VITALITY
FALL 2016

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A Degree Nearly 70 Years in the Making

On May 13, 2016, 96-year-old World War II veteran Alfonso Gonzales became the oldest graduate in USC history, finishing the bachelor’s degree in zoology he began in 1947. The USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology helped design an independent study course tailored for Gonzales, enabling him to complete a final missing credit and achieve this important milestone.

“I enjoyed coming to USC, and I enjoyed the atmosphere of knowledge,” Gonzales says. “Knowledge is intrinsic, and that can never be taken away from you.”

Read more about Gonzales’ remarkable story on page 8, and learn more about the other ways the Davis School is helping older adults in Los Angeles stay engaged in the community and pursue their goals through the Purposeful Aging L.A. initiative on page 10.

— Photo by Michael Glier
How a new partnership aims to help Los Angeles residents of all ages achieve their goals and live healthier lives

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Professor Kate Wilber: Making our communities age-friendly is crucial for all of us

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Dear members of the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology community,

Welcome to the Fall 2016 issue of Vitality! As we start another school year and welcome thousands of new students to the USC campus, I’m certain that the idea of finding one’s purpose is on many students’ minds. But it’s not just young adults setting out on their own who strive to find and work toward meaningful goals—just see the story of 96-year-old World War II veteran Alfonso Gonzales, who with the USC Davis School’s help became the oldest-ever USC graduate on May 13.

This issue’s cover story discusses the USC Davis School’s involvement in Purposeful Aging Los Angeles, a new initiative to make Los Angeles one of the most age-friendly regions in the world. Working together with the City and County of Los Angeles, AARP, the Milken Institute, UCLA, and other community partners, we hope to make L.A. a place where older adults can feel connected to the community, stay safe and healthy, and take part in activities and work toward goals that are meaningful to them. Learn more about this important initiative on page 10, and hear from Professor Kate Wilber on why this initiative is so important for people of all ages on page 34.

Along with exciting research and school news, in this issue we celebrate USC University Professor and AARP Professor of Gerontology Eileen Crimmins and her election to the National Academy of Sciences. This is a tremendous and well-deserved honor for a world-renowned researcher who’s achieved so much over the course of her career.

Earlier this year, I was honored and humbled to accept another five-year term as dean of the USC Davis School. I am proud to continue working with our USC Davis School Trojan Family to realize the school’s most important objectives and to help our students discover and reach the goals that mean the most to them.

Fight On!

Pinchas Cohen, M.D.
Dean, USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology
Executive Director, Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Center
Holder, William and Sylvia Kugel Dean’s Chair in Gerontology
Eileen Crimmins, University Professor and USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology AARP Professor of Gerontology, has been elected to the National Academy of Sciences in recognition of her scientific impact and leadership.

Membership in the academy is one of the highest possible honors for scientists in the United States. The academy includes approximately 2,250 members and nearly 440 foreign associates, of whom approximately 200 have received Nobel prizes.

“Eileen is an incredible scientist whose scholarship, creativity, and insight have shaped the field of gerontology and beyond,” said USC Davis Dean Pinchas Cohen. “Her election to the National Academy of Sciences is a richly deserved honor, and it is a privilege to have her as a colleague at the Leonard Davis School.”

Crimmins is a world-renowned researcher in demography, socioeconomic differences in health, and global aging and has received many other major honors for her scholarship. In recent years, she has been listed as one of the world’s most influential scientific minds in social sciences by the media and information firm Thomson Reuters, was elected to the Institute of Medicine, and received the Gerontological Society of America’s Robert W. Kleemeier Award for outstanding gerontology research. Her USC honors include the Associates Award for Creativity in Research and Scholarship.

She is the only new National Academy of Sciences member from USC this year and is one of just 84 new academy members from across the country. She is also the first female USC faculty member to be elected to the academy. Having been a USC faculty member since 1982, Crimmins credited the university, and USC Davis in particular, for providing an exemplary environment for her scholarship.

“Any success I’ve had is due to my career here at USC and specifically the USC Davis School, which has been a multidisciplinary and forward-thinking environment,” she said.

- Beth Newcomb
The USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology hosted the annual "What's Hot in Aging Research at USC" on April 18, 2016. This year's event focused on how nutrition and diet interact with genetics to influence lifespan.

Presentations included USC faculty members discussing their latest research; author and journalist Bill Gifford sharing the research that went into his book, *Spring Chicken: Stay Young Forever (or Die Trying)*; L.A. Kitchen and St. Barnabas Senior Services leaders; and a healthy cooking demonstration from Vi at Silverstone Executive Chef Jeff Weston.

Check out more images and quotes from this year's What's Hot in Aging Research at tinyurl.com/whiarUSC.
The USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology’s newest study abroad program in Israel provided a unique perspective on the psychology of older adults as well as incredible experiences in one of the world’s most interesting places to study aging, according to the program’s first students.

Taking place from May 16 to June 3, 2016, “The Psychology of Aging” (GERO 320) was held at USC during the first week and in Herzliya, Israel during the second and third weeks. The study abroad opportunity was the inaugural offering of a newly launched educational partnership between the USC Davis School and the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya (IDC Herzliya). The course was taught by psychology of aging expert and USC Davis School Professor Mara Mather, who described the course as an “intense” but rewarding experience.

“The IDC partnership provided an impressive number of guest speakers and also some interactions with IDC students. We all especially enjoyed hearing from older Israelis who came to our class to talk about their life and perspectives,” Mather said. “We had a terrific guide on the field trip to Jerusalem, and it was a great day where we saw a lot without it feeling overwhelming. In this course, students did a final paper in which they integrated interviews they conducted with middle-aged and older adults with the content they had learned about in the course. This was a great way for them to review the course from another perspective.”

Student feedback for the course has also been extremely positive, with participants calling the course immersive and unforgettable:

“My Maymester abroad was unforgettable! I learned so much, not only from the gerontology class, but also from being immersed in a foreign culture. For starters, GERO 320 was one of the best electives I have taken during my time at USC. I met students from a variety of majors, which made the class more interesting when we had a chance to participate.

After class, we would go to the beach most of the time, [and] we had two class outings to Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, so we were able to experience a new country with our fellow classmates. I highly recommend GERO 320; it is an opportunity every USC student should be given.”

— Gillian Miller
BS Real Estate Development

“There’s a saying in Israel, chaval al hazman, that cannot be directly translated into English. It encapsulates the notion that time is too short and the experience itself, grand. I think it’s fitting in describing the remarkable nature of the Israel trip. Israel, in spite of the burdens her people have carried, is filled with so much joy...

The country offers such a rich cultural dialogue with its Jewish traditions and its crucial role in history. To have the ability to study under Dr. Mara Mather and a number of incredible professors at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya who broadened the students’ understanding of the psychology of older adults was unparalleled... I know it will be a trip I will never forget.”

