OUR BACKGROUND

The Virginia Center on Aging (VCoA) is an example of the extremely rare circumstance of a legislature creating a statewide Center on Aging. We were enacted in 1978 with mandates in the Code of Virginia.

The General Assembly added mandates in 1982 that we administer the Alzheimer’s and Related Diseases Research Award Fund (ARDRAF) as a seed grant program for Virginia researchers to investigate the causes and consequences of dementia, and, in 2006, that we maintain a statewide training fund program for aging-related workforce development. We have organized our response to the Code by establishing four primary programs.

Our Mission:

The mission of the VCoA is to define and protect the quality of life for older Virginians so that they may remain autonomous, contribute to their communities, and have access to resources for continued learning and personal growth. We provide data, resources, and insightful recommendations to decision-makers (legislators, practitioners, service providers, and caregivers) to enable them to make informed decisions about our elderly. To achieve its mission, the Center focuses on these core operating objectives:

1. Training, Education, and Lifelong Learning
2. Alzheimer’s Research and Education
3. Expanding the Community’s Capacity to Provide Caregiving
4. Serving as a Statewide Resource Center
OUR FOUR PRIMARY PROGRAMS

**Geriatrics Education**, through initiatives like our Virginia Geriatric Education Center and the Geriatric Training and Education (GTE) initiative to enable communities, agencies, and groups to conduct aging-related workforce development.

**Abuse in Later Life**, which seeks to enhance and train a multidisciplinary approach to prevent and respond to the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older Virginians.

**Dementia Research**, through our administration of the Alzheimer’s and Related Diseases Research Award Fund (ARDRAF), which has grown since 1982 to be arguably the most productive, state-funded pilot research program on dementia in the country.

**Lifelong Learning**, through our partnership with Chesterfield County Schools and Board of Supervisors, in operating the Lifelong Learning Institute (LLI) in Chesterfield as a member-driven opportunity for personal growth.

Beyond these primary programs, we have significant other work in research and research translation. VCoA members serve on numerous coalitions, task forces, and committees across Virginia, at state, regional, and local community levels. Partnerships have been our way of work since our inception, for these complement our expertise and multiply the impact on the well-being of older Virginians and their families. And, of course, our quarterly publication *Age in Action* has been recognized repeatedly as the finest aging-related media product in the South.
The Virginia Geriatric Education Center (VGEC) is a consortium of universities that includes VCU, the University of Virginia (UVA), Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS), and George Mason University (GMU), and involves faculty and clinicians from nine professions (Dentistry, Medicine, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Patient Counseling, Pharmacy, Physical Therapy, Speech Pathology, and Social Work).

Our major work currently is the federally funded Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (2019-2024). Interprofessional geriatrics collaboration is the hallmark of our work which is overseen by the all-in Plenary. Through 21 different initiatives, we are working to:

- Develop partnerships among academia, primary care systems, and community based organizations in order to improve health outcomes for older adults through interprofessional training from pre-clinical to practice settings; integrate geriatrics expertise into primary care.

- Train community-based older adults, families, direct care workers and healthcare providers on aging-related issues including dementia.

In 2020, we adapted our initiatives to the limitations imposed by COVID-19. We delivered training programs virtually for primary care providers, first responders, pre-clinical students, direct care workers, families, and older adults; helped maintain the Richmond Health and Wellness Program with interprofessional faculty and students monitoring the well-being of disadvantaged older adults through IT innovations; partnered with Hampton University to offer a teleseries on racial disparities in dementia care; offered through George Mason University the Music & Memory and TimeSlips programs as non-pharmacological interventions in dementia care for facility staffs and family caregivers; operated through EVMS two primary care clinics to screen for and respond to social determinants of health (lack of transportation, nutritional insufficiency, education and income levels, etc.) that jeopardize well-being; offered through VirginiaNavigator in-person and virtual learning experiences for older adults across Virginia on medication management, transitions in care, and Advance Care Planning; and much more.
While five percent of the country’s COVID-19 cases have occurred in long-term care facilities, deaths related to COVID-19 in these facilities account for about 38 percent of the country’s pandemic fatalities. In Virginia, about 50% of all deaths related to COVID-19 have occurred in long-term-care facilities.

