

2025

Building an Age-Friendly Future

Highlights from SDSU's First Age-Friendly University Month



By: Jocelyn Protopappas, MSW MPH RDN
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Background

A quick stroll around San Diego State University's (SDSU) campus conjures all the familiar scenes of a university in Southern California. It's a perfect 70-degree day, and sunlight spills across stretches of red terracotta tile and sandstone buildings. The arched entryway of Hepner Hall, the university's most iconic landmark, frames a steady stream of students in flip-flops and backpacks. Along the palm-lined walkways, skateboarders weave between clusters of students with earbuds and iced coffees making their way to class.

Yet beneath this familiar rhythm, a quieter movement is taking shape, one that most students hurrying across campus might not even realize is happening. It's a movement that challenges assumptions about who a typical SDSU student is and redefines what it means to belong in higher education. In classrooms, research labs, and across SDSU's network of community partners, new ideas about aging, learning, and connection are beginning to take root as the university continues leaning into the Age-Friendly University movement.

An Age-Friendly University (AFU) is a higher education institution committed to promoting inclusion, engagement, and opportunity for learners of all ages. The concept originated at Dublin City University in Ireland and has since grown into a global network of more than 110 universities across five continents, known collectively as the Age-Friendly University Global Network. AFUs are committed to advancing the Ten Principles of the Age-Friendly University (see next page), which emphasize intergenerational connection and mentorship, flexible and inclusive learning environments, recognition of the longevity dividend and the contributions of older adults, and institutional policies that support their active participation in academic life and community.



10 Principles of an Age-Friendly University

- To encourage the participation of older adults in all the core activities of the University, including educational and research programs.
- To promote personal and career development in the second half of life and to support those who wish to pursue second careers.
- To recognize the range of educational needs of older adults (from those who were early school-leavers through to those who wish to pursue Master's or Ph.D. qualifications).
- To promote intergenerational learning in order to facilitate the reciprocal sharing of expertise between learners of all ages.
- To widen access to online educational opportunities for older adults to ensure a diversity of routes to participation.
- To ensure that the university's research agenda is informed by the needs of an aging society and to promote public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the varied interests and needs of older adults.
- To increase the understanding of students of the longevity dividend and the increasing complexity and richness that aging brings to our society.
- To enhance access for older adults to the university's range of health and wellness programs and its arts and cultural activities.
- To engage actively with the university's own retired community.
- To ensure regular dialogue with organizations representing the interests of the aging population.



SDSU's Road to AFU Designation

In 2021, San Diego State University convened a multisector workgroup to explore emerging challenges and opportunities in higher education as part of the university's "Big Ideas" campaign. Through this collaboration, the group recognized that shifting demographics and increased intergenerational engagement represented both a growing challenge and a unique opportunity for innovation at SDSU. From this initiative, two key ideas emerged: the creation of the Center for Excellence in Aging & Longevity (CEAL) and a university-wide commitment to pursuing an Age-Friendly University designation.

SDSU Named an Age-Friendly University

The designation recognizes a commitment to lifelong learning and age-inclusivity.

By **SDSU News Team**

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

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Steve Hornberger, Co-Director of CEAL, shared that he and his colleagues convened a group of AFU Champions along with an AFU Steering Committee, and conducted an audit of SDSU's existing programs, research and policies to identify areas that aligned with the Ten Principles.

