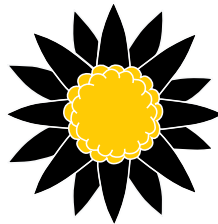


The HBEC encourages older African Americans to participate in research with the goal of addressing health disparities



# HEALTHIER BLACK ELDERS CENTER

SUMMER 2020

Connecting Older Adults to Research



## How You Can Help

Research is critical to understanding why African Americans are at much higher risk of developing certain diseases, and why these diseases have a greater impact on their health and longevity. If you agree to be part of the Participant Resource Pool (PRP), we guarantee that:

- The research projects meet the highest quality federal, state and university standards.

- Your information will be handled with the strictest confidence.

- You will be considered for research that is of interest to you.

- You have the right to decline a research project for any reason at any time.

If interested, contact HBEC Program Coordinator at **313-664-2604**

*The Healthier Black Elders Center is part of the Michigan State University, University of Michigan and Wayne State University Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research: A National Institute on Aging Grant Program*



## HBEC RESPONSE TO COVID-19



CAB members from left, front row: Eugene Odom, Wilma Stringer. Back row: Vanessa Rorai, Shirley McRae, James Bridgforth, Fannie Spears, Alice Feurtado, Henry Swift, Patricia Mullin, JoAnn Smith, Tam Perry, Jamie Mitchell. Not pictured: Ethel Ambrose, Precious Everett, Fred Hawkins, Johnetta McLeod, Clarence Steen, and Adrienne Watts.

## Special Edition: Stories from Community Advisory Board Members

As we continue to shelter at home to be safe, the staff and faculty of HBEC want you to know we are thinking about you, and we are checking-in to see how you are doing. Our hope is to hear your story and get a better understanding of how you are coping during this Covid-19 crisis. A team of trained callers is currently making telephone calls to all 1,300 HBEC members!

HBEC staff have been honored to hear the many accounts of members' experiences during this difficult time. Some stories have been of hope, courage, perseverance, and others of sadness, grief, stress, and confusion. We know how important it is to feel connected now. Since we couldn't meet with you in person at a Lunch

& Learn, we've created a "special" newsletter. Written primarily by our Community Advisory Board (CAB) members, it includes poetry, words of encouragement, favorite Bible verses, and reflections.

We sincerely thank the HBEC members who have already spoken with us, and we send a future thank you to those we will speak with soon. We feel very proud to continue the work of HBEC during this time, and deeply appreciate you as an HBEC member for being a part of this program. We hope our regular fall newsletter will be able to include happy news of upcoming events. Until then, stay safe and know how grateful we are for your continued support.

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## Positive STEPS: Chronic Pain Self-Management Program

Looking for adults 60+ with chronic pain that interferes with daily activities. We are testing an educational program that helps people manage chronic pain by increasing positive emotions and experiences. Involves use of a website and phone calls from a community health worker.

Call 844-456-4668 or email [steps-study@umich.edu](mailto:steps-study@umich.edu)



## The WALLET Study

There is a concern that people who experience a decline in memory or thinking skills may unknowingly also experience a decline in taking care of their finances.

This study will review the past 12 months of bank statements and administer some psychological and cognitive tests. Looking for English-speaking adults aged 60 or older, diagnosed with Mild Cognitive Impairment (MCI) or those that feel their memory has declined.

This study is completed by telephone. Contact **Vanessa Rorai** at [vrorai@wayne.edu](mailto:vrorai@wayne.edu) or 313-664-2604.



Dear Fellow Seniors,

I write on behalf of the leadership of the **Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research (MCUAAAR)** and our partner at **Wayne State University, the Healthier Black Elders Center**. The United States has not faced times this difficult since World War II and the Spanish flu pandemic. This silent killer that swirls around us – the coronavirus – threatens not only the health and well-being of vulnerable elders but our children and grandchildren as well. We have read too many stories, especially in our beloved Detroit, about multi-generation families devastated by the virus; entire families have passed away. Unfortunately, we have also learned that African Americans are particularly vulnerable to the worst effects of Covid-19.

