

## Research, Education and Community Outreach

Aging affects everyone, and the Clemson University Institute for Engaged Aging (IEA) works to support an optimal aging experience by keeping people meaningfully engaged in life— regardless of their social, economic or health status. The IEA brings together faculty and students from a variety of disciplines across six colleges in order to create synergies to discover, develop and disseminate best practices for engaged aging through research, education and community outreach.

Enabling older adults to live independently and to enjoy a high quality of life is one of the major challenges of our state as it experiences rapid growth of the population over 65 years of age. By 2030, for the first time in United States history, there will be more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 18. In South Carolina, 22 percent will be over the age of 65 – compared to 20 percent nationally. 28 percent will be aged 60 or older.

The IEA provides a unique opportunity for collective efforts between individuals, foundations, health care systems and corporations to leverage resources in the promotion of older adult quality of life. To this end, the IEA has many active initiatives, such as fall prevention, hypertension self-management and dementia caregiving. These initiatives are critical as one in three older adults fall, and 66.5 percent of those over 65 in South Carolina have hypertension – compared to 60.5 percent nationally. The IEA is also committed to providing much needed support to South Carolina family caregivers, as more than 770,000 caregivers provide 737 million hours of free services to their chronically ill, disabled or frail, elderly loved ones each year.

Independent living and safely aging in place are not only important to older adults and their families, but also to the state's social services and health care systems which are struggling to meet the needs of current clients and patients. For example, falls can jeopardize the safety and independence of seniors, as they are the leading cause of nonfatal and fatal injuries in people 65 years and older. This places a heavy financial burden on the older population, their caregivers, our state's aging services and health care systems.

With its network across campus, the state and the region, IEA connects researchers, creates multidisciplinary teams, attracts support from private entities, and positions teams to initiate research efforts or to respond to specific requests for proposals. IEA brings instant access to potential research partners and older adult participants in research projects by:

- maintaining successful, ongoing partnerships with researchers and agencies internal and external to the university;
- continually establishing new partnerships; and
- recruiting hundreds of older adults to participate in IEA initiatives

The goals of IEA directly align with those outlined in the ClemsonForward Strategic Plan, which states that Clemson will make a “real impact on the greatest challenges of our time” by developing “real solutions to real problems facing our state and nation.” The Institute is doing just that – developing and implementing strategies that will meet the needs of a growing older population.



## Why Give Now

Research, educational programs and community outreach generated through the Institute are critical to meet the needs of a diverse older adult population in the state and region as it experiences rapid growth due to the aging of indigenous citizens and the in-migration of retirees. In only ten years, it is estimated that 28 percent of South Carolinians will be over 60 years old. The state is not prepared to meet their needs.

We need your support to build upon the foundation established by the IEA. It has successfully forged a multidisciplinary team of professors and students dedicated to improving the quality of life for older adults in our state. It is now at a stage of maturity where sustained support is needed to grow its programs in order to increase its impact in the state and beyond.

The IEA is committed to training Clemson students to be advocates for older adult quality of life in their chosen professions – including healthcare, architecture, social services, computer science and recreation therapy. For example, South Carolina has one of the highest rates of dementia in the nation, and health care systems and social service agencies need providers who are dementia-capable. For the past six years, the IEA has provided students an opportunity to develop this important skill set while also meeting the needs of those with dementia and their family caregivers. The IEA trains students to deliver services in two dementia day programs. Working in these day programs has become more than just a valuable learning experience for many Clemson students; it has become their passion.

“Getting to know the participants and help them was rewarding and honoring. I love the prevention and intervention phases of medicine. It’s been my favorite thing I’ve done at Clemson. The research skills I’ve gained are giving me the chance to benefit someone now, not only after I graduate.” – Hailey Malphrus, health sciences major

Being dementia-capable is a highly valued skill set in health care systems, giving our students a competitive edge over their peers when they enter the field or apply to graduate school in nursing, medicine, physical therapy or occupational therapy.

## Opportunities for Support

The IEA has established several priorities for funding that will significantly impact its ability to meet the needs of a diverse adult population.

