and has appeared on NPR's *Here & Now* and the live TV program *Good Day L.A.*

A former editor with experience at *Newsweek*, *Life*, *People*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Sesame Street* magazines, and *The Charlotte Observer*, she brings a strong storytelling and communication lens to aging education. Her encore career, inspired by a decade as a caregiver for her parents, is grounded in promoting the dignity, wisdom, and value of older adults. She currently serves on the American Society on Aging's Ageism & Culture Advisory Council.

In her keynote session, “AGING SIDEWAYS: Let's Change How We Get Older!”, Leardi invites participants to challenge common myths about aging, recognize and respond to ageism, and learn four practical strategies for aging with empowerment.

# CONFERENCE PROGRAM DETAIL

**7:30 AM - 8:00 AM** ..... **Hager-Lubbers Exhibition Hall**  
Sponsor and Registration Set Up

**8:00 AM - 8:45 AM** ..... **Hager-Lubbers Exhibition Hall**  
Registration Packets  
Sign in for CEUs  
Light Breakfast  
SPONSOR Visits

**8:45 AM - 9:00 AM** ..... **Loosemore Auditorium**  
**OPENING SESSION/WELCOME:**  
Priscilla J. Kimboko, GVSU Conference Coordinator  
Steve Velzen-Haner, CEO Reliance Community Care Partners  
**INTRODUCTION to Program Details**  
**INTRODUCTION to Keynote Speaker**

**9:00 AM - 10:00 AM** ..... **Loosemore Auditorium**  
**KEYNOTE SPEAKER**  
Jeanette Leardi, Social Gerontologist & Community Educator  
Aging Sideways: Let's Change How We Get Older!  
Jeanette Leardi will invite participants to reconsider what they think they know about aging and to explore why many common beliefs about aging are inaccurate. This down-to-earth, entertaining, and enlightening keynote offers surprising, more accurate ways to understand how we age. Attendees will learn what we often get wrong about aging and why those misconceptions persist; how to recognize and push back against ageism when it arises; and four practical strategies for aging with dignity, purpose, and well-being throughout the later-life journey.

**10:00 AM – 10:10 AM**  
**BREAK**

**10:10 AM – 11:10 AM**  
**EARLY MORNING SESSIONS (EM)**

**AM-1** ..... **136E DEV**

**Presenter:** Jason Fair – Director of Clinical Services, TANDEM365

Jason Fair leads multi-disciplinary teams delivering Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) services across Michigan as the Director of Clinical Services at TANDEM365. He has held leadership roles in three MIH organizations TANDEM365, Medically Home, and Emergent Health Partners – giving him a broad view of how acute care, EMS, and community-based services can be integrated. His work focuses on building resilient teams, challenging broken healthcare norms, and designing systems that empower clinicians to lead with purpose.

# A healthy community is one in which the elderly protect, care for, love and assist the younger ones to provide continuity and hope.



**Session Title: *MIH Is Not a Point Solution: How TANDEM365's Culture Challenges Broken Systems and Builds Sustainable Care***

Fair explains why MIH should not be treated as a short-term fix for care gaps. Instead, he presents TANDEM365's model as a culture-driven approach rooted in autonomy, trust, transparency, and shared purpose built to support aging in place and dignity for older adults. Attendees will learn how empowering clinicians can drive innovation and outcomes, what leadership strategies help embed culture into daily operations, and how MIH programs can scale beyond operational “patches” to create sustainable, lasting impact.

**AM-2.....109D DEV**

**Presenter:** Laura Hall, DNP, NP, – Director of Clinical Services, Care Resources PACE

Laura Hall is a nurse practitioner specializing in geriatrics and currently serves as the Director of Clinical Services at Care Resources PACE in Kent County. In this role, she helps older adults remain active, independent, and safely at home by coordinating primary care and supportive services. Dr. Hall has worked in inpatient, inpatient psychiatry, and outpatient geriatric settings, and she partners with patients and families to set practical goals of care that support quality of life across the aging continuum. She earned her Doctor of Nursing Practice from Grand Valley State University in 2018.

**Session Title: *Social Determinants of Health: Prevention and Improvement for Aging in Place with Dementia***

Hall explores how social determinants – economic stability, social and community context, education access, healthcare access, and neighborhood environment – shape health outcomes and dementia risk for older adults. The session reviews common dementia risk factors, highlights practical interventions and community resources to reduce risk and support function, and explains how the PACE model addresses medical and social needs within a single, coordinated system, helping people live well at home for as long as possible.