— Sarah Wong
BS Human Development and Aging

To see more photos from the program, visit tinyurl.com/USCIIsrael16.
With the help of the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, one Trojan has taken the adage “better late than never” to a whole new level.

For more than six decades, Alfonso Gonzales thought that he had graduated from USC with a bachelor’s degree in zoology. But when his family members approached the university about getting a copy of his diploma, they were met with surprising news: he was one unit short.

Gonzales wasn’t about to let technicalities—the missing credit, his age of 96, and the fact that the zoology major no longer exists at USC—stop him from getting the degree he had worked so hard for in the 1940s.

To help, USC administrators worked with the Davis School to create a one-unit course that was as substantive as any other USC class but was tailored to Gonzales’ life experiences and needs as an older student. They also reopened the zoology major for him.

Aaron Hagedorn, an instructional assistant professor in the Davis School, met with Gonzales weekly to study autobiographies, give reading and video assignments, and arrange visits to other gerontology classes. Hagedorn found his diligent student always prepared and enthusiastic for class.

“Teaching Alfonso was a great demonstration of the principles of andragogy, also known as adult learning theory, in creating a learning environment that was based on his life experiences,” Hagedorn says.

Pinchas Cohen, dean of the Leonard Davis School, praised Gonzales’ commitment to finishing his education and willingness to be a role model for lifelong learning.

“We at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology are proud to have helped [Gonzales] finish his degree,” Cohen said. “What he’s doing is setting an incredibly positive example for other older adults in America and around the world. He embodies the fact that learning...
opportunities never stop; people can develop new skills and grow at any age.”

Gonzales passed the class and attended the Davis School commencement ceremony on May 13, 2016. That day, he also met with USC Provost Michael Quick, who presented Gonzales with his official diploma.

Born in 1920, Gonzales grew up in Hermosa Beach and joined the Navy in 1942. Two years later he transferred to the Marine Corps, where he received field medicine training, and he treated wounded on the battlefield as part of World War II’s largest amphibious assault in the Pacific.

Discharged in November 1945, Gonzales returned to California. He was the first in his family to attend college and majored in zoology at USC in hopes of applying to medical school. But his career goals changed, and he started Compo-Loam, a company that offered a proprietary planting soil mix. He worked at his family business until retiring at age 88.

Finishing his degree with the course in guided autobiography not only provided Gonzales with more insight about how to share his story with others, but also gave him even more happy memories, he says.

“I enjoyed coming to USC, and I enjoyed the atmosphere of knowledge,” he says. “Knowledge is intrinsic, and that can never be taken away from you.”

Gonzales is the eldest member of a family with five living generations, and his intelligence and determination inspire his family members, says Gonzales’ grandniece Dorinda Geddes. “My uncle has always been a very remarkable and special man,” she says. “He is a role model for all of us.”

- Beth Newcomb

IN HIS OWN WORDS
Read a column authored by Gonzales about his life and experiences at tinyurl.com/USCgonzales.
AGING WITH PURPOSE IN LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles is renowned for its sunshine, celebrities, beautiful beaches, and, of course, great universities. Less well-known but equally important is the fact that it is home to a large and growing population of older adults.

Between 2010 and 2030, the number of people aged 65 and over in the Los Angeles region is expected to almost double, from approximately 1.1 million (larger than the total population of nine states) to more than 2.1 million individuals. This unprecedented aging of the region’s diverse population requires bold planning and action, shared responsibility, committed public and private sector leadership, and information on the latest research findings—a solid playbook for healthy, safe, and rewarding lives for Angelenos of all ages.

To ensure the region is ready to meet the challenges and opportunities its aging population presents, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and Supervisor Hilda Solis, chair of the County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, launched the Purposeful Aging Los Angeles initiative at a joint press conference on May 18, 2016. Purposeful Aging Los Angeles is an ambitious and innovative initiative designed to harness the extraordinary human capital and untapped potential of Los Angeles’s aging population and in doing so improve the lives of older adults and people of all ages.

“I am very pleased that the County of Los Angeles is joining with the City of Los Angeles and leading institutions to launch Purposeful Aging Los Angeles,” said Supervisor Solis. “With an older adult population that is rapidly growing, we must prepare our communities for the future of aging in Los Angeles County; this landmark initiative will unite public and private leadership from across the county to ensure a better future for older adults and Angelenos of all ages. As we make our county more age-friendly, we are expanding our shared commitment to the older adults who contribute so much to our communities.”

In addition to the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, partners in the new initiative include Los Angeles County Community and Senior Services, the Los Angeles Department of Aging, AARP, the Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging, and the UCLA Los Angeles Community Academic Partnership for Research in Aging.

**USC AMONG INITIATIVE’S KEY PLAYERS**

In a letter of support for Purposeful Aging Los Angeles, USC Provost Michael Quick expressed enthusiasm for the initiative and the unique aging expertise present within the university.

“We are excited about the potential of this collaborative effort to address one of the most important opportunities and challenges of our time — the aging of our population,” Quick said. “USC is an internationally recognized pioneer in the study of aging. The university has prioritized the study of aging across disciplines and has recently made a significant investment in Alzheimer’s disease research, making it
arguably the leading institution in the country on this important issue.”

Enthusiastic engagement and support by USC Leonard Davis School Dean Pinchas Cohen ensures that the school has a prominent role throughout the initiative, from conducting research to leading interventions for healthy aging.

“The Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, in partnership with the broader USC community, is leading research efforts to understand the underlying mechanisms of aging and longevity, the rapidly shifting demographics and the impact an aging population will have on individuals, families and communities, as well as such key areas as health care, behavioral health, public policy, business and finance,” he said. “We are enthusiastic about using our expertise in collaboration with Purposeful Aging Los Angeles partner organizations to contribute to the development of innovative, evidence-based changes in the community.”

“This is an historic opportunity for the Mayor, his colleagues on the County Board of Supervisors, and a wide range of collaborating stakeholders to set the standard for regions with aging populations across America and the world that hunger for new ideas and innovative practices,” added Paul Irving, Chairman of the Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging and Distinguished Scholar in Residence at the Leonard Davis School.

PLANNING AND TEAMWORK
As a critical component of Purposeful Aging Los Angeles, the City and County of Los Angeles have joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly Communities and World Health Organization Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. Membership in the Network of Age-Friendly Communities provides a structured opportunity to examine and enhance current policies, programs, and infrastructure in eight domains of livability that include civic participation and employment, community support, and health services and transportation.