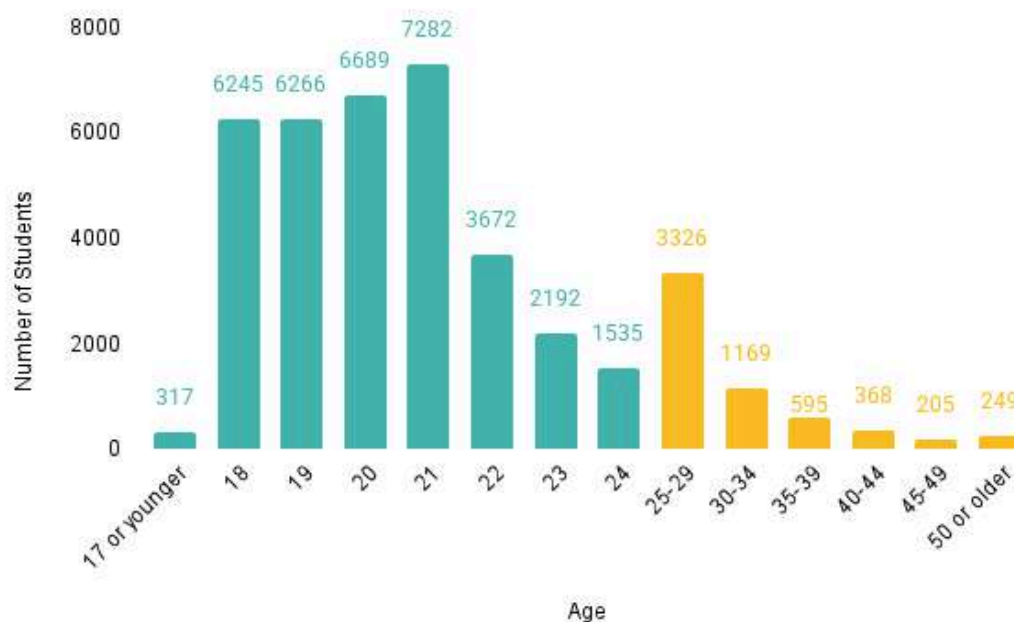
With this groundwork in place, the workgroup sought the endorsement of the university's president to formally begin the application process. Shortly after, President Adela de la Torre approved the initiative.

In July 2021, SDSU was officially designated an Age-Friendly University. The rest, as they say, is history—or really, just the beginning of a journey toward making SDSU a campus where people of any age can thrive.

SDSU Campus Demographics

A **non-traditional aged** student is typically defined a student, who is 25 years or older. These students often balance their busy university schedules with employment, family responsibilities, military service, and/or caregiving. Sometimes they're returning to school after a significant break or have never attended college at all. Their lived experiences, learning styles, and support needs may differ from those of younger, traditionally aged students (18–24).

2025 Student Enrollment Fall 2025*



*Data from SDSU Analytic Studies & Institutional Research, Fall 2025

In the Fall of 2025, 15% of the undergraduate and graduate students at SDSU fell into the non-traditional age bracket. This means a significant portion of the student body arrives with diverse life experiences, intergenerational perspectives, and unique support needs.

SDSU GLOBAL CAMPUS STATISTICS

SDSU's Global Campus provides flexible academic pathways designed for adult learners, career-changers, and working professionals. Notably, 56% of its students are non-traditional aged, reflecting strong demand for age-inclusive, lifelong education.

THE CSU OVER 60 PROGRAM

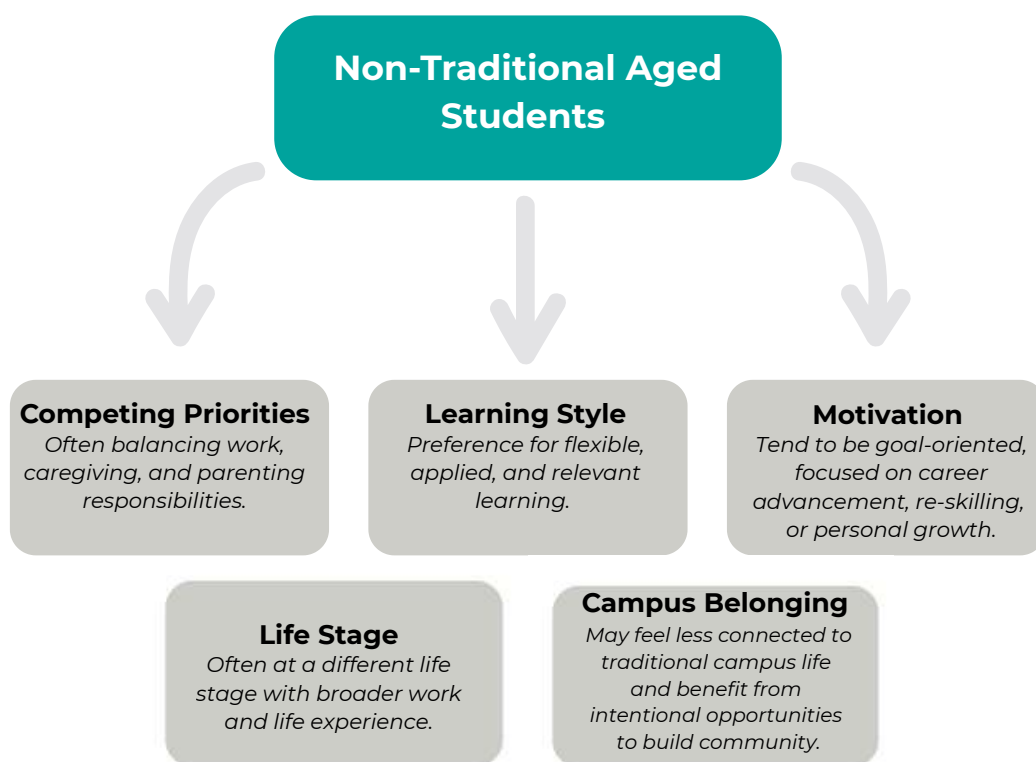
SDSU's Over 60 Program allows California residents aged 60+ to study at a significantly reduced cost, with the admission fee and most Basic Tuition & Fees waived. In Fall 2024, about 60 older adults enrolled with the most popular majors being English Literature, Education, Art & Design, Accounting, Social Work, and European Studies.