**Session Title: *Mindfulness for Enhancing Wellbeing and Belonging***

Gipson introduces mindfulness and its documented benefits, with a focus on how mindfulness can support wellbeing and strengthen a sense of belonging. Participants will be guided through trauma-sensitive practices, including anchoring, focused attention, and self-compassion, with clear instructions for each activity. The session blends brief background information, guided experiences, and time for reflection so attendees leave with both understanding and practical techniques they can use immediately.

**AM-3.....Loosemore Auditorium**

**Presenter:** Dr. Jenna Smith, PT, DPT, GCS – Owner, Vitality At Home (Mobile PT/OT), Certified Health & Wellness Coach

Dr. Jenna Smith is a Doctor of Physical Therapy and Board-Certified Geriatric Clinical Specialist with over 15 years of experience helping older adults stay strong, independent, and active. A Grand Rapids native, she earned her B.S. in Kinesiology from the University of Maryland and her DPT from Northeastern University. She is the owner of Vitality At Home, a mobile physical and occupational therapy practice serving older adults across the Greater Grand Rapids area, and a Certified Health & Wellness Coach.

**Session Title: *Forever Able: The Essentials for Thriving After 55***

Smith shares an integrative, evidence-based approach to aging well that connects both the art and science of longevity. The session focuses on four core pillars – Exercise, Nutrition, Sleep, and Purpose – with practical demonstrations and discussion on functional strength, balance, energy optimization, sleep hygiene, and purpose-driven habits. Emphasis is placed on strategies that are realistic and adaptable across mobility levels, providing professionals, caregivers, and older adults with tools they can apply immediately to support independence and quality of life after age 55.

**AM-4.....138E DEV**

**Presenter:** Rod Auton, MSW – Manager, Calhoun County Senior Services; Part-Time Instructor, Western Michigan University (College of Health & Human Services)

Rod Auton manages Calhoun County Senior Services (Senior Millage), supporting and funding programs that meet the needs of older adults across the county. He also teaches part-time at Western Michigan University and brings 25 years of experience across multiple roles in the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE). His background also includes work with the Battle Creek Community Foundation, managing healthcare programs, and training in the Healthy Aging Framework in Edmonton, Alberta, while collaborating regularly with Canadian colleagues during implementation in Calhoun County.

**Session Title: *Use the Healthy Aging Framework – Alberta as a Tool for Strategic Planning in Calhoun County, Michigan***

Auton introduces the Healthy Aging Framework as a practical tool for organizing community efforts around outcomes that matter to older adults. The session highlights how the framework supports cross-sector collaboration, asset mapping, strategic goal-setting, and evaluation, linking funding decisions to determinants of healthy aging, including health promotion, chronic condition management,



**Respecting every individual is very important. It starts with respecting elders regardless of profession.**

# You now know things that younger people will spend a lifetime learning.

functioning, and social engagement. Attendees will learn how Calhoun County is using the framework in strategic planning, provider training, and grant-making (including RFP processes) to strengthen stewardship and improve the community's ability to help older adults age in place.

**11:00 AM – 11:20 AM**  
**BREAK**

**11:20 AM – 12:20 PM**  
**LATE MORNING SESSION 2**

**AM-5.....109D DEV**

**Presenter:** Elyse Greene, MPH – Community Assistant, Age-Friendly Grand Rapids (City of Grand Rapids)

Elyse Greene is a public health professional with over eight years of experience in health education and healthy aging initiatives. She holds a Master of Public Health from Ferris State University and currently serves as the Community Assistant for the City of Grand Rapids' Age-Friendly initiative. Drawing on her professional background and personal experience as a caregiver, Elyse is committed to helping people live healthier, more fulfilling lives across the life span.

**Session Title:** *The Importance of an Age-Friendly Community: Grand Rapids, MI*

Greene explains why Grand Rapids has prioritized age-friendly planning as Michigan's population ages. She will highlight the city's Age-Friendly Plan and its key focus areas – communication, housing, transportation, and outdoor spaces – and share real examples of completed projects, including efforts tied to fair housing and ADUs, walkability improvements such as snow removal and benches, resource guides and maps for services, and advocacy for stronger public transportation routes. Attendees will also be introduced to the AARP Livability Index and learn how age-friendly strategies expand access, improve daily life, and help residents remain active and connected as they age.