As members of the Network of Age-Friendly Communities, the city and county will launch a two-year, inclusive planning process with robust engagement of key stakeholders, including older adults, philanthropic organizations, community organizations, businesses, and educational institutions. During the coming months, Purposeful Aging Los Angeles will host or participate in a series of events throughout the Los Angeles region to introduce the Initiative to these constituencies. The planning process will culminate in the development of a three-year action plan for implementation that will strengthen the region’s age-friendliness across eight domains of livability outlined by AARP: housing, neighborhood, transportation, environment, health, engagement, and opportunity.

Kate Wilber, Mary Pickford Foundation Professor of Gerontology at USC Leonard Davis and a member of the Purposeful Aging Steering Committee, said both the planning and action phases of the initiative offer opportunities for faculty and students to contribute through a wealth of research and community service activities.

“Los Angeles is an incredibly important place to test ways to make communities more aging-friendly,” Wilber said. “Its diversity and demographic trends make it a valuable living laboratory for policies and interventions. In taking a key role in this initiative, the Davis School will contribute its world-class leadership in aging research and education for the next generation of gerontologists and the next generation of older adults. We’ve been anticipating, if not preparing, for the aging of the baby boomers, and now that time has arrived. Baby boomers started turning 65 over five years ago—in little more than a decade, the entire generation will be eligible for Medicare. Purposeful Aging Los Angeles is an opportunity to innovate, to offer pathways for older adults to contribute their vast array of talents and interests, and to use what we learn to build a model for the rest of the country.”

In addition, Wilber said using evidence-based interventions to address domains of livability with older adults in mind will do more than just allow older Angelenos to remain in their homes and engaged in their communities. It has the potential to provide a wide variety of positive benefits for people of all ages, from healthier and safer neighborhoods to a more robust regional economy.

“What’s good for older people is good for everybody and helps people of all ages achieve the goals that are important to them,” she said.

- County of Los Angeles Community and Senior Services; Beth Newcomb

Learn more at PurposefulAgingLA.com
AGING BY THE NUMBERS

Angelenos are living longer: between 1991 and 2011, average life expectancy increased from 75.8 years to 81.5 years.

More than half a million Californians have Alzheimer’s disease or related dementia.

Nearly 25 percent of households include an adult age 65 or older.

More than 3.4 million Californians serve as informal caregivers for older and/or disabled individuals.

WHAT MAKES A LIVABLE, AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY?

According to AARP and the World Health Organization, addressing these eight domains of livability with older residents in mind can optimize health, safety, productivity, and more—for everyone.

OUTDOOR SPACES & BUILDINGS
Are sidewalks, streets, and buildings safe?
Are there green spaces and outdoor seating?

TRANSPORTATION
Is public transit easy to navigate?
Are there good connections to services?

HOUSING
Are homes affordable, safe, and adaptable for all life stages?

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION
Is social isolation discouraged via accessible and affordable activities?

RESPECT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION
Are there intergenerational activities in which younger and older people learn from and respect one another?

CIVIC PARTICIPATION & EMPLOYMENT
Do older adults have opportunities to stay engaged by working or volunteering?

COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION
Is information disseminated through appropriate channels for various audiences?

COMMUNITY SUPPORT & HEALTH SERVICES
Are health care and other services accessible and affordable?
RESEARCHERS HIGHLIGHT BRAIN REGION AS “GROUND ZERO” OF ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

A critical but vulnerable region in the brain appears to be the first place affected by late onset Alzheimer’s disease and may be more important for maintaining cognitive function in later life than previously appreciated, according to a USC-led review of scientific literature.

The locus coeruleus is a small, bluish part of the brainstem that releases norepinephrine, the neurotransmitter responsible for regulating heart rate, attention, memory, and cognition. Its cells, or neurons, send branch-like axons throughout much of the brain and help regulate blood vessel activity. Its high interconnectivity may make it more susceptible to the effects of toxins and infections compared to other brain regions, lead author Mara Mather said.

Mather, professor of gerontology at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, added that the locus coeruleus is the first brain region to show tau pathology—the slow-spreading tangles of protein that can later become telltale signs of Alzheimer’s. Though not everyone will get the disease, autopsy results indicate that most people have some initial indications of tau pathology in the locus coeruleus by early adulthood, she added.

The norepinephrine released from the locus coeruleus may contribute to preventing Alzheimer’s symptoms. Studies conducted with rats and mice have shown that norepinephrine helps protect neurons from factors that kill the cells and accelerate Alzheimer’s, such as inflammation and excessive stimulation from other neurotransmitters.

Norepinephrine is released when someone is engaged in or mentally challenged by an activity, whether it’s solving problems in the workplace, completing a word puzzle, or playing a difficult piece of music.

“Education and engaging careers produce late-life ‘cognitive reserve,’ or effective brain performance, despite encroaching pathology,” said Mather, who holds a joint appointment as professor of psychology at the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. “Activation of the locus coeruleus-norepinephrine system by novelty and mental challenge throughout one’s life may contribute to cognitive reserve.”

“The Locus Coeruleus: Essential for Maintaining Cognitive Function and the Aging Brain” appeared in Trends in Cognitive Sciences and was funded by the National Institutes of Health grant RO1AG025340. The study was co-authored by Professor Emeritus Carolyn Harley of the Memorial University of Newfoundland.

— Beth Newcomb
TINY BUT IMPORTANT

The locus coeruleus, indicated below in blue, sends branches of its cells from the brainstem throughout the brain and is the first part of the brain to show signs of Alzheimer’s. Its interconnectivity may make it more vulnerable to toxins and infections, Mather says.
NEWLY DISCOVERED PROTEINS MAY PROTECT AGAINST AGING’S ILLNESSES

A group of six newly discovered proteins may help to divulge secrets of how we age, potentially unlocking new insights into diabetes, Alzheimer’s, cancer, and other aging-related diseases.

The tiny proteins appear to play several big roles in our bodies’ cells, from decreasing the amount of damaging free radicals and controlling the rate at which cells die to boosting metabolism and helping tissues throughout the body respond better to insulin. The naturally occurring amounts of each protein decrease with age, leading researchers to believe that they play an important role in the aging process and the onset of diseases linked to older age.

The research team led by Pinchas Cohen, dean and professor of the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, identified the tiny proteins for the first time and observed their surprising origin from organelles in the cell called mitochondria and their game-changing roles in metabolism and cell survival. This latest finding builds upon prior research by Cohen and his team that uncovered two significant proteins, humanin and MOTS-c, hormones that appear to have significant roles in metabolism and diseases of aging.

Unlike most other proteins, humanin and MOTS-c are encoded in mitochondria, the structure within cells that produces energy from food, instead of in the cell’s nucleus where most genes are contained. Mitochondria have their own small collection of genes, which were once thought to play only minor roles within cells but now appear to have important functions throughout the body. Cohen’s team used computer analysis to see if the part of the mitochondrial genome that provides the code for humanin was coding for other proteins as well. The analysis uncovered the genes for six new proteins, which were dubbed small humanin-like peptides, or SHLPs, 1 through 6 (the name of this hardworking group of proteins is appropriately pronounced “schlep”).