Why Does Age-Diversity Matter on Our Campus?

Due to a declining birthrate over the past two decades, higher education systems are bracing for an “enrollment cliff,” with projections indicating that the number of traditional college-aged students may fall by nearly 15 percent in the coming years. This projected decline comes at a time when concerns about the affordability and overall value of post-secondary education are increasing, placing additional pressure on colleges and universities to adapt. The year 2025 is expected to mark an inflection point, with enrollment of traditional-aged students reaching a peak before beginning a steady decline through 2041. In California, the trend is even more pronounced, with the number of high school graduates projected to decrease by approximately 29 percent, a shift that is expected to drive significant declines in college enrollment statewide.

Conversely, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) projects growth among non-traditional aged students. In a 2024 report, NCES estimated an 18 percent increase in learners over age 35 between 2019 and 2030, highlighting the expanding importance of adult and returning students in the higher education landscape.

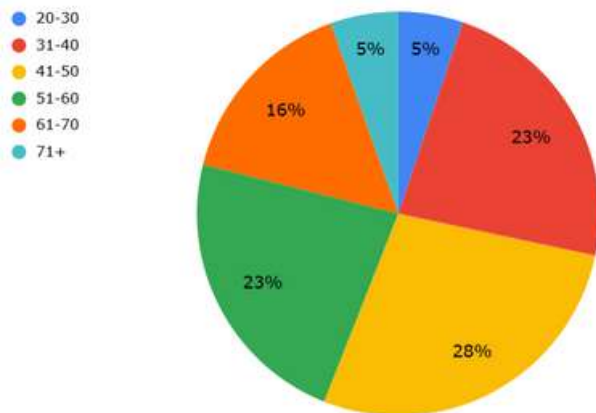
Non-traditional aged students bring different experiences and expectations to the table when it comes to higher education compared with younger students.



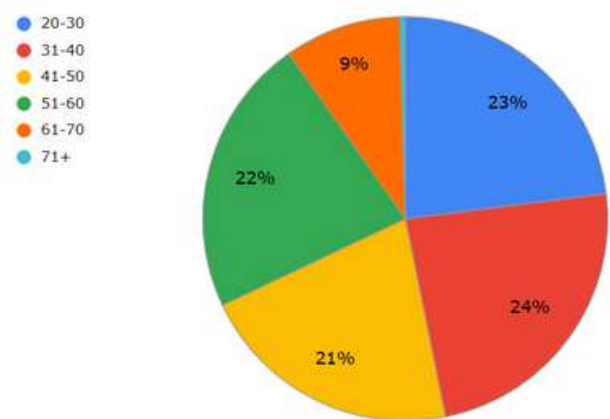
Multigenerational Workforce

At SDSU, age diversity and the principles of an age-friendly university extend well beyond the student population. With people living longer and many older adult workers choosing or needing to stay in the workforce, we are now seeing the largest multigenerational workforce in history. This creates an important opportunity for SDSU to support employees of all ages and strengthen an age-friendly campus culture.