**AM-6.....Loosemore Auditorium**

**Presenter:** Dr. Julie Bekius, DNP, FNP-BC – Assistant Professor, Kirkhof College of Nursing (GVSU); Family Nurse Practitioner

Dr. Julie Bekius is a board-certified Family Nurse Practitioner with 24 years of clinical experience across diverse care settings, including family medicine, allergy/asthma, and the past 13 years in outpatient palliative care. She serves full-time as an Assistant Professor at Grand Valley State University's Kirkhof College of Nursing, teaching nurse practitioner students in didactic, clinical, and lab courses, and she continues to practice one day per week.

**Session Title: *Unpacking Polypharmacy: A Roadmap to Safer Medication Use in Older Adults***

Bekius addresses why polypharmacy is a growing risk for older adults and how deprescribing can improve safety, quality of life, and healthcare outcomes. The session introduces practical steps to identify candidates for deprescribing, navigate common barriers, and use evidence-based tools such as the Beers Criteria and STOPP/START guidelines. Through case examples and interactive scenarios, attendees will learn how interdisciplinary teams and family caregivers can work together to align medication use with an older adult's goals, values, and preferences – making medication review not only a clinical strategy, but a person-centered approach to care.

**AM-7 .....138E DEV**

**Presenter:** Laura Dow – Founder, Stiff To Fit; Author and Anti-Aging Advocate

Laura Dow is an anti-aging advocate focused on removing ageist barriers to physical activity for older adults. She contributed to the American Society on Aging's award-winning white paper, “Ability, Not Age” (2025), and is the author of *Mind Your Movement: Six Essential Physical & Mental Tools To Stay Active As You Age*. She founded Stiff To Fit, a movement and fitness business serving older adults, and she presents nationally and internationally in both live and virtual formats. Her background spans social science, health, and the arts, and she holds numerous fitness and wellness credentials, including ACE/ACSM personal training, yoga education, Pilates-based movement training, and health coaching.

**Session Title: *Mixed Messages: Overcoming Ageist Barriers to Physical Activity for Older Adults***

Dow explores the conflicting messages older adults receive about exercise and the ageist and ableist assumptions that often shape fitness programming. She highlights how language and labeling in the fitness industry can reinforce stereotypes and how internalized beliefs about aging can affect motivation and confidence. Building on the “Ability, Not Age” framework and research on age beliefs, the session offers practical ways to move forward: focus on ability rather than age, choose words more carefully, and examine personal attitudes to create more empowering and inclusive opportunities for older adults to move.

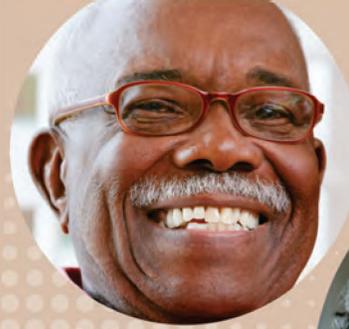
**AM-8 .....136D DEV**

**Presenter:** Noah O’Ryan, B.A – Media Studies, Regional Program Manager, Older Adults Technology Services (OATS), AARP Washington DC Metro Area

Noah has served as program coordinator, Program Lead and now Regional Manager of the Older Adults Technology Services with AARP in the Washington DC Metro area, since 2020. He combines his knowledge and studies in media studies and business, with several certifications in computer languages and skills. His combination of knowledge and skills has led to his current role and expertise in enabling older adults to master technologies including AI.

The only way to be indispensable is to be different.

We should indeed keep calm in the face of difference, and live our lives in a state of inclusion and wonder at the diversity of humanity.



**Session Title: *Older Adults and the AI Revolution***

O'Ryan explores how AI and Age Tech – such as health monitoring tools, smart home technology, mobility supports, and robotics – can improve safety, independence, and wellbeing for older adults when used responsibly. The session also addresses real risks, including fraud and deceptive AI content. It highlights how OATS is building AI literacy and resilience through education efforts, including its work as an early partner in the Microsoft–OpenAI Societal Resilience Fund. Attendees will leave with practical strategies for reducing adoption barriers, protecting older adults from scams, and implementing AI solutions that are accessible, ethical, and genuinely supportive of aging communities.