After identifying the six SHLPs and successfully developing antibodies to test for several of them, the team examined both mouse tissues and human cells to determine their abundance in different organs as well as their functions. The proteins were distributed quite
differently among organs, which suggests that the proteins have varying functions based on where they are in the body.

Of particular interest is SHLP 2, Cohen said. The protein appears to have profound insulin-sensitizing, anti-diabetic effects as well as potent neuro-protective activity that may emerge as a strategy to combat Alzheimer’s disease. He added that SHLP 6 is also intriguing, with a unique ability to promote cancer cell death and thus potentially target malignant diseases.

“Together with previously identified mitochondrial peptides, the newly recognized SHLP family expands the understanding of the mitochondria as an intracellular signaling organelle that communicates with the rest of the body to regulate metabolism and cell fate,” Cohen said. “The findings are an important advance that will be ripe for rapid translation into drug development for diseases of aging.”

The study, “Naturally Occurring Mitochondrial-Derived Peptides are Age-Dependent Regulators of Apoptosis, Insulin Sensitivity, and Inflammatory Markers,” first appeared online in the journal Aging on April 10, 2016. Cohen’s research team included collaborators from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and the findings have been licensed to the biotechnology company CohBar for possible drug development.

The research was supported by a Glenn Foundation Award and National Institutes of Health grants to Cohen (1R01AG034906, 1R01AG 034430, 1R01GM 090311, 1R01ES 020812), and an Ellison/AFAR post-doctoral fellowship to Kelvin Yen. Study authors Laura Cobb, Changhan Lee, Nir Barzilai, and Pinchas Cohen are consultants and stockholders of CohBar Inc. ■

-Beth Newcomb
Older Americans who did not graduate from high school feel they have less control and hope in their lives than those who completed a high school degree or better, according to a national study led by USC researchers.

The findings, based on responses to the national Health and Retirement Study, contribute to scientific evidence that education affects well-being and health in later years.

“Higher levels of educational attainment offer some protection against declines in sense of control and hope as people age,” said Uchechi Mitchell, the study’s lead author and a postdoctoral fellow at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology and the USC/UCLA Center for Biodemography and Population Health.

Hopelessness was greatest among the least educated, and their hopelessness worsened over time, the researchers found. The increase in hopelessness was also associated with health problems and disability.

Mitchell also offered a cautionary note on interpreting the study’s results.

“This does not mean that someone with a college degree may not experience these declines or that someone with a high school degree is destined to feel in less control of their lives or hopeless,” said Mitchell, who is also affiliated with the Minority Aging Health Economics Research Center of the USC Schaeffer Center for Health Policy and Economics.

The study was published online on March 24, 2016 in the Journals of Gerontology: Social Science.
their feelings, whether they could be relied upon for serious problems, and whether they could confide in them.

Respondents also reported any health conditions and difficulties or limitations performing daily activities such as dressing, eating, and walking.

One in every eight respondents reported having at least one physical limitation, nearly 45 percent had a health condition, and 20 percent were depressed.

Hopelessness increased for respondents who at some point within the four years of the surveys had suffered a disability or who reported a loss of social support from family or friends.

“We did not observe an association between spousal loss and any of our measures of psychosocial functioning,” the researchers wrote. “There was an association, however, between loss due to divorce/separation and perceived constraints and hopelessness.”

Economic status and financial well-being often are associated with a high level of educational attainment, but Mitchell emphasized that this study did not examine their influence. Instead, she said, the study focused on education and the psychological and social aspects of aging.

“Although greater educational attainment can potentially lead to increased earnings and greater financial stability, this is not always the case; the relationship depends on other factors such as a person’s occupation and marital status,” Mitchell said. “At older ages, education may be more important for psychosocial functioning than individual earnings or household income because many older adults are retired. Education is a more stable resource that often doesn’t change in old age.”

The study co-authors were Assistant Professor Jennifer Ailshire, doctoral candidate Lauren Brown and AARP Professor of Gerontology Eileen Crimmins — all of USC Davis; and Morgan Levine, postdoctoral fellow at UCLA.

The study was funded by grants from the National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health (T32-AG000037, R00-AG039528, P30-AG043073 and R24-AG045061).

- Emily Gersema

### MEASURING HOPELESSNESS

Twice in four years, participants responded to questions about how they felt in their old age. Researchers rated the answers on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 representing the worst, and then calculated the averages and mean responses according to their level of schooling. (USC Graphic)
Americans are living longer but in poorer health, according to a study led by renowned USC demography researcher Eileen Crimmins.

The USC-led report examined life expectancy trends and disability rates over a 40-year span from 1970 to 2010. The analysis of U.S. vital statistics found that the average total life span increased for men and women in those 40 years, but so did the proportion of time spent living with a disability.

The study found increased longevity is not necessarily indicative of good health. Most age groups live longer with a disability or other health problem.

“We could be increasing the length of poor-quality life more than good-quality life,” said Crimmins, USC University Professor and AARP Professor of Gerontology at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology. “There are a number of indications that the baby boomer generation that is now reaching old age is not seeing improvements in health similar to the older groups that went before them.”

Only for people aged 65 and older was there a “compression of morbidity”—a reduction in the proportion of years spent with disability.

The findings have implications for policymaking, such as proposals to raise the retirement age for Social Security and Medicare eligibility.

“Clearly, there is a need to maintain health and reduce disability at younger ages to have meaningful compression of morbidity across the age range,” Crimmins said. “The trends for the last 40 years do not support projections and policies that are based on assumptions of a reduced length of disabled life.”

The average life span for men increased by 9.2 years to 76.2 years, the researchers found. The number of years they live with a disability increased by 4.7 years while the number of years spent disability-free increased by 4.5 years.

For women, the average life span increased by 6.4 years to 81 years. The number of years that women spend with a disability increased by 3.6 years, exceeding the increase in women’s disability-free life (2.7 years).

“The smaller increase in healthy life than in total life for women was surprising and another indication that American women have not done as well as American men in terms of improving health in recent decades,” Crimmins said.
Different factors may affect disability at different ages. For instance, younger populations may have had an increase in disability because of a greater emphasis on mental health, increased diagnoses of autism spectrum and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorders, as well as changes in drug use.

The study was published online April 13, 2016 in the American Journal of Public Health. Yuan Zhang of USC Davis and Yasuhiko Saito, a USC graduate and faculty member at Nihon University, were co-authors.

The study was supported by a grant from the U.S. National Institute on Aging (P30-AG17265) and a Special Research Grant by the Japan Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (H26-Tokubetsu-Shitei-029).