Over the last 20 years, improving the quality of life for Detroit's older adults has been our primary goal as we listen and respond to your concerns and needs. Our community partnerships have stood the test of time. We are now reaching as many of you as possible by phone to personally check on how you and your families are faring. We are also conducting a major study of how the pandemic affects families, especially families of color, and what people, especially older adults, have been doing to protect themselves. We hope these lessons learned will help others as they battle the ravages of the virus.

I want to leave you with a note of hope. While difficult, stay-at-home guidelines and social distancing have reduced the effects of the pandemic. The bravery and willingness of many of you to adhere to these very difficult guidelines has put us on the right road to protect ourselves and our children and grandchildren. But we must "stay the course."

This pandemic is not over. We will face similar flare-ups and dangers from Covid-19 in the months and years to come. We must be prepared to emerge carefully from home and social isolation to participate face-to-face with family, friends, church and other contacts. Life will not be like it was before the pandemic; it will be a new normal. As we struggle with what this means for our families, we want you to know that MCUAAAR and HBEC remain concerned, caring and prepared to do whatever we can do to get all of us through these unexpected and life-changing times.

Sincerely,

**James S. Jackson**  
**Peter Lichtenberg**  
**Joan Ilardo**

MCUAAAR Co-directors



# Covid-19 Fears are Fertile Ground for Scammers

by SAFE Program Director,  
LaToya Hall

Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has created excellent opportunities for scammers to prey on older adults. Although times of crisis brings out the best in most of us, we see the worst emerging from some individuals. Con artists want to play on our fears of this virus to scam us out of our money. Here are a few of the many new scams that use Covid-19 as an entry point:

## Offers to Run Errands

Individuals are going door-to-door or calling on the phone to offer to run errands such as picking up groceries for homebound seniors. They may ask for lists of items needed, plus cash or credit card numbers. These scammers take the money or card numbers and never deliver anything. If you give them your card number, they could charge thousands of dollars of items to your card for delivery to *their* address. If you cannot do your own shopping, ask a trusted friend or family member or use a legitimate grocery delivery service such as Instacart. Do not trust a stranger no matter how friendly he or she seems.



## Cures, Treatments & Vaccines

Currently there is no cure, treatment or vaccine for Covid-19. Individuals have been selling supplements and drugs claiming they will treat, cure or protect you from Covid-19. Although these items may not be harmful (and they might indeed be), there is no guarantee they will protect you from or cure you of Covid-19. You are wasting your money.

## Loved One in Trouble

Scammers call you to claim your friend or relative has contracted Covid-19 and they need money for treatment. Never send or give money to, or purchase a gift card for, a stranger. Call the family member to verify the information and only exchange funds

between trusted members of the family for treatment or any other things your loved one may need.

These and many more scams are circulating at this time of crisis. Keep your guard up and report any suspicious encounters. If you become the victim of a scam or identity theft, remember the Successful Aging Thru Financial Empowerment (SAFE) program offers no cost, one-on-one support through your computer or over the phone. Please call me, LaToya Hall at 313-664-2608, or email [L.hall@wayne.edu](mailto:L.hall@wayne.edu) for assistance.

Please add us on Facebook to see live videos about the latest scams, what to watch out for and how to protect yourself. Search Facebook for Success After Financial Exploitation SAFE.

## Gratitude for Years of Outstanding Service



Minti Henderson, MCUAAAR's project coordinator for more than 15 years, resigned her position recently due to health reasons. We will miss Minti's abilities and enthusiasm greatly. She provided incredible leadership for our Early Career Research Scientists and deep concern for the older adults associated with MCUAAAR and the HBEC.

We applaud Minti's major contributions to the success of the Center over these many years. We have communicated our thanks and gratitude directly to Minti over

the last few weeks, though some of our good-bye plans were disrupted by Covid-19. We want Minti and all of you to know we are tremendously grateful for the many years of unselfish and outstanding service Minti gave to the scholars of MCUAAAR and the seniors of Detroit. We wish her all the best in the future.

We welcome Dr. Deborah Robinson who has joined the administrative core as Faculty MCUAAAR Administrative Coordinator. We will work to continue to provide to all scientists, faculty, administrative staff and Detroit older adults the very best organization to achieve MCUAAAR's mission and vision for the future.