**AM-9.....111D DEV**

## STUDENT RESEARCH PRESENTERS

**Presenter:** Katelyn Hanson, Psychology, Freshman

**Faculty Advisor:** Jing Chen, [chenj@gvsu.edu](mailto:chenj@gvsu.edu)

**Session Title: *The Impact of Mentoring and Intergenerational Programs at GVSU on Older Adults***

Research has indicated that intergenerational programs produce favorable outcomes for both older and younger adults (Martins et al., 2018). In 2021, Grand Valley State University developed an intergenerational co-mentoring program, Grand Connections. In this program, each student is paired with an older adult to share experiences and learn from one another. The current study aims to assess the program's influence on older adults. To explore the impact, older adult mentors from the Grand Connections program were interviewed using a semi-structured format. During the interviews, mentors' experience with one-on-one interactions with college students, their experience as members of Grand Connections, and their suggestions for improvements to the program were explored. Themes and patterns from their responses will be presented. This qualitative study will be the first step in examining the effectiveness of the mentoring program and understanding the benefits of creating an integrated society.

**Presenter:** Malarie Johnson, Psychology, Sophomore

**Faculty Advisor:** Jing Chen, chenj@gvsu.edu

**Session Title:** *Creativity as a Key to Health in Old Age*

One topic that has become more important and is being discussed in the media is how older people are now a larger share of the global population, as life expectancies have increased. This has caused people to be concerned about how to provide good-quality care for them. My presentation addresses this subject by discussing what previous research has found about the positive impacts of participating in creative activities on the mental, cognitive, and physical health of the elderly. Some of the key impacts to be discussed include the positive influence these creative activities have on protecting against cognitive decline and on reducing negative emotions, the latter of which may lead to improvements in overall physical health. Based on these findings, creativity-based treatments like art therapy should be part of the care elderly people often receive for age-related cognitive and physical declines.

**Presenter:** Sri Rakumari Mendu, Health Informatics and Bioinformatics, Graduate

**Faculty Advisor:** Tejaswi Manchineella, manchite@gvsu.edu

**Session Title:** *Technology Should Age Gracefully Too*

Older adults are frequently overlooked in technology design, which contributes to a digital divide that limits access to essential services and meaningful social participation. Many mainstream interfaces are created with younger, highly active users in mind, and this approach often fails to account for the diverse physical, sensory, and cognitive abilities of aging populations. Through our project, we identified common barriers in everyday technologies, including complex navigation structures, low visual clarity, small interactive elements, and interaction patterns that require rapid responses or high precision.

Using age-inclusive design principles, we analyzed how these barriers emerge and developed practical recommendations for companies to improve accessibility. These recommendations include simplifying interaction pathways, increasing visual adaptability through scalable text and adjustable contrast, integrating multimodal feedback, and expanding personalization options that support a wider range of user abilities.



What divides us pales in comparison to what unites us.

Our findings highlight that age-inclusive design benefits users across all age groups by improving clarity, reducing cognitive load, and supporting more intuitive engagement, particularly in complex tasks such as data visualization. By adopting these strategies, companies can create technologies that remain usable throughout the lifespan and support more inclusive digital participation for everyone.

**Presenters:** Malavika Ravuri & Castro Walunywa, Cell and Molecular Biology, Graduate  
**Faculty Advisor:** Sok Kean Khoo, khoos@gvsu.edu

**Session Title: *Study of Alpha-Synuclein-Related MicroRNAs in a Parkinson's Disease Cell Model***

Parkinson's disease (PD) is a neurodegenerative disorder marked by the loss of dopaminergic neurons and the abnormal buildup of alpha-synuclein (SNCA), a dysregulated protein key to the disease. Despite extensive research, effective methods for selectively lowering SNCA levels in neurons remain limited, posing a significant therapeutic challenge. This study investigates whether specific microRNAs can decrease SNCA expression in a cellular model for PD. We hypothesize that targeting the SNCA transcript and its associated microRNAs will reduce SNCA levels. The human neuroblastoma SH-SY5Y cell line will be used as an in vitro model to mimic PD neurons. Cells will be transfected with candidate microRNAs, and alpha-synuclein protein expression will be measured. We aim to shed light on how SNCA is regulated by its related microRNAs and explore the potential of microRNAs as a therapy for PD.