- Emily Gersema; Beth Newcomb

**QUANTITY VS. QUALITY**

While average lifespan increased in both sexes from 1970 to 2010, men experienced a larger increase (above). Of the years added to lifespan, women spent a higher proportion of those years with a disability (below).

“The smaller increase in healthy life than in total life for women was surprising and another indication that American women have not done as well as American men in terms of improving health in recent decades,” Crimmins said.
FASTING-LIKE DIET TURNS IMMUNE SYSTEM AGAINST CANCER

A fasting-like diet with chemotherapy strips away the guard that protects breast cancer and skin cancer cells from the immune system, according to a new USC-led study on mice.

The study was published in the journal Cancer Cell on July 11, 2016, days after BMC Cancer published a separate study showing that a pilot trial of the three-day, fasting-like diet was “safe and feasible” for 18 cancer patients on chemotherapy.

Both studies were led by Valter Longo, professor and director of the USC Longevity Institute at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, who has found several health benefits of fasting-like diets, from weight loss to slowed aging. The clinical study was co-led by oncologist David Quinn of the Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center at the Keck School of Medicine of USC.

“The mouse study on skin and breast cancers is the first study to show that a diet that mimics fasting may activate the immune system and expose the cancer cells to the immune system,” Longo said. “This could be a very inexpensive way to make a wide range of cancer cells more vulnerable to an attack by the immune cells while also making the cancer more sensitive to the chemotherapy.”

The two studies’ findings build upon prior research that showed a short-term fast starves cancer cells and facilitates the chemo drug therapies to better target the cancer. Another recent study showed that a low-calorie, fasting-mimicking diet can slow multiple sclerosis, killing bad cells and generating new healthy ones.

The results of this latest mouse study are striking since chemotherapy’s side effects include immunosuppression. The researchers found that the fasting-mimicking diet, when used with chemotherapy drugs, raises the levels of bone marrow cells that generate immune system cells, such as T cells, B cells and “natural killer” cells that infiltrate tumors.

DECEPTIVE T CELLS

In the mouse study, scientists saw another significant effect of the diet: the “T regulatory” cells which protect the cancer cells were expelled. The scientists traced this effect to a weakened enzyme, heme oxygenase or HO-1, inside the T regulatory cells’ mitochondria. Prior research has indicated that HO-1 levels are often elevated in tumors and are linked to several cancers.

“While it’s more of a mechanism to keep the T cells away, in some ways the heme oxygenase tricks the immune system into thinking that the bad cells should not be killed,” Longo said. “By removing heme oxygenase, these T regulatory cells are also taken from the site of the cancer.”

In examining the effects on breast cancer, researchers found that putting the mice on four days of the low-calorie fasting-mimicking diet, with chemo drugs doxorubicin and cyclophosphamide, was as effective as two days of a water-only, short-term starvation
diet. Both diets with the drugs slowed the growth of tumors while protecting healthy, normal cells. The scientists found similar effects on melanoma.

They also found three cycles of the fasting diet, combined with doxorubicin, prompted a 33 percent increase in the levels of cancer-fighting white blood cells and doubled the number of progenitor cells in the bone marrow. The cancer-killing cells were also more effective at attacking and shrinking the tumors.

The scientists found that short-term starvation (a two-day, water-only diet) and the low-calorie fasting-like diet in mice reduced the expression of the HO-1 gene in the T regulatory cells. This change made it easier for the chemotherapy drugs to attack the cancer.

**NATURAL MECHANISM?**

Longo said it’s unclear if the diet-prompted response in the immune system is an evolved mechanism to protect us from disease.

“It may be that by always being exposed to so much food, we are no longer taking advantage of natural protective systems which allow the body to kill cancer cells,” Longo said. “But by undergoing a fasting-mimicking diet, you are able to let the body use sophisticated mechanisms able to identify and destroy the bad but not good cells in a natural way.”

The mouse study’s first authors were Stefano Di Biasé and Changhan Lee, with co-authors Sebastian Brandhorst, Brianna Manes, Roberta Buono, Chia-Wei Cheng, Mafalda Cacciottolo, Alejandro Martin-Montalvo, Min Wei and Todd E. Morgan – all of the USC Longevity Institute; and Rafael de Cabo of the National Institute on Aging. The mouse study was funded by the National Institutes of Health (PO1 AG034906).

The results of the pilot trial suggested that even water-only fasting in combination with chemotherapy is safe for humans. The research team also found that 72 hours of fasting is associated with lower side effects, compared with fasting for 24 hours. This raises the possibility that a doctor-monitored, fasting-like diet could bolster the effectiveness of immunotherapy on a wider range of cancers.

The human pilot study was conducted by Assistant Professor Tanya Dorff and Associate Professor and Medical Director David Quinn of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center at the Keck School of Medicine.

In addition to Longo, other co-authors were Susan Groshen, Huyen Pham and Denice Tsao-Wei of the Keck School of Medicine; Agustin Garcia and Manali Shah of the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center; as well as Chia Wei-Cheng, Sebastian Brandhorst, USC Davis Dean Pinchas Cohen and Min Wei—all of the USC Longevity Institute. The study was supported by the V Foundation and the National Cancer Institute.

- Emily Gersema
STAYING ACTIVE—AND SAFE—OUTDOORS

By Jon Pynoos, UPS Foundation Professor of Gerontology, Policy, and Planning at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology

With autumn upon us, we’re trading farmers markets and trips to the beach for football games and walks in the park. We’re still as active as ever, just grabbing a sweater on our way out the door.

Whether you are out and about to stay active or making a quick trip to the store, it’s important to take steps to avoid a fall.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, most fractures older people experience are caused by falls. Each year, 2.5 million older adults are treated in emergency departments for their fall injuries. Having a chronic disease such as arthritis, diabetes, or osteoporosis increases the risk of falling. Many think that only frail older adults need to be concerned about preventing falls, but active older adults are also at risk, especially when outdoors. In fact, researchers at the University of Massachusetts found in 2011 that most older adults who fall outdoors are more active, take fewer medications, and in better health than those who fall indoors.

September 22, 2016 is National Fall Prevention Awareness Day, a perfect time to take steps to reduce falls in your home and outdoor activities! Falls happen to people of all ages, but the chances of falling, and being seriously injured in a fall, increase with age. However, there are many things you can do to reduce your risk of falls when outdoors.

BE AWARE OF WHERE AND WHEN YOU WALK

When walking in the community, watch out for uneven sidewalks. Walk in pairs or groups so you can alert each other of potential hazards. Consider going to well-maintained places like gyms, malls, and high school tracks. At night, walk where there is plenty of light to help you see where you are going. Carry a small flashlight that can fit in your pocket, purse, or on a keychain so you always have a light source if needed.