In response, the Virginia Center on Aging has partnered with The VCU School of Medicine, Division of Geriatric Medicine, and the Department of Gerontology, to join the Nursing Home National COVID Action Network, using an award from the CARES Act Provider Relief Fund. Funding was provided by the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. VCU joined the network to rapidly deploy a specific nursing home ECHO project to train and support nursing home staff on best practices for protecting patients, staff, and visitors from coronavirus infection and spread. The VCU Nursing Home ECHO uses teleconferencing technology to connect nursing home staff with specialists to promote the philosophy of “all teach, all learn” during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The VCU ECHO Nursing Home project recruited 111 of Virginia’s 273 eligible nursing homes, grouped into four cohorts of approximately 30 nursing homes each. In coordination with an Institute for Healthcare Improvement quality improvement expert, the program developed and implemented 16 weekly 90-minute ECHO sessions for each of the cohorts. The sessions promote collaboration, sharing success stories, and following up on quality improvement projects. Important topics, such as vaccine distribution and strategies for vaccine acceptance, testing, and visitation policies were reviewed with the facilities.

This program has initiated new collaborations with nursing homes and will help foster innovative ways to collaborate in this post-COVID-19 virtually connected world. Future projects will help determine the most effective methods to promote engagement through implementation and evaluation science.
Our Abuse in Later Life Program tackles the issue of abuse of adults 50 and older by bringing together professionals from such diverse fields as law enforcement, victim advocacy, social services, the faith community, criminal justice, housing, healthcare, aging services, and more.

In January of 2019, VCoA was awarded Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) funding in the amount of $82,263. This funding allows us to develop a comprehensive, coordinated, and cross-trained community response to intimate partner and family violence in later life in Virginia that assists criminal justice professionals, providers of aging-related services, domestic violence advocates, adult protective services workers, and allied service professionals in addressing the needs and circumstances of older women and promoting the identification, apprehension, prosecution, and adjudication of persons committing violent crimes against older women. This is accomplished by providing training for criminal justice professionals and service providers, and facilitating the provision of appropriate services through interagency collaboration. In addition, there is a focus on increasing awareness and education, designing specialized services, improving existing services, and designing resources and training programs to assist law enforcement, criminal justice, aging services, domestic violence advocates, and allied service professionals in responding to the unique needs of older women.

What we’re hearing from law enforcement officers about our trainings...

“Course was presented effectively, the time allocated was sufficient. Great class for first responders. Should be presented in the academy.”
2020 Highlights:

• Provided training to 161 individuals from the following professions: law enforcement, victim advocacy, healthcare, and social services.

• Provided consultations to 20 agencies throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia.

• Provided workforce development to 81 professionals, via the Central Virginia Task Force on Domestic Violence in Later Life. The Task Force is a multi-disciplinary local partnership of organizations working since 1998 to raise awareness and improve the community response to women aged 50 and older who experience domestic, sexual, or family violence.

What we’re hearing from victim service providers about our trainings...

“I genuinely learned so much and really thought about older population violence in a new perspective. The videos were thought provoking.”
For almost 40 years, the Alzheimer’s and Related Diseases Research Award Fund (ARDRAF) has offered productive support for innovative investigations throughout the state into the methods of treatment, ways that families can cope with the stresses of the disease, and the impact of the disease on the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Funding a wide diversity of entities, including state and not-for-profit agencies, the ARDRAF has provided a total of 191 competitive awards to 27 different recipient organizations to date. Awardees have obtained $45.7 Million in related grant funding, 6 patents, and 313 subsequent publications in peer-reviewed journals. We make seed grants that allow investigators to collect the data needed to compete for more substantial awards from outside of Virginia. With $5.02 Million competitively awarded so far, the program has returned $9.08 for each $1 appropriated by the General Assembly.

This year the ARDRAF is funding five awards.

Two awards are at the University of Virginia (UVA). One investigation is focusing on rural families dealing with dementia at home, while the other is looking at barriers to screening among caregivers of cognitively-impaired patients with end-stage kidney disease.

VCU also received two awards. One study is testing an interdisciplinary rehabilitation program to support cognitive health in low-income adults. The second study examines the brain mechanisms that contribute to the development of Alzheimer’s disease in traumatic brain injury.