**Presenter:** Emily Sullivan, Psychology, Junior  
**Faculty Advisor:** Jing Chen, chenj@gvsu.edu

**Session Title: *Music as an Intervention for People Suffering from Dementia***

Dementia is a neurodegenerative disease that affects many older adults. This disease can have a variety of adverse symptoms, including many behavioral, emotional, and personality changes in addition to cognitive decline. Research has been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of various forms of treatment, including both pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic approaches. In this presentation, I will review the findings from recent research on the effects of an important non-pharmacological treatment, music-related intervention, for people suffering from dementia. Studies have shown that music, especially live music, is effective in managing dementia symptoms, including agitation and anxiety. A survey of these empirical studies may help us design evidence-based programs to improve the quality of life for older adults with dementia.

**Presenters:** Jamie Valkenburg, Kates Krasin, Cleary Welsh, & Emmett Lake, Biomedical Sciences, Seniors  
**Faculty Advisor:** John Capodilupo, capodilj@gvsu.edu

**Session Title: *Isoforms of GAP-43: Making Connections to Alzheimer's Disease***

Alzheimer's disease (AD) is a neurodegenerative disorder characterized by cognitive and behavioral impairment. Efforts to identify biomarkers of AD pathogenesis largely focus on examining levels of beta-amyloid (A-beta) plaques and neurofibrillary tangles. As a result, additional primary pathogenic factors of AD potentially contributing to neuronal death and



Often we measure the day by what we do with it; cure cancer, surf in Maui or meet your child's teacher and overlook what is truly miraculous, the arrival of a new day. Enjoy it or not, the day doesn't care, but if you miss it, it won't be back again.

synaptic dysfunction have been less appreciated. Our focus is to examine the phosphorylated and non-phosphorylated isoforms of GAP-43, a growth-associated protein widely expressed in neurons. Previous reports demonstrate that the phosphorylated isoform increases during learning and memory formation. We believe the relative ratio of these two isoforms may serve as a novel biomarker for AD and, potentially, a new target for drug therapy. This poster presents the results of the first step of our research, which is to enhance the resolution of GAP-43 isoforms using 2D-SDS-PAGE.

**12:20 PM – 1:00 PM** .....Hager- Lubbers Exhibition Hall

**LUNCH** – additional seating in Gordon Gallery & Regency Room  
*Box Lunches Provided by MEALS ON WHEELS OF WESTERN MICHIGAN*

**STUDENT RESEARCH POSTERS** .....West Hallway DEV E

Sponsor Displays (close at 1:00 – be sure to stop by)

**1:00 PM – 2:00 PM**

**AFTERNOON SESSIONS**

**PM-1** .....136E DEV

**Presenter:** Dr. Jing Chen – Professor of Psychology, CLAS (GVSU)

Dr. Jing Chen is a psychology professor who has taught developmental courses at Grand Valley State University since 1999. Her recent research focuses on predictors of early developmental outcomes and the impacts of intergenerational interactions. She serves as the faculty coordinator of Grand Connections, an intergenerational mentoring program. She is the faculty advisor for SAGE (Students for Aging and Gerontology Enrichment), a student club focused on aging and gerontology.



**Session Title: *Hot Topics in Science of Aging: Health Span, Telomeres, Sleep, & Dementia***

Dr. Chen introduces key concepts shaping today's aging research, including health span and aging clocks. She then highlights two high-interest areas: telomeres – the protective chromosome caps linked to aging and influenced by lifestyle and psychosocial factors – and the role of sleep in brain health, particularly its support for brain “waste clearance” and how poor sleep may increase dementia risk. The session concludes with practical, evidence-informed strategies and modifiable factors that can support healthy longevity and overall well-being as we age.

**PM-2.....Loosemore Auditorium**

**Presenter:** Lois Thomas – Nurse, Certified Dementia Practitioner; Dementia Institute Educator & Community Consultant

Lois Thomas is a nurse with over 12 years of experience across behavioral health, outpatient rehabilitation, management, geriatrics, and dementia care. Her greatest passion is supporting people living with neurocognitive changes and their care partners. Through the Dementia Institute, she provides education, supportive services, and community consultations, and she also volunteers with the Alzheimer's Association as a support group facilitator. Thomas holds multiple dementia-care credentials, including Certified Dementia Practitioner, MoCA Rater, Enhanced Trainer, and Engagement Leader, and she is a co-author of the second edition of the Evening Star Worship Handbook for Persons Living with Dementia.