EYEWEAR CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Be sure you are wearing the correct eyewear while walking—bifocals or reading glasses make it harder to see hazards on the ground. On bright days, wear sunglasses to help reduce glare. Have your vision checked once a year or when your vision changes. This can ensure your prescriptions are up-to-date.
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TO REDUCE FALL RISK

Exercises that are especially effective at reducing fall risk work on improving balance, strength, flexibility, and endurance. Examples include strength-training exercises, such as lunges or squats, and Tai Chi, which can improve balance and endurance. Any time you’re considering a new kind of physical activity, talk with your doctor or a physical therapist to get a fall risk assessment and see what types of exercises would best match your abilities and fall risk level. Make an activity plan that fits your interests - you’ll be more likely to continue activities you enjoy.

THESE SHOES WERE MADE FOR WALKING

Wear shoes with firm soles and low heels, and make sure to wear sturdy shoes when exercising. Pay attention to the bottom of your shoes and replace them when the treads begin to wear out. Just like the tires on a car, the soles of your shoes can only walk so many miles before they need to be replaced.

SAFE TRAVELS

When traveling to new places or in your own neighborhood, it is important to be aware of your surroundings. Use caution in parking lots and garages, and be aware of curbs, car stops, and changes in elevation. While riding public transportation such as buses and trains, always use handrails when available. When crossing the street, walk in crosswalks and use curb cuts or ramps when they are present. Stop at islands in the middle of the street when available and wait for the next walk sign. Always take your time; hurrying across streets puts you at risk of falling.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Learn how to reduce your fall risk at StopFalls.org.
- Get tips for maintaining independence at home at HomeMods.org.
- See photos from actual homes that show how design and home modification can support independent living at LifetimeHome.org.
LAURA CORRALES-DIAZ POMATTO '11, MS '12, PHD '17

Celebrated young researcher is slated to be the first-ever graduate of the joint Buck Institute/USC Davis School’s pioneering PhD in the Biology of Aging program, thus becoming the nation’s first holder of a formal biology of aging doctorate.

A Trojan since 2007, Laura Corrales-Diaz Pomatto is set to make history with her latest USC degree as the first-ever graduate of the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology PhD in the Biology of Aging program, the first program of its kind in the U.S.

It all began when she first learned about the Davis School prior to her freshman year while flipping through a pamphlet from USC that explained all the different schools, she says. “I was really taken with gerontology in large part because of the very positive relationship I had with my own grandparents while growing up,” she says. “During freshman orientation, I remember going with my dad to meet with Jim DeVera and asking about the classes and the program and his recommendation for my first gero class. I still go to Jim for my PhD forms and coursework tracking, which is something I love about the Davis School—it really can provide a sense of belonging and people that want you to succeed.”

During her junior year, while contemplating what to do after graduation, Pomatto took the undergraduate Biology of Aging course led by USC Davis School James E. Birren Chair in Gerontology and Vice Dean Kelvin Davies. He subsequently offered her a spot in his lab as an undergraduate researcher.

“I guess he didn’t mind all the questions I asked him in class,” she jokes. “Since than I have really enjoyed the mentorship and guidance he has offered throughout my PhD, especially his push to foster independence in his graduate students, which I think has offered me a skill set that is very unique and will be beneficial to my future endeavors.”
Pomatto graduated with degrees in Gerontology and Biomedical Engineering in 2011; beyond the demanding double major, the hardworking student also competed as a member of USC’s varsity rowing team. She went on to receive a Master of Science in Medical Device and Diagnostic Engineering at USC in 2012 before enrolling in the PhD in Gerontology program. Upon its creation in 2014, she transferred to the PhD program in the Biology of Aging, a joint offering between the Davis School and the Buck Institute for Aging Research in Novato, Calif.

“I thought joining the Biology of Aging program was a wonderful opportunity,” Pomatto says. “As the Davis School is the leader in the U.S., and potentially the world, for having a collection of such high caliber academics in both the social and biological sciences, it is an amazing opportunity to be the first student to graduate from this flagship program.”

With Davies, a pioneer in the study of free radicals and oxidation, as her mentor, Pomatto’s doctoral research examines fruit flies and how their sex and age affect their ability to adapt to oxidative stresses that can damage proteins, lipids, and DNA. Specifically, her work analyzes two proteins that degrade damaged, oxidized proteins to help cells continue to function: the mitochondrial Lon protease and the cytosolic 20S proteasome. To look at an organism’s ability to cope with oxidative stress via adaptation, she treats fruit-flies with a low amount of an oxidant, hydrogen peroxide, which will not kill the organism but can activate the genes and proteins that are necessary to protect the cell against oxidative stress. Following this activation phase, the flies are treated with a semi-lethal amount of the oxidant, and survival is measured.

“Young flies pretreated with the adaptive amount of hydrogen peroxide survive longer than their counterparts that were not pretreated upon exposure to the challenge dose,” Pomatto says. “However, only females show this phenomenon—males, regardless if they are pretreated or not, show no change in survival. Also, I have looked at the age-related changes in adaptation and found that with age, fruit flies lose the ability to show an adaptive response.”

This is important as our cells are continually dealing with various forms of oxidative stress, Pomatto explains, adding that the female-specific bias in activation of the stress response is particularly interesting: “This phenomenon may potentially contribute to the differences in lifespan that we see in ourselves as females typically outlive males.”

Pomatto has been recognized for her research, including with a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and the 2015 Young Investigator Award from the Society for Redox Biology and Medicine. As she prepares for graduation and contemplates what she’ll do next as a researcher, Pomatto encourages other current and future USC students to ask their own questions and take active roles in research if they’re interested.

“Due to my own positive experience as an undergrad at USC, I really wanted to pay it forward, in sense that I aim for all the undergraduate students I work with to have a positive experience in the lab environment,” she says. “I have worked with eight undergrads, ranging from gerontology to biomedical engineering majors, and in each case, I think it’s really important that they ‘own’ a portion of a project, and that their work actively contributes towards a publication.”

- Beth Newcomb
TOD LIPKA MSG ’82, MPA ’82

President and CEO of the Step Up organization leads innovative efforts to help Angelenos dealing with mental illness and homelessness.

Before he enrolled at USC in 1980, Tod Lipka MSG ’82, MPA ’82 had already spent time helping vulnerable older adults and learning about the field of aging. Today, as President and CEO of Los Angeles nonprofit organization Step Up, he leads innovative responses to mental illness, homelessness, and the aging issues that occur with them.

As an undergraduate student at the University of Hartford in Connecticut, Lipka first discovered his interest in aging issues when his father was hospitalized with a serious illness. During his daily visits with his father, he also got to know the hospital’s many older adult patients, several of whom Lipka characterized as “languishing” with little to no contact with their family members.