## Stay Fit and Healthy through a Pandemic

Ordinarily, the speaker is turned on, tunes are blaring, and Margreat Handley, 65, is leading a lively Enhance Fitness class at Hasselbring Senior Center in Flint. But now, like everyone else, Handley waits—waiting for signs that the virus spread has slowed down, waiting for the world to get going again, waiting to return to her job with the National Kidney Foundation. She waits for the music to play once more and to see all the smiling faces ready to get sweaty in the morning.

“I’m so used to exercising. It’s important for me to exercise, and it’s important for me to watch portion sizes as well.” Handley notes that maintaining a healthy weight is “80% managing portion sizes, and 20% exercise. If you don’t exercise, you lose muscle mass.

“Aerobic exercise, especially, helps your heart stay stronger. Accelerating your lungs helps you increase your oxygen intake, which is good for maintaining a good weight and good health!” Even though Handley is not running her classes now, she has pointers on helping her peers stay physically fit. “You have to be creative. Go up and down the stairs! Don’t wait to go up and down the stairs. Just go. When I clean the house, I bend down and do squats. Cleaning and housework that we’re doing now is physical activity. Playing with the little ones gets your heart going, too.”

Handley also says that springtime brings another great opportunity to get physical activity—gardening! Being outside offers additional benefits: fresh air, sunlight (and Vitamin D), and a sense of accomplishment in creating a



*“Aerobic exercise, especially, helps your heart stay stronger.” Margreat Handley leads an Enhance Fitness class at Hasselbring Senior Center in Flint.*

*Photo courtesy of Beverly Lewis, Hasselbring Senior Center.*

beautiful flower or vegetable garden.

Sleep and mental health are part of our well-being, too. Older adults are more prone to catching the novel coronavirus, and “Stay Home, Stay Safe” orders have isolated many from families and friends. Handley noted that getting seven hours of sleep is important to help our body regenerate and recover from day-to-day activities. If one has issues with sleeping due to stress or worry, she suggests “turning off that TV.”

She also says that “meditation is really important for you to control your mind, to deal with this, and not having strong anxiety. What do people always say? This will pass. It’s important to keep yourself in a healthy state mentally, because you can look at this and get overwhelmed.

“Sitting back, meditating, and getting a grip on what’s going on [has helped].” Journaling is another excellent activity that Handley recommends. Whatever anxieties you have, write them on paper to relieve them. Research has shown this to be very effective in coping with anxiety, depression and stress.

“Prayer, meditation, and journaling has really helped me,” Handley said.

Though so much has changed in the past months, our aim to be healthier hasn’t disappeared. Now we must devote more time and creativity to figure out how to make our health a priority. For those who are still practicing caution and staying at home, Margreat and the Hasselbring Senior Center has good news. It will begin live streaming workouts soon via Facebook Live. For details, follow Hasselbring Senior Center on Facebook.

## Meet Dr. Kent Keys: New MCUAAAR Community Core Co-Leader



I am a lifelong resident of Flint, MI, and have been actively engaged in community-engaged research for more than a decade. I am interested in racial and ethnic health disparities in urban minority populations. I use qualita-

tive research methods (interviews, discussions, observations) to evaluate people's perceptions and lived experiences to develop community-driven solutions for health equity.

I'm on the faculty at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine, in the Division of Public Health. My former position at the Michigan Institute for Clinical Health Research at the University of Michigan Medical School allowed me to sharpen my skills for minority population engagement across the lifespan. I look forward to working with all involved with the MCUAAAR project as we effectively collaborate with our communities to build a culture of health for all!

### Remote Help with Scams, Fraud, Identity Theft & Managing Money as a Caregiver



Successful Aging thru Financial Empowerment (SAFE) provides FREE financial coaching to older adults and their caregivers to manage money securely and accurately.