The fifth award is funding a study at the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center that is using deep brain stimulation to regenerate and restore cognitive function.

“The ARDRAF is certainly the oldest and arguably the most effective pilot research program of its kind in the country.”
The Lifelong Learning Institute (LLI) in Chesterfield County is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, founded and co-sponsored by the Virginia Center on Aging, Chesterfield County Public Schools, and Chesterfield County serves midlife and older adults with a mission to provide lifelong learning opportunities for midlife and older adults through education, social and fitness activities…all for the LOVE of learning. In 2020, the LLI offered 620 in-person and online courses with 26,013 registrations. These registrations represented 2,178 students in three full sessions (a single student may be counted three times) of daytime nonresidential college-level courses and related activities, and 53,136 total classroom hours taught by 182 instructors. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, LLI suspended the Spring 2020 session and quickly pivoted to offering online courses through Zoom. Thanks to the partnership with the Virginia Center on Aging, this was a systemically seamless transition. LLI staff trained over 600 members and 90 instructors on the Zoom platform and the program is flourishing with online lifelong learning and social connection opportunities that are held in meaningful, LIVE, and interactive environments. These efforts have effectively battled the social isolation among the older adult population LLI serves.

The LLI had a total of 1,333 members in 2020, mostly Virginians representing 58 different zip codes and the following locations: Amelia, Chesterfield, Colonial Heights, Cumberland, Dinwiddie, Essex, Fairfax, Goochland, Hanover, Henrico, King William, Martinsville City, Nelson, New Kent, Nottoway, Petersburg, Powhatan, and Richmond.
“You have been wonderful during this difficult time. Thank you so much for all your support and kindness. You have made life less stressful, given us structure, and something to look forward to each week. Thank you for all you do. – Gwen C.

“Thanks to all of you for all the hard work you have done in bringing these courses to us. I feel so lucky to be a part of LLI. You have certainly helped to make this awful period of isolation bearable. You have saved my sanity!!!” – Edie J.

“LLI has been a lifeline during this pandemic. It has brought some normalcy at a very unsettling time. Thank you to all the LLI staff for reaching out to the membership with your care, concern and professionalism.” – Carole D.

“Having access to learn on a platform where one can readily see and interact with the instructor and other students supports my lifelong learning and mitigates the self-isolation that I am observing to stay healthy and engaged with others. Keep up the wonderful work and great care that you are extending to us!” – Terri H.
At the Virginia Center on Aging (VCoA), we engage in a variety of research projects with faculty on VCU’s health campus, as well as with colleagues from across the Commonwealth. While our projects vary in scope, they share commonalities: they are partnerships and they help us achieve the same goal: to expand the impact we have on our older adult population by promoting more positive views of aging, of older adults, and of working interprofessionally to improve the care and well-being of older adults and their families.

During the past year, COVID-19 has hindered some of our research efforts while simultaneously amplifying others.

Typically, we are able to prepare and deliver presentations at numerous professional conferences. This year, however, many of our professional organizations’ annual meetings were canceled, resulting in a lower than usual number of presentations given.

On the other hand, and partially as a result of calls for COVID-19-related research projects, we had a very successful year in terms of receiving competitive grant funding. We applied for five grants during this calendar year and were awarded four, including a project dedicated to helping nursing home staff combat COVID-19.

4 Articles published
8 Presentations given
4 Grants received
Age in Action is a 20-page quarterly published jointly by the Virginia Center on Aging and the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services.

Age in Action strives to share current aging-related research, education, and programming happening across the Commonwealth. It has an audience of thousands that includes professionals in the field of aging, gerontologists, geriatricians, health professionals and administrators, adult home and community professionals, and students.

The leading feature of each issue is a case study, which is developed based on current issues, opportunities, and concerns affecting older adults. This past year’s topics included podiatry issues, food insecurity, music and memory, and Area Agency on Aging partnerships.

Each issue also includes editorials from the directors of the collaborating organizations and articles on topics of relevance, such as housing, health, guardianship, legislative issues, available resources, notices of meetings and conferences, and more. Readers are encouraged to submit content for review.

Now in the 36th year of publication
Winner of several media awards
Thousands of readers across Virginia and the world