“I got to know quite a few people in the wing where my dad was, and I developed a very significant relationship with one woman, Yetti. I realized I was kind of like her sunshine, and I really enjoyed spending time with her,” Lipka recalls. “I knew that I wanted to work with people; I realized I enjoyed working with older people and that I’d be interested in making this a career.”

He complemented his bachelor’s in sociology with a specialty in aging and continued to work with aging individuals. Just prior to deciding to pursue a master’s degree in aging, he helped run a food program for isolated, low-income seniors in downtown Los Angeles.

“I decided I really wanted to choose this as a career and get my master’s,” Lipka says. “USC was one of only two schools with a full degree program in aging at the time; aging wasn’t such a high-visibility issue yet.”

Because of his interest in leading programs for seniors, Lipka enrolled in the dual Master of Science in Gerontology/Master of Public Administration program. After he graduated in 1982, he began working for Second Careers, a private nonprofit temporary employment agency that helped older workers find employment.

“A lot of older workers were given incentives to retire, though many still wanted to work,” Lipka says. “It was a
great niche at a time when there was a lot of talent in the market and older workers who didn’t want to retire or wanted to stay active.”

In 2001, Lipka became President and CEO of Step Up. The organization provides training, permanent supportive housing opportunities, and recovery services to individuals with mental illness throughout Los Angeles. Lipka said he often connects his current work with Step Up to his knowledge of gerontology.

“There are generational issues in mental health. For a lot of people with serious mental health issues, they have been dealing with illness for decades; they were diagnosed when a diagnosis was almost destiny,” Lipka says. “Today, diagnosis is not destiny, and early intervention can shape outcomes.”

Step Up has recently received attention for its innovative and successful approaches to helping homeless individuals with mental illness, including those who are chronically homeless for a year or more. Much of the organization’s success has come from embracing a “housing first” approach, Lipka says.

“For anybody who’s homeless with mental health issues, the answer is housing—service-enriched housing, or what we call permanent support housing. We move people right from street into their own home and wrap that home in rich supportive services,” he explains. “For most chronically homeless individuals, it’s more expensive to support them on street than to house them. [On the street] they engage with the government’s most expensive systems of care… The only way to really solve this is to create housing, where individuals can unlearn survival skills from street and learn skills to flourish in housing.”

Lipka says Step Up currently has an 89 percent retention rate in its housing facilities—meaning that after one year, 89 percent of the previously homeless individuals they serve are still successfully in housing. “Even people who had been homeless for 30 to 40 years succeed to a great extent,” he says. “Housing first works.”

In 2010, Step Up partnered with the Clinton Global Initiative and made a commitment to house 200 homeless individuals within five years. By 2015, they had constructed three new housing facilities and provided homes for more than 250 people. Recently, the organization has made a new commitment with CGI to house 400 of L.A.’s homeless veterans by 2018. With 3,000 homeless vets on the streets of L.A. County at any night, Step Up is using a creative approach to create housing faster than ever: purchasing what were previously nuisance motels and converting them into supportive housing facilities.

His experience at USC, especially in the Davis School, was “a wondrous experience” and encouraged him to go out into the world and innovate, Lipka says; his favorite class ever was a policy class taught by Fernando Torres-Gil, renowned public policy and aging expert and adjunct professor with the Davis School. After Lipka graduated, the two remained in touch; Torres-Gil is now a member of the Step Up Board of Directors.

“I’m so thankful to have such a wise expert on policy on our board,” Lipka says. “I’ve now been able to benefit from his wisdom for 35 years.”

Lipka says today’s USC Davis School students had wisely chosen a field in which there are numerous opportunities to innovate and positively contribute to the world.

“I’ve never had any doubt that how I’ve expended my energy was valued in the world,” he says. “There’s still tremendous opportunity to innovate and create… It’s so exciting to redefine what aging is.”

- Beth Newcomb
The USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology’s newest tenured faculty member, Associate Professor Sean Curran, wasn’t originally planning on becoming a scientist, he says.

“I started off thinking I would be a clinician,” says Curran, who studied premed coursework while majoring in biochemistry as an undergrad at UCLA. “Then I began doing research at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and fell in love with basic research.”

His experience as a lab technician in Cedars-Sinai’s Department of Surgery led him to pursue a PhD at UCLA, and he graduated with his doctorate in biochemistry and molecular biology in 2004. His research as a PhD student examined mitochondrial biogenesis—how cells create new copies of the organelles that power them—in yeast. He followed up with a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard Medical School, where he first examined the genetic mechanisms involved in regulating development and lifespan in the worm species *C. elegans*.

Curran, who joined the Davis School as an assistant professor in 2010 and holds joint appointments in the Keck School of Medicine and Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, now researches the mechanisms that balance cellular metabolism with stress adaptation in the quest for healthy aging. Since becoming a Trojan, he has made several exciting advancements in the biology of aging, including groundbreaking work on how specific genes interact with various diets to increase or decrease lifespan, otherwise known as “diet-gene pairs.”

“We use classical genetic approaches to identify new pathways that are important for development, growth, stress adaptation, metabolism, and health span,” Curran says. “The identification of mutations that are only important on certain diets was in many ways an accident; we noticed many of the behaviors and phenotypes of our mutants were attenuated on specific diets.”

His work has also combined results from worms, mice, and human cells, highlighting how the actions of certain cellular pathways have been conserved throughout evolution.

“We have moved our work in *C. elegans* into mouse models and human cell culture,” he says. “Remarkably, the pathways we discovered in the worm are conserved and have the promise to impact human disease... The more gene variants we can pair with specific environmental and health parameters, the better our understanding of the biological basis of the variation in human aging.”

Curran has already received a great deal of recognition for his research achievements, including the 2011 Ellison Medical Foundation Young Scholar in Aging award, the 2014
Gerontological Society of America’s Nathan Shock New Investigator Award, and the 2015 Ewald W. Busse Research Award from the Duke University Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development. This year, he was also named a fellow of the Gerontological Society of America.

In addition, Curran’s undergraduate and graduate students praise his teaching, and he received a USC Mellon Mentoring Award in 2012. He views the opportunity to mentor graduate students and post-docs and to collaborate with other faculty members as the best parts of being a USC faculty member, he says.

“The recognition of tenure was certainly a validation of my career,” he says. “I am truly appreciative of the mentoring I’ve received and the support from the Davis School and the university.”

- Beth Newcomb
Vibrant Living Retreat

February 26-28, 2016
Rancho Valencia Resort & Spa
Rancho Valencia, California

USC Davis alumna Morgan Levine PhD discusses the Longevity App

USC University Professor Caleb "Tuck" Finch gives a fiddle performance

RSVP now for the 2017 retreat!
March 24-26 • Ojai, California
See back cover for details
USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology Board of Councilors member Mei-Lee Ney has made a gift to create a new endowed scholarship in her name.

