



News Release
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University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Retirement and Disability Research Center Awarded \$3.8 Million for Research Focused on Understudied Populations

The U.S. Social Security Administration is funding 12 major research projects sponsored by The University of Wisconsin–Madison Retirement and Disability Research Center (UW-RDRC) investigating retirement and disability topics surrounding children and families, and the economic security of older adults.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison Retirement and Disability Research Center (UW-RDRC), after being awarded a second five-year cooperative agreement in 2023 with the SSA Retirement and Disability Research Consortium, has received \$3.83 million in funding from the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) for research, training, and outreach in 2024-25.

One of six such centers in the country supported by the SSA, the UW-RDRC focuses on the financial well-being of economically vulnerable families, households of color, older adults, people with disabilities, low-wealth households, and children.

“Especially in light of the pandemic and rising inflation, the events of recent years have intensified the need to conduct research that can be used to improve social insurance programs,” says UW-RDRC Faculty Director Dr. J. Michael Collins, Fetzer Family Chair in the School of Human Ecology and Professor at the La Follette School of Public Affairs, UW–Madison. “This federal support is critical to research that can better understand the factors that fuel economic, social and health disparities in the U.S., as well as the resulting implications for Social Security recipients and the policies and programs that impact their well-being.”

This latest federal funding supports 12 major research studies nationwide, several of which include a University of Wisconsin researcher. David Pate Jr. is an Associate Professor of Consumer Science, Human Development & Family Studies in the School of Human Ecology at UW–Madison. Professor Pate was awarded funding to study SSA benefit application processes and populations reintegrating after incarceration. “Along with my co-investigators, I am excited for this funding to pursue this important area of study. Many of these former and potentially new recipients are in an extremely vulnerable economic position upon release from prison, which may affect their physical and mental health as well as their risk for recidivism.”

This seventh year of federal funding for the UW-RDRC renews support for mentored fellowships and for two training programs held in collaboration with Howard University and San Diego State University, which are building a pipeline for underrepresented scholars in the retirement and disability research field: the [Junior Scholar Intensive Training \(JSIT\)](#) program and the [Social Insurance Undergraduate Research Fellowship \(SURF\)](#). Since 2019 UW-RDRC programs have supported more than 150 emerging researchers in the field.

The RDRC is a research collaboration that involves investigators at UW–Madison and several other academic institutions. Notably, nine of the twelve funded projects include researchers from historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and minority serving institutions (MSIs). Projects receiving SSA funding through the UW-RDRC for 2024–2025 include:

- Lessons from the Middle Space: The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) application process for citizens reintegrating after incarceration
- Child SSI Participation in Wisconsin: A Closer Look
- Long COVID, Economic Outcomes, and SSA Program Participation: A Community-Informed Mixed-Methods Study
- Disparities in SSI, SSDI, and OASI Participation Among LGB and non-LGB Persons: Evidence from COVID-19 Pandemic Shocks
- Impact of Paid Sick Leave Policies on SSI/SSDI Participation among Children and Adults with Disabilities
- The Alternative Safety Net: Gig Employment and Social Program Participation
- Economic Disparities in Widowhood by Race, Gender, and Marital Status: A Mixed-Methods Study of Older Adults who Lost a Partner to Cancer
- Barriers and Facilitators of Using ABLE Accounts and Characteristics of Newly Eligible ABLE Users by Disability Onset Ages: A Mixed-Methods Study
- Living with Grandma as a Survival Strategy? Understanding Social Security’s Role in the Economic Lives of Children in Multi- and Skip-Generational Families
- Increasing Non-Homeownership, Mortgage Debt Burden, and Retirement Security: Housing Tenure in Old Age as a Source of Systemic Disadvantage for Communities of Color?
- Financial Security and Retirement Preparedness Among Midlife and Older Parents of Children with and without Developmental Disabilities: An Intersectional Approach
- Service Delivery Needs of Working-Age People from Racial/Ethnic Minority Groups Who Have Long COVID and are Interacting with SSA Disability and State Vocational Rehabilitation Systems

For abstracts and Principal Investigators on these projects, please visit the [UW-RDRC website](#).

The University of Wisconsin–Madison’s Retirement and Disability Research Center (UW-RDRC), an organizational unit of the Institute for Research on Poverty, is an applied research program that develops evidence to assist policymakers, the public, and the media in understanding issues in Social Security, retirement, and disability policy, especially related to economically vulnerable populations. The UW-RDRC incorporates diversity of viewpoints and disciplines, develops diverse emerging scholars, and generates research findings that are used in policy and practice. To learn more, visit <https://rdrc.wisc.edu/>.