Schedule an appointment with Program Director LaToya Hall to talk by phone or computer: [l.hall@wayne.edu](mailto:l.hall@wayne.edu) or 313-664-2608



**Assistance is safe,  
confidential and free**

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GERONTOLOGY  
CAREGIVER EMPOWERMENT



#### Participant Research Pool (PRP)

A database of older African Americans open to participate in research studies on aging. When you become a member of the HBEC, you are added to the Participant Resource Pool.  
Web: <https://mcuaaar.wayne.edu/participant>  
Ph: 313-664-2604

#### Healthier Black Elders Center (HBEC)

The community outreach program of MCUAAAR responsible for educating seniors about health and promoting research on older African Americans.  
Web: <https://mcuaaar.wayne.edu/healthier>  
Ph : 313-664-2604

#### Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research (MCUAAAR)

One of the RCMAR centers jointly run by WSU, U-M and MSU to train scholars in African American aging research to reduce health disparities faced by minority older adults. Principal Investigators are James S. Jackson, PhD, U-M; Peter Lichtenberg, PhD, ABPP, WSU; and Joan Ilardo, PhD, MSU.  
Web: <https://mcuaaar.wayne.edu>

#### Resource Centers for Minority Aging Research (RCMAR)

Created and funded by the NIA, RCMAR coordinates and supports 18 centers across the country, each focusing on a particular population and/or disease. The Michigan Center for African American Aging Research is one of those centers.  
Web: <https://www.nia.nih.gov/research/dbsr/resource-centers-minority-aging-research-rcmar>

#### National Institute on Aging (NIA)

A governmental agency that is part of the National Institutes of Health. It funds scientific research to understand the nature of aging and supports centers including MCUAAAR.  
Web: <https://www.nia.nih.gov>

It Starts Here





## Messages from our Community Advisory Board



### The Urge to Learn is in the Numbers

By Wilma Stringer

I returned to Wayne State University in 2012 to take remedial mathematics courses. I had taken math courses throughout my schooling (I have degrees in anthropology and biology), but had little understanding of them. The first available course was elementary statistics. One day the instructor was solving an example on the board and it struck me that math, not just statistics, could be used to describe the universe around us. Math was a language, not just a series of operations. I got a B+ in the course.

My next course was the second lowest math course offered at WSU. I worked hard and got a B. I was ready to go on to the next course when the director of the math lab suggested I take the enhanced version of that course at The Center for Excellence and Equity in Mathematics. At the Center, in addition to lectures and homework, there were twice weekly labs where teams solved more complex problems and each team member had to write up their correct solution with

an essay explaining how he or she had arrived at the solution and why. It was intense. I failed the course. After my second attempt completing the course,

I got a congratulatory email from the Mathematics Department.

For people competent in math, a

continued on next page

## Wisdom from Survivors

HBEC CAB member Mr. Eugene Odom, age 87, contracted Covid-19 in late April and was in the hospital for four days. After his release, he was sent to a rehabilitation center for about a week to regain his strength. He tells us he is doing much better now and only requires help (especially with cooking) for about four hours a day. "The people caring for me in the hospital and in rehab treated me fantastic," he said. "They were a big help." He credits his prior good health with his ability to survive Covid-19. "I am not a smoker and I exercise five days a week," he said. His advice to everyone? "Take care of yourself." Staying healthy and strong can improve the odds of a good outcome.



Another member of the CAB, who wishes to remain anonymous, has made it through a difficult bout with the coronavirus. They write:

"Near the end of March, I had just successfully completed my fourth surgical procedure in 18 months. My wife and I were so happy about the outcome we were planning a vacation to celebrate. Then the pandemic started and everything changed. My wife developed a cough and had an elevated temperature. We were fortunate to be tested on March 31 and told it would take a week to get our test results. On April 7, I was informed by the Detroit Health Department that I tested positive. Two days later we found out my wife also tested positive.

Our anxiety level was somewhat elevated, because we are both senior minorities with diabetes and hypertension, and in my case heart disease. We monitored ourselves as much as possible during our quarantine period. Finally, after the 14 days were up on April 21, and we had gone three consecutive days without any symptoms, we believed that the worst was over and we had managed to survive."

This person urges everyone to continue social distancing and wearing masks and gloves when appropriate. Rather than relaxing the restrictions too soon, this person urges the country to open the economy gradually. "This is so new. Keep doing the things that are working."

then 60-something taking remedial math may seem trivial, but taking those courses changed my thinking. Granted, once the courses moved past elementary functions, I was just too slow to keep up. But because of the course I took, I now look at the world more quantitatively. When a media presenter says, “60 percent of this is that,” I ask how many people, places, or things does the 60 percent represent, and what is the source of the data? When I completed the math courses, I took a writing course and a course in critical thinking and several others. I have met smart students and committed instructors and have been reminded of how much there is still to learn.