Ney is an active member of the Leonard Davis School Board of Councilors, serving on its Vibrant Living Retreat Planning Committee, as well as a member of the USC Pacific Asia Museum. With her leadership gift of $100,000, Ney has created a scholarship fund that will provide support to deserving Leonard Davis School students in perpetuity.

The Mei-Lee Ney Endowed Scholarship couldn’t have come at a better time; there have never been more students enrolled at the school in its more than 40 years of existence. The number of students enrolled in both undergraduate and graduate programs has soared to all-time highs in the past few years.

Dean Pinchas Cohen praised Ney’s decision to create an endowed scholarship fund: “Mei-Lee’s generous gift will greatly help deserving students studying aging at every level for generations to come. We are grateful for her support and leadership.”

Ney is enthusiastic about supporting the school and its students.

“I’m very happy to help the Leonard Davis School and its wonderful students,” she said. “With my gift I hope to encourage other members of the Trojan Family and the Leonard Davis School Family to support the school through donations or volunteering.”

- David Eshaghpour
Capturing The Untapped Potential Of Older Adults

Why working to make our communities age-friendly is so important—for all of us.

“Yes, maybe we’d like to be able to get places quickly, and carry things in both hands, but only because we have to keep up with the rest of you. We would rather be just like us, and have that be all right.”

— Barbara Kingsolver, The Poisonwood Bible

Our youth-centric standard of physical ability, beauty, and performance leaves most of us out, including many older adults. What would happen if all of us were valued for being “just like us” and could bring our unique contributions to a common purpose? Consider what we could accomplish if older adults had opportunities to contribute to their community according to their fullest potential, no matter their age, interests, or expertise? Conversely, how much talent and wisdom do we miss out on because many elders don’t have clear, comfortable, and accessible means through which to share their knowledge and life experiences within the fast-paced, technology-driven rat race that many of us inhabit?

While older adults offer a largely untapped reservoir of potential, it is not unusual to see the rapid aging of the population portrayed in apocalyptic terms, with phrases like the “silver tsunami” or the “age quake.”

The subtext of these proclamations is that tsunamis and quakes are destructive and overpowering. Although we know that demographic changes bring challenges, population aging also offers unprecedented opportunities. To capitalize on the promises rather than the perils of an aging society, leaders in the Los Angeles region have launched the Purposeful Aging Initiative.

Purposeful Aging Los Angeles stresses the importance of ensuring that older adults live safe, healthy, and rewarding lives. Equally important, the initiative seeks to harness the largely untapped human capital, creativity, and experience that our elders have to offer. Strategically recognizing and developing opportunities and meeting the challenges head-on, will ensure that people of all ages benefit. Whether small- or large-scale, creative, practical ideas that are good for older people are likely to be good for everyone.

By Kate Wilber, USC Mary Pickford Foundation Professor of Gerontology; Steering Committee Member, Purposeful Aging Los Angeles
Consider these examples:

- Aging in place should include opportunities to age in community. Strong volunteer programs, such as those that connect older volunteers with schools, offer students new mentors and role models and give teachers support in the classroom. At the same time, such programs bring generations together, breaking down stereotypes and fostering friendships across communities that are too often age-segregated and isolating.

- Make access to outdoor spaces and community activities more accessible. Sidewalks, parks, and other community infrastructure can be designed to be safe and easily navigable for older people. These designs will also make it easier for parents with children in strollers and those using walkers, rollators, and wheelchairs to get around. Similarly, policies that promote safe, accessible, good-quality, and affordable housing benefit older people, younger adults just starting out, and a large swath of people who have been priced out of the housing market. Innovations include experimenting with different models of housing such as accessory dwelling units, co-housing, and home sharing options.

- Recognize and promote strategies to wipe out the stigma of getting older by embracing the many facets of older age. Unfortunately, more than four decades after Robert Butler coined the term “ageism,” age bias appears to be alive and well in Los Angeles. Working together to make communities in the region age-friendly will create opportunities to change how people view aging and older adults.

Changing attitudes, developing and improving programs, innovating across a variety of sectors, and engaging a wide range of stakeholders is a tall order, and Los Angeles is gearing up for the challenge. Purposeful Aging Los Angeles is fortunate to have strong champions in Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors represented by the Board’s Chair Hilda Solis. In addition to leadership from the region's top officials, this ambitious initiative has been and will continue to be a team effort. Partners include the City and County of Los Angeles, the USC Leonard Davis School, AARP, the Milken Institute Center for the Future of Aging, and UCLA. This team is working to bring together community stakeholders from throughout the region to identify challenges and opportunities for making Los Angeles a model age-friendly region for all its residents. Launched in May, the initiative begins with a two-year planning process. Planning activities are designed to engage key stakeholders, including older adults, in the City of Los Angeles, the other 87 cities in Los Angeles County, philanthropic organizations, community organizations, businesses, and educational institutions. To ensure that these efforts pay off and the priorities for change actually happen, the planning process will set the stage for a three-year action plan.

There is lots of work to do, and it is our hope that as Purposeful Aging LA gets underway, Angelenos from a variety of different backgrounds and perspectives will provide advice and support. Los Angeles has a unique and exciting opportunity to make the region a model that capitalizes on the opportunities of an aging society in a way that supports, empowers, and celebrates individuals at every stage of life.
FRIDAY-SUNDAY, MARCH 24-26, 2017
2017 Vibrant Living Retreat
Ojai Valley Inn and Spa
Ojai, California

Come hear the experts assembled by the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology discuss the newest developments in science, technology, nutrition, disease prevention and longevity to help us live longer, more fulfilled and healthier lives.

Retreat rates: $2,750 double accommodation; $2,250 single accommodation. Register by October 1, 2016 to enjoy a savings of $250. Call (213) 740-0777 to secure your reservation!

Special thanks to the retreat planning committee for building a personalized retreat to benefit the participants who attend: Elie Gindi, Paul Irving, Mei-Lee Ney, Keith Renken, Sharon Tedesco, Shari Thorell, and Patricia Will.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2016
Morten Kesten Summit
University of Southern California
The Morton Kesten Summit examines new aging research applications and advancements in public and private innovations. Registration is $40 before Friday, September 30 and $45 after. Registration deadline is Monday, October 10; register now at www.usc.edu/esvp (code: summit).

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2016
USC Davis Homecoming Picnic
University of Southern California
The USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology will be hosting a pre-game picnic starting three hours before kick-off. For more details, please email gerodev@usc.edu.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2016
USC Reception at Gerontological Society of America Annual Scientific Meeting
9PM-12AM, Sheraton New Orleans Waterbury Room
Join faculty, students, and alumni of the USC Davis School at this year’s GSA Meeting! Register for the conference at www.geron.org; RSVP for the reception at (213) 740-1728.