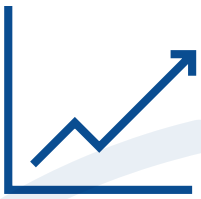
The Center for Aging Research and Education
SCHOOL OF NURSING
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

2026 **ANNUAL REPORT**

Connecting people and information

to improve how we age



In 2025, we more than doubled the number of CARE U trainers statewide, to

51 total



81%

of participants in CARE U workshops and train-the-trainers work in medically underserved areas



67%

of participants in CARE U workshops and train-the-trainers work in rural areas



75 direct care staff

participated in CARE U workshops led by CARE or our new trainers



26 health educators

participated in CARE U train-the-trainers



Professor Lisa Bratzke, PhD, RN, ANP-BC, FAHA leads the dementia care topic during a CARE U workshop in Madison

IMPROVING CARE

What do direct care staff need to know to support older people's health and well-being?

- "Some things that we assume are 'age-related' normal changes are not."
- "A lot about mobility and the need to walk."
- "Slow down, let them do more. Pay attention to changes."
- "Think about the individual" when making "choices for care."
- "A full range of ways to enhance life for people with challenges."

That's how direct care staff described what they learned during CARE U workshops in 2025. CARE U workshops use interactive presentations and active learning exercises to cover seven topics: person-centered care, dementia care, mobility, vision, nutrition, pain, and emergency preparedness.

Wisconsin has one of the largest direct care staff workforces in the U.S. These certified nursing assistants, personal care workers, adult day center staff, and other workers provide hands-on care to older adults across settings. Yet few receive training on older adult care, and continuing education opportunities are rare.

Given the large and growing need for training, CARE doesn't just organize our own workshops for direct care staff. We prepare nurses and other health educators to offer workshops, as "CARE U trainers."

In 2025, we doubled the number of CARE U trainers, from 25 to 51 statewide.

New CARE U trainers said they will use the information and materials to:

- "Provide education to our rural communities."
- "Bring information/fun learning activities back to my facility."
- "Teach my Native community."
- "Present the CARE U topics at my hospital and hopefully make a difference!"

CARE also helped improve care in 2025 by becoming an external training partner for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services' Certified Direct Care Professionals program; and providing more people with free CARE toolkits and manuals than ever before.

AGING RESEARCH

In 2025, the Rural and Madison Boards of Older Adult Advisors (BOAAs) met with health researchers across disciplines. From engineering to epidemiology, food science to kinesiology, and landscape architecture to nursing, researchers benefited from BOAA members' guidance and lived experience.

CARE Affiliate and Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy Beth Fields, PhD, OTR/L credits the BOAAs with shaping her research priorities. In 2025, the BOAAs reviewed a toolkit she developed to help hospitals support family caregivers of patients living with dementia.

"They offer such a great wealth of information, and the members have

2025 BY THE NUMBERS

IMPROVING CARE

- **783 requests** for CARE U toolkits and manuals, a nearly **three-fold increase** from 2024
- **81% of CARE U workshop and train-the-trainer participants** work in medically underserved communities
- **8 direct care staff** received a **CARE U credential** from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services

AGING RESEARCH

- **44 faculty and graduate student CARE Affiliates** from 18 campus departments
- **12 Board of Older Adult Advisors research meetings** and **3 campus talks** on the BOAAs' community aging research agendas
- **4 letters of support** provided and **3 interdisciplinary teams** convened for aging research proposals

NURSING EDUCATION

- **14 community partners** recruited for Nursing 511 Community Supports for People with Dementia
- **6 campus events,** on caregiving, aging research, healthy aging, and careers in aging
- **2 Doctor of Nursing Practice students** connected with partners for scholarly projects



Doctor of Nursing Practice student Laura Vergenz, BSN, RN.

such diverse backgrounds," Fields said. "It makes my research more applicable because I'm getting diverse perspectives that I wouldn't get in a traditional, controlled research study."