## Finding Comfort and Strength

Every morning or night, CAB member Fannie Spears recites some of her favorite Bible verses from memory. She calls them her ‘armor’ because they protect her and provide comfort and strength.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. – *Proverbs 3:5-6*

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. – *Hebrews 11:1*

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. – *Psalms 51:10*

Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones. – *Proverbs 16:24*



## The Heart and Soul of Healthy Aging

By JoAnn Smith

The key for healthy aging in my opinion is releasing stress. Learning to shift negative thoughts, fears, and doubts to attract the good you desire to come into your life. If your thoughts are not serving you well then change your mind, thinking, habits, and actions. Notice the words that you are using. Speak only what you desire for yourself: healing, prosperity, and happiness. Discover your gift and use it to bless others. The more I give, the more I receive.

Remember that aging encompasses the mind, body and soul. While some of these suggestions will have to wait until the Covid-19 crisis ends, many of them you can do right now.

**Mind:** Keep in contact with your family members and continue having an active social life with old and new friends – even if it’s only through FaceTime, a greeting card or a phone call. If you are single, start planning for the time when you can get out and date. Men and women are looking for companions to go out to lunch or to see a good movie. Keep in touch with your male and female friends through texting or a check-in phone call in the morning and the evening.

Keep the mind stimulated by reading books of interest. I also enjoy watching talk shows, the science and history channels, and a good mystery movie. Some of my friends are working part-time and stay involved in their community that way. Some return to college and take classes of interest such as

math, English, ancient African history, creative writing, art, quilting, or playing an instrument.

**Body:** Our goal is to maintain a healthy body and a healthy brain. Studies show that exercise combined with a healthy diet will produce a healthy body. Exercise! Hobbies and sports, such as bowling, tennis, golf, and bike riding, or a nice nature walk in the park. An occasional walk around the mall, going to the hair salon, body massage, nail spa, and facial. Belle Isle is a beautiful park and I love to sit and watch the ships and small boats pass by under the lighted bridges crossing the Detroit River

**Soul:** I begin and end each day through meditation, exercise, and gratitude. I connect with nature by sitting in my back yard early in the morning looking at the pretty spring flowers and trees. I enjoy the warm sun on my skin while watching the squirrels play around the trees, and the butterfly in the flowerbed. I am so grateful during the night as I look up at the sky to see the glowing light from the moon and the abundance of stars and feeling grateful for God’s creations. Music is also good for the soul. In the evening I listen to jazz, pop, classical, African, Asian, Spanish, hip-hop, and other types of music.

Peace, love and joy to all.





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HEALTHIER BLACK ELDERS  
 SUMMER 2020 NEWSLETTER

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**Lunch & Learns** If you have any questions contact us at 313-664-2616

*Caring for the Caregiver Workshop*  
**Thursday, June 18, 2020, 1:00 – 2:00pm**

Did you know approximately 53 million U.S. caregivers provide care to adults with a disability or illness? Did you know about 15.7 million adult family members care for someone who has Alzheimer's disease or other dementia?



Health educators Sean Knurek and Holly Tired from MSU-Extension will explore the many ways informal caregiving affects a caregiver's mental and physical health. They will teach the importance of self-care for caregivers, practice strategies for self-care, and share resources for learning more about self-care strategies and benefits.

**There are 2 Ways to Attend the Workshop**

**Online Video Webinar**

1. You'll need an email address and a computer.
2. You must register by going to the following website: <https://bit.ly/HBEJuneCaregiving>
3. You'll receive a **confirmation email** with instructions to use Zoom video chat.
4. You'll have the option to join Zoom by downloading it onto your computer or joining on the web. The "Join on the Web" option is simple and fast. Please note that you will be muted and your video/image will not be displayed on-screen during the webinar. Only the presenters' video will appear.

**Telephone Conference Call**

To listen with no video, just call 646-876-9923  
 When asked, enter Webinar ID# 977 5896 0748,  
 then press the # key.