

Addressing Alaska's Aging Needs through Occupational Therapy and Biomedical Research

What is the compelling need for research focused on age-related diseases?

The worldwide demographic transformation caused by a rapidly aging population increases the risk for frailty and many associated diseases. Stroke (#5), diabetes (#8), and Alzheimer's disease (#9) are the leading causes of death for Alaskans age 65+ ([CDC National Center for Health Statistics, Stats of the State of Alaska](#)). People age 65+ spend more on health care per capita than other age groups because they are most at risk for frailty, chronic disease, and cognitive impairments associated with advanced age ([Alaska State Plan for Senior Services, FY2020 to FY2023](#)).

Alaska is identified as the state having the top senior growth rate in the U.S. that increased 72% over the last decade ([2020 Profile of Older Americans, Administration on Aging](#)). In 2021, Alaska's 60+ population totaled more than 147,500 comprising 20% of the state's total population ([Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development, Research and Analysis](#)). Advanced age is an important risk factor for Alzheimer's disease. Due to our fast-growing older adult population, Alaska ranks #5 among states projected to have a significant increase in Alzheimer's cases anticipated to grow almost 30% from 2020 to 2025 ([alzheimers-facts-and-figures.pdf](#)).

What is needed to improve health care for Alaska's aging population?

Innovative solutions to address the need for in-home supports and underlying disease factors for age-associated diseases that impact older adults and threaten their ability to live independently as contributing members to their family and community. Well Haven Occupational Therapy and the UA Center for Transformative Research in Metabolism (TRiM), two separate programs aligned with a common goal, are working to improve the quality of life for Alaska's aging population.

Well Haven Occupational Therapy offers occupational therapy and aging-in-place services across Alaska to help older Alaskans live safely and longer at home. These services include in-person and virtual home safety assessments and recommendations, education and skill building for caregivers of persons living with dementia to improve quality of life and decrease hospitalizations and institutionalization, as well as collaboration and referrals to other providers to increase a family's support system, such as counselors, physical therapists and respite workers.

The UA Center for Transformative Research in Metabolism (TRiM) is an interdisciplinary biomedical research center at the University of Alaska (UAF and UAA) funded through a five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health, National Institute of General Medical Sciences, using the Center for Biomedical Research of Excellence (COBRE) funding mechanism (P20GM130443). An important focus for TRiM's research is to connect discoveries from hibernation to innovative treatments for metabolic and related diseases with clinical relevance for aging. Age increases the risk for frailty as well as chronic metabolic health conditions including Type 2 diabetes, disuse muscle atrophy, cardiac disease, and cerebral ischemia and stroke. In addition to using arctic hibernating mammal models, such as the arctic ground squirrel and black bear, TRiM's researchers are employing the sled dog/canine model as an intervention platform to test novel treatments to prevent or reverse brain aging. TRiM's overall research goal is to use these models to advance development of diagnostics and treatments that will reduce the incidence of chronic diseases related to metabolic health disorders across the life span and to turn the curve of rising health care costs.

Please join us for a lively conversation on **Friday, June 24, 2022 at 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m. (AST)** during the virtual TRiM Journal Club session accessible by [zoom](#). For more information, please contact Emily Byl, emily@well-haven.com or Denise Daniello, TRiM Program Coordinator, dldaniello@alaska.edu.