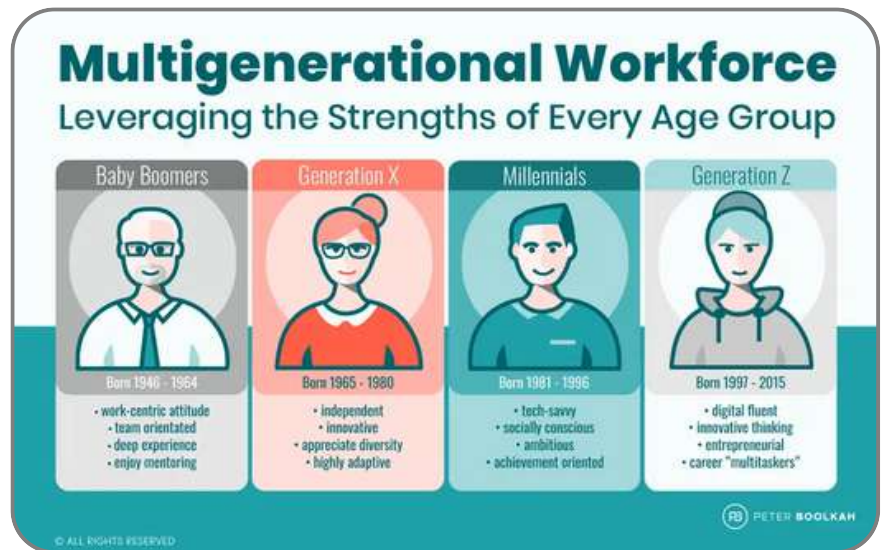
SDSU Faculty by Age: Fall 2024*



SDSU Staff by Age: Fall 2024*



The data on faculty and staff ages at SDSU in Fall 2024 show a multigenerational workforce. Most employees are distributed across ages 31 through 70, with smaller numbers in the 20 to 30 and 71 plus groups. This range highlights the importance of creating an age-friendly campus culture that supports employees at different life stages, strengthens collaboration, and helps the university retain talent across the lifespan.



The "Multigenerational Workforce" infographic above created by Peter Bookah is a helpful way to visualize the unique strengths each age group brings to the workplace. It illustrates how Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z often carry different communication styles, expectations, and motivations. Rather than framing these differences as challenges, the graphic emphasizes how they can complement one another when organizations intentionally support and value employees across ages.

First Annual Age-Friendly University Month








October 2025

Recognizing the importance of an age-friendly university and the role it plays in supporting students, employees, and community members across the lifespan, SDSU took an important next step by hosting its first Age-Friendly University Month this year in October 2025. After four years as part of the AFU Global Network, this inaugural AFU Month was not only celebrate the progress this initiative has had but also raise awareness about what it means to be age-friendly and how this commitment shows up across campus. The month created space to highlight ongoing work, introduce new audiences to the AFU principles, and connect people to the programs and partnerships already in place. This effort was supported by SDSU's Age-Friendly University Steering Committee and Workgroup, whose leadership and collaboration made it possible to bring the month to life and engage the campus community in a deeper understanding of age inclusivity. The following pages highlight the month's events and where the AFU efforts will go next at SDSU.

What We Did at SDSU

October 2025

Age-Friendly University Month

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	
	6	7  AFU Webinar Series 11:00 am - Noon	8	9  Movie Screening: Join or Die Grossmont Healthcare District 5:00-7:30 pm Ageism Awareness Day	10	
	13	14  AFU Webinar Series 11:00 am - Noon	15  Age-Friendly SDSU Webinar Presentation 11 am - Noon	16	17	
	20 Caregiver Resource Fair SDSU Courtyard & Pride Suite 11-1 pm	21  AFU Webinar Series Noon - 1 pm	22	23	24	
	27	28  AFU Webinar Series 10:30-11:30 am	29	30  Intergenerational Coffee Lemon Grove Coffee 10 - 11:00 am		

SAVE THE DATE!

20 Caregiver Resource Fair

October 20, 2025
11:00 am-1:00 pm

SDSU Student Union Courtyard

26 SDSU

For more information, visit care.sdsu.edu or sdsu.afu@sdsc.edu


Age-Friendly University Month Webinar Series


October is Age-Friendly University Month!


San Diego State University is proud to be an Age-Friendly University, joining a global movement that fosters learning, engagement, and connection across all ages. To celebrate, we're hosting a special webinar series every Tuesday in October.


Join us as we showcase the importance of the Age-Friendly University initiative and highlight the innovative work happening on our campus and beyond. Each week will feature a new topic, fresh perspectives, and inspiring conversations about creating a more inclusive, connected future for all.