**Session Title: *Is this Dementia?***

Thomas helps families and professionals navigate one of the most difficult and common questions: are the changes we're seeing normal aging, mild cognitive impairment, or dementia? The session explores key differences between healthy aging and dementia-related symptoms, offers practical tips for recognizing early warning signs, and encourages open conversations that reduce stigma. Participants will also learn actionable strategies to support brain health – beneficial for people with healthy brains and for those living with dementia.

**PM-3.....138E DEV**

**Presenter:** Katlin Mills, MSW – Advanced Care Planning Facilitator, Avenues by Brio Living Services

Katlin Mills is a social worker with over a decade of experience supporting individuals through significant life transitions. She began her career at Bethany Christian Services, working with vulnerable children in foster care. For the past five years, she has worked with Avenues by Brio Living Services (formerly Porter Hills), helping older adults plan proactively for aging at home. Her approach centers on empathy, education, and empowerment to enable older adults to age with dignity and choice. She is an Advanced Care Planning Facilitator, certified by the Michigan Public Health Institute in 2022.

**Session Title: *Aging Alone but Thriving Together: Supporting Solo Agers***

Mills addresses the growing number of older adults aging independently due to longer life expectancy, changing family structures, and the rise of childless households. The session

explores the unique challenges solo agers face – especially safety, social isolation, and aging in place – and provides practical planning strategies that help older adults stay independent, connected, and supported. Participants will also learn how professionals and community organizations can collaborate to build stronger support networks and promote meaningful engagement for solo agers.

**PM-4 .....109D DEV**

**Presenter:** Jan Amato, BS – Community Relations Specialist, Emmanuel Hospice

Jan Amato has over 25 years of experience in healthcare and senior services and holds a degree in Health Care Administration from the University of Michigan–Flint. Her background includes pharmaceutical sales, home care, and hospice outreach, with more than two decades of experience in geriatric care. She has served in roles at Porter Hills Home Health Care and Porter Hills Senior Living, developed expertise in skilled nursing with Trilogy Services, and spent 7.5 years at Emmanuel Hospice. In her current role at Emmanuel Hospice, she is passionate about holistic approaches that protect patients' comfort, dignity, and quality of life and support families.

**Session Title: *Holistic Approach to Symptom Management***

Amato presents a holistic, non-pharmacologic approach that integrates mind, body, and spirit in patient care. Using evidence-based practices and longstanding healing traditions, she discusses how healing environments and supportive techniques – such as mindfulness, deep breathing, massage, aromatherapy/essential oils, and spiritual care – can reduce distress and improve comfort in home, hospice, and palliative settings. Attendees will learn practical interventions they can use or teach others, along with strategies to support caregiver self-care and reduce compassion fatigue.

**2:00 PM – 2:10 PM**

**BREAK**

**2:10 PM – 3:15 PM .....Loosemore Auditorium**

**CLOSING SESSION**

**Presenter:** Laura Armenta, BFA – Somatic Leadership Specialist; Founder & CEO, Armentality Group

Laura Armenta is an internationally trained choreographer, somatic movement educator, and wellness leader with over 40 years of experience using movement to spark vitality and human connection. As Founder and CEO of the Armentality Group, she integrates polyvagal-informed strategies, anatomy-based training, and global dance traditions to help people move with confidence, creativity, and purpose. Her background includes serving as a former GVSU adjunct professor and artistic director, and she holds multiple wellness credentials, including certified yoga teacher, certified Ayurvedic consultant, and certified Thai Yoga Therapy practitioner.

**Session Title: *Movement as Medicine for the Aging Body-Mind: A Somatic Approach to Longevity, Confidence, and Emotional Resilience***

Armenta explores how age-related body-mind changes can be supported through somatic and rhythm-based movement practices. The session introduces simple regulation strategies

that reduce fear of falling, build confidence, and encourage safe, graceful movement while strengthening cognitive longevity through joy, rhythm, and creativity. Participants will also examine the roles of belonging, co-regulation, and social engagement in emotional well-being. They will practice an accessible “movement reset” they can use daily to improve energy, mood, and body awareness – even on low-energy days.

**When everyone  
is included  
everyone wins.**





# MEALS on WHEELS WESTERN MICHIGAN

# NO SENIOR HUNGRY OR FORGOTTEN

Meals on Wheels Western Michigan is the leading senior nutrition provider in West Michigan, dedicated to supporting older adults in Kent and Allegan Counties. Each year, we serve over 6,000 seniors through three core programs that eliminate hunger, promote dignity, reduce isolation, and support senior health.