### Professorship

Funding for the director of the IEA is critical, as the director is responsible for recruiting IEA faculty associates, supporting them by creating and maintaining research teams to enhance their ability to secure external funding, seeking corporate and agency sponsorship of IEA initiatives, and leading efforts to create and sustain educational programs for students and community-dwelling older adults. The director keeps the IEA and its initiatives visible across the state by establishing, maintaining and strengthening relationships with the External Advisory Board and IEA Ambassadors, local and statewide aging agencies and organizations, and media organizations. The director secures new space for IEA activities, mentors graduate and undergraduate students in aging research efforts, offers public presentations about topics of interest, and coordinates IEA activities with Prisma Health – all of which are directly impacting the IEA and its mission to discover, develop and disseminate best practices for engaged aging.

### Graduate assistantships

Graduate assistants would assist the director in day-to-day management of IEA activities and provide support for various related responsibilities. This opportunity would fundamentally impact the future for these Clemson students, providing them with the knowledge and experiences necessary to be leaders in their chosen professions in meeting the needs of an aging population.

### Funding for pilot projects

Pilot projects allow the IEA to offer knowledge, support and activities directly to the older adult population. Future goals of the IEA include reducing isolation and feelings of loneliness of rural older adults by creating mechanisms for meaningful engagement in community life – such as building capacity of rural senior centers to offer programming. Projects, such as the Fall Prevention Project or the Brain Health Club, are examples of the impact your gifts can have on the IEA and the older population.

A \$25,000 grant from the Pete and Sally Smith Family Foundation is helping the IEA fund the Fall Prevention Project – including a best-

practice program, A Matter of Balance, which helps reduce the fear of falling and risks for falling as well as building self-efficacy to be more physically active.

“This is something I needed. Just about any senior could benefit from this. If you don’t have the knowledge, it’s hard to prevent the falls from happening.” – Kathy Dubber, Fall Prevention Project participant

The IEA Brain Health Club provides best practices for persons with early to mid-stage dementia. The Brain Health Club – in its new location at the Central Community Center – provides a safe, loving environment for participants who enjoy activities led by Clemson University students. Activities are designed to stimulate social, creative, intellectual and physical engagement of participants while providing their family caregivers a much-needed break from their demanding role.

### Workshops

With ongoing support, the IEA director will continue to offer popular public presentations on topics such as brain health, chronic condition prevention and self-management, stress management, and getting quality sleep. Additional funding would allow the director to continue and expand these offerings.

### Extension programs

Support for collaborative efforts between Clemson extension and the IEA will enable placement of trained extension agents in rural senior centers to offer fall prevention programming and the evidence-based program, Health Coaches for Hypertension Control (HCHC), developed by IEA faculty. Additional funding would allow expansion of these programs statewide. Agents could also be trained to establish community-based dementia day programs and train and supervise community volunteers to provide activities for those with early to mid-stage dementia.

“The Institute for Engaged Aging enables Clemson University to fulfill its land-grant mission by meeting the growing needs of our state’s older citizens. The Institute for Engaged Aging is poised to increase its impact through the addition of new research space at Oconee Memorial Hospital and its growing partnership with Prisma Health – Upstate. My hope is that the IEA will get the support it needs to sustain and grow its efforts to improve quality of life for such a large segment of our population.” – Cheryl Dye, Director of Clemson University Institute for Engaged Aging

## The Impact

The impact of your support will be crucial as the Institute continues to address challenges to meet the diverse needs of older adults in South Carolina, providing them with the knowledge and skills needed to live independently and enjoy a high quality of life. The IEA programs are currently making a difference in the lives of our aging population in the Upstate. Your support is essential to maintaining and building upon these programs that are impacting a significant percentage of the population – a percentage that will continue to grow.

Your contribution to the IEA will directly impact Clemson students and professors, address and help solve the problems associated with aging and make a difference for family caregivers across our state. Your impact will be widespread – and immeasurable to those who benefit from the Institute and its research, programs and outreach.

If you are interested in supporting the Institute for Engaged Aging, please contact Ben Grandy at [bgrandy@clemson.edu](mailto:bgrandy@clemson.edu) or 803-920-1161.