In addition to Fields' toolkit, "We had another group that was concerned about hazards in people's houses," said Rural BOAA member Michael Britt. "We also had a meeting with a researcher on loneliness, which is a big issue."

CARE also fostered aging research in 2025 by adding Affiliates across campus; connecting researchers with potential community partners; and convening interdisciplinary teams collaborating on research proposals.

NURSING EDUCATION

"As an undergraduate, CARE opened my eyes to the spectrum of what nurses can do—how we can support other nurses and connect with communities," said Laura Vergenz, BSN, RN. "That was where my interest in older adults started."

In 2025, Vergenz was a Doctor of Nursing Practice graduate student. She requested to be placed with CARE for her health policy practicum.

CARE connected Vergenz with aging advocacy leaders and suggested she map CARE Affiliates' research areas to relevant state and federal policies.

"Coming into this course, I didn't fully understand how policy and nursing intertwined," Vergenz said. Her project with CARE made clear "how research supports or could inform future policies." She added, "One topic that stood out was aging in place," because of "how much data backs these initiatives."

CARE also enhanced nursing education in 2025 by recruiting partners for a community-based learning course; supporting student participation in a geriatric case study competition; and helping organize Careers in Aging Week and other campus events.

SEEKING YOUR SUPPORT

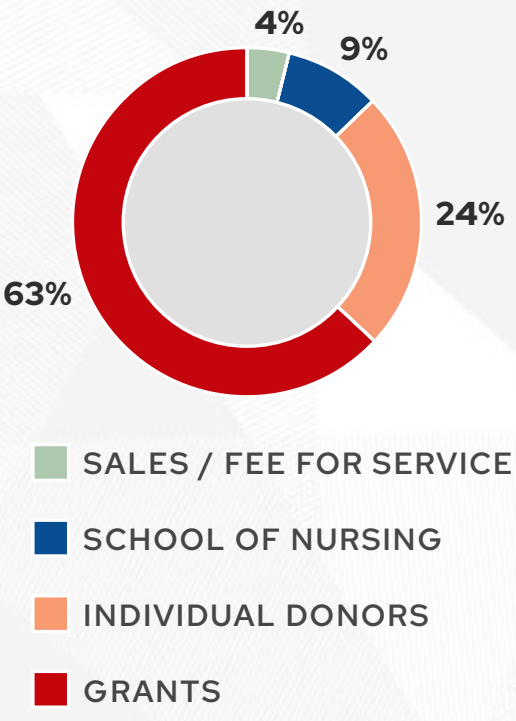
Last year brought changes to federal policies and funding, as well as leadership transitions at the School of Nursing. CARE remains committed to our strategic priorities, which were developed with input from campus, community, and healthcare partners.

Support from people like you is vital to CARE. To support our innovative work to improve aging by connecting people with nursing research and practice expertise, contact Jordan Langer at **608-262-1179** or **jlanger3@wisc.edu** or visit: **https://go.wisc.edu/igt055**



Participants in the "Art of Aging" intergenerational campus event share their watercolor paintings.

CARE REVENUE



CARE Team:

Tonya Roberts, Executive Director

Paula Bizot, Aging Education Project Manager

Diane Farsetta, Outreach Program Manager

Barb Bowers, Founding Director

CARE Advisory Committee:

Jillian Bodden Hoenisch, UW Health

Abigail Bradfield, Kinesiology PhD student

Kevin Coughlin, Wisconsin Division of Medicaid Services

Sarah Endicott, School of Nursing

Valerie Hiltbrand, Aging and Disability Resource Center of Iowa County

Liz Jensen, Direct Supply

Christine Klotz, Sharing Active Independent Lives

Emma Judd, Nursing BSN student

Edith Lawrence-Hilliard, Precious Memories Choir

Jingxi Li, Nursing PhD student

Kiarra McCoy, Pre-Nursing student

Deanna Truedson McKillips, Unity Point Health-Meriter

For more info, visit: **care.nursing.wisc.edu** *or contact us at:* **care@son.wisc.edu** *or* **(608) 265-4330**