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**AREA AGENCY ON AGING OF WESTERN MICHIGAN**

## The Source for Seniors

There's no "one-size-fits-all" for aging, and many older adults want to stay living independently in their own homes and communities as they age. With the help of our partners, we make this possible.

**Reach Out**  
 (616) 456-5664  
 [WWW.AAAWM.ORG](http://WWW.AAAWM.ORG)



**We're Here to Help**

The Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan can connect you with resources for aging, whether you are an older adult, living with a disability, or a caregiver.

-  **Personalized Options**  
In-Home care programs vary based on need and care level.
-  **Community Resources**  
Meals, transportation, respite, and many other resources are provided through our 9-county network of partner agencies.
-  **Education**  
Sessions about caregiving, dementia, elder abuse, healthy aging, and more.

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Emmanuel Hospice is More About Living.



**I don't call it getting older,  
I call it outliving the warranty.**



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Creator and host of:



I grew a beard thinking it would say,  
“Distinguished Gentleman” instead  
it says, “Senior discount, please.”



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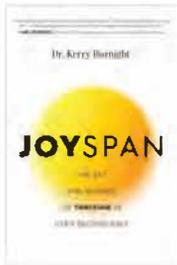
[www.gvsu.edu/grandconnections/](http://www.gvsu.edu/grandconnections/)

It's weird being the same  
age as old people.

# 21ST ANNUAL ART AND SCIENCE OF AGING CONFERENCE 2026

## BOOKS ON AGING WELL TOGETHER

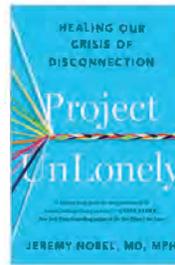
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### ***Joyspan: The Art & Science of Thriving in Life's Second Half***

Kerry Burnight, 2025  
ISBN: 1546007350

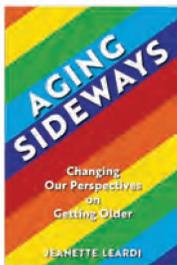
Burnight shares her philosophy and uplifting approach to navigating longevity. Her approach is based on the science of well-being, contentment, connection, meaning, growth, choice, and purpose.



### ***Project UnLonely: Healing Our Crisis of Disconnection***

Jeremy Nobel, 2023  
ISBN: 9780593191941

Dr. Nobel addresses the public health crisis of chronic loneliness by suggesting ways of building and strengthening connections. One focus of the healing process in engaging in creativity.



### ***Aging Sideways: Changing Our Perspectives on Getting Older***

Jeanette Leardi, 2024  
ISBN: 9798348536152

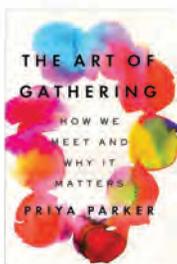
Social gerontologist and community educator Jeanette Leardi draws on research, expert opinions, and personal experiences to provide you with surprising, refreshing, "sideways" approaches for embracing getting older.



### ***Can't We Talk about Something More Pleasant?: A Memoir***

Roz Chast, 2014  
ISBN: 1608198065

New Yorker cartoonist Roz Chast brings her signature wit to the topic of aging parents. Including four-color cartoons, family photos, and documents, and a narrative full of laughs and tears, Chast's memoir is both comfort and comic relief for anyone experiencing the loss of elderly parents.



### ***The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters***

Priya Parker, 2018  
ISBN: 1594634920

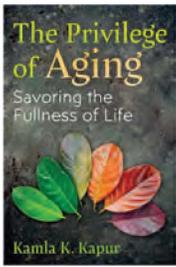
Parker explains how to make gatherings memorable and effective for all participants. Using her background as a strategic facilitator, Parker shares real-world applications of elements to build memorable gatherings.



### ***There Was an Old Woman: Reflections on These Strange, Surprising, Shining Years***

Andrea Carlisle, 2023  
ISBN: 0870712578

In this essay collection, Carlisle writes about experiences shared with many older women: musing about facing loss, her body's transformation, discovering new talents, caregiving, and how to let go of pieces of the past.



***The Privilege of Aging:  
Savoring the Fullness of Life***  
Kamla K. Kapur, 2024  
ISBN: 979-8888500521

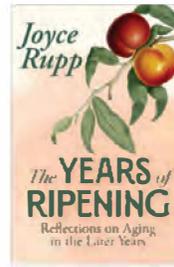
Drawing on stories from a variety of cultural traditions, Kapur demonstrates the power of self-examination and intentionality to have a successful old age.

She offers numerous strategies, tools, and ways of thinking to ensure mental, physical, and spiritual strength.



***The Gift of Aging***  
Marcy Cottrell Houle and Elizabeth Eckstrom, 2023  
ISBN: 100933073X

Science-based facts, medical and legal advice and practical wisdom from elders to finding joy, vitality and purpose in growing older.



***Years of Ripening: Reflections on  
Aging in the Later Years***  
Joyce Rupp, 2025  
ISBN: 162698638X

Joyce Rupp is known for her work as a writer, spiritual midwife, retreat leader, and conference speaker.

Her comment on the changes that come with aging: “It is our attitude towards them that either instills peace or creates a troublesome angst.”



***Shibui: The Japanese Art of  
Finding Beauty in Aging***  
Sanae Ishida, 2025  
ISBN: 1632175754

Shibui introduces readers to a transformative Japanese approach to aging that celebrates the subtle beauty, wisdom, and joy that emerge with time.

Through personal essays, watercolor illustrations, and practical activities, Japanese-American author Sanae Ishida presents an alternative to Western anti-aging messages.

# Personal Conference Planner

ALL SESSIONS APPROVED FOR SW AND NURSING CEUs

TIME	S#	PRESENTER	SESSION TITLE	ROOM	X
8:00 AM - 8:45 AM			Registration and Sign In for CEUs Breakfast Sponsor Visits	Hager-Lubbers Exhibition Hall	
8:45 AM - 9:00 AM		Reliance: Steve Velzen-Haner GVSU: Priscilla Kimboko	Welcome	Loosemore Auditorium	
9:00 AM - 10:00 AM		Jeanette Leardi	KEYNOTE: Aging Sideways: Let's Change How We Get Older	Loosemore Auditorium	
10:00 AM - 10:10 AM	BREAK				
10:10 AM - 11:10 AM MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS 1	AM1	Jason Fair	MIH is Not a Point Solution: How TANDEM365's Culture Challenge Broken Systems and Builds Sustainable Care	136E DEV	
	AM2	Laura Hall	Social Determinants of Health: Prevention and Improvement for Aging in Place with Dementia	109D DEV	
	AM3	Dr. Jenna Smith	Forever Able: The Essentials for Thriving After 55	Loosemore Auditorium	
	AM4	Rod Auton	Use the Healthy Aging Framework – Alberta as a Tool for Strategic Planning in Calhoun County, Michigan	138E DEV	
11:10 AM - 11:20 AM	BREAK				
11:20 AM - 12:20 PM MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS 2	AM5	Elyse Greene	The Importance of an Age-Friendly Community Grand Rapids, MI	109D DEV	
	AM6	Dr. Julie Bekius	Unpacking Polypharmacy: A Roadmap to Safer Medication Use in Older Adults	Loosemore Auditorium	
	AM7	Laura Dow	Mixed Messages: Overcoming Ageist Barriers to Physical Activity for Older Adults	138E DEV	
	AM8	Noah O'Ryan	Older Adults and the AI Revolution	136D DEV	
	AM9	Student Research Presenters	See Descriptions Pages 9 and 10	111D DEV	
12:20 PM - 1:00 PM	Lunch, Social Media Post, Student Research Poster and Sponsor Displays			Hager-Lubbers Exhibition Hall West Hallway DEV E	
1:00 PM - 2:00 PM AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS	PM1	Dr. Jing Chen	Hot Topics in Science of Aging: Health Span, Telemares, Sleep & Dementia	136E DEV	
	PM2	Lois Thomas	Is This Dementia?	Loosemore Auditorium	
	PM3	Katlin Mills	Aging Alone but Thriving Together: Supporting Solo Agers	138D DEV	
	PM4	Jan Amato	Holistic Approach to Symptom Management	109D DEV	
2:00 PM - 2:10 PM	BREAK				
2:10 PM - 3:15 PM CLOSING SESSION	PM5	Laura Armenta	Movement as Medicine for the Aging Body-Mind: A Somatic Approach to Longevity, Confidence and Emotional Resilience	Loosemore Auditorium	

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