THE CREATOR LINEUP

SESSION 1
 **Living and Learning Together: Intergenerational Housing Models**
Presented by: Michelle Luster, Director of Aging at SDSU CEAL
Tuesday, October 7, 2025
11:00 am - Noon [REGISTER NOW](#)

SESSION 2
 **Age-Friendly University Takeover: Insights & Brightspots**
Presented by: Josh Wrenhouse, MEd, Director of Strategic Partnerships & Programs at City of Anschutz Multidisciplinary Center on Aging
Tuesday, October 14, 2025
11:00 am - Noon [REGISTER NOW](#)

SESSION 3
 **Making Your Built Environment Age-Friendly**
Presented by: Jill Wrenhouse, MEd, Director of Strategic Partnerships & Programs at City of Anschutz Multidisciplinary Center on Aging
Tuesday, October 21, 2025
12:00 - 1:00 pm [REGISTER NOW](#)

SESSION 4
 **The Road to Age-Friendly Universities: The Challenges & Opportunities of an Aging Course**
Presented by: Elizabeth Russell, PhD, Trent University
Tuesday, October 28, 2025
10:30 - 11:30 am [REGISTER NOW](#)

Dean Bonomi's AFU Month Designation

To strengthen campuswide awareness about the month's activity, the Dean of the College of Health and Human Services, **Dr. Amy Bonomi**, designated October as the first **Age-Friendly University Month**.

This designation helped highlight the value of being an age-friendly institution, encouraged broader participation in AFU-aligned activities, and created an opportunity to share the work taking place across our colleges and programs.

SDSU

College of Health
and Human Services

CHHS Dean Bonomi's Weekly Digest



A few months ago, I started this digest with passages from Wendell Berry and bell hooks. To my surprise, so many of you wrote back to say how meaningful it was to start your day with prose.

Since then, I've heard from several of you who are feeling the weight of our times. And so today, I return to that practice with the words of poet and novelist Rainer Maria Rilke. His reminder that "we must trust what is difficult" echoes what I see in our college community: when times are hard, we lean in and support one another. And we also draw on the quiet strength that solitude can provide. Many of you have shared with me that your best ideas emerge in moments of stillness—on a run, during a walk or in reflection.

Rilke's words also reminded me of something even more essential about our college: like all of nature, we are capable of more than we know. We are resilient, creative and extraordinary.

In this spirit, I want to highlight a profoundly creative initiative in CHHS: the work of **Steve Hornberger**, **Jocelyn Protopappas** and the **Center for Excellence on Aging and Longevity**. Together with the **Division of Research and Innovation** and the **President's Office**, they are advancing healthy aging initiatives in recognition of Age-Friendly University Month. No matter which profession you represent in CHHS, your work touches healthy aging, so I encourage you to [engage with this month's events](#).

As we continue this semester, please know my door is always open. I welcome hearing what's on your mind and how the college can best support you through these times.

Amy
Amy Bonomi, Ph.D., MPH
Dean, College of Health and Human Services

Healthy Aging Coalition Meeting

In mid-October, the Healthy Aging Coalition hosted its first community-based meeting at San Diego State University, in collaboration with the SDSU Division of Research and Innovation. The Healthy Aging Coalition is a national organization dedicated to advancing policy and expanding knowledge that support healthy aging and longevity. Through leadership, advocacy, and cross-sector collaboration, the Coalition unites stakeholders committed to improving outcomes for aging communities.



EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

The Coalition is led by SDSU alumna Vicki Shepard, a nationally recognized advocate whose career has significantly shaped aging policy and practice across government and the private sector. In the photo above, she is joined by Archelle Georgiou, MD, who delivered the keynote address, and SDSU President Adela de la Torre, who opened the event with a warm welcome.

The gathering featured two dynamic panels that showcased SDSU's leadership in aging innovation. A distinguished panel of SDSU deans highlighted university-wide initiatives that strengthen research, education, and community engagement in healthy aging. This was followed by a faculty research panel, where SDSU scholars shared current projects and emerging findings that advance our understanding of aging and improve the wellbeing of older adults.

Weekly Age-Friendly University Takeover Webinars

Living and Learning Together: Intergenerational Housing Models

Tuesday, October 7, 2025

[Click here to view](#)



SDSU

Center for
Excellence
in Aging &
Longevity

Dr. Michelle Matter shares new research exploring how shared living models between older adults and students can foster connection, reduce isolation, and expand affordable housing opportunities. Learn about national models leading innovation in intergenerational housing, what residents value most in shared living communities, key design and program best practices.

This webinar features guest speakers Lindsey Beagley from Mirabella at Arizona State University and Erin Erdahl from The Pillars of Prospect Park in Minneapolis.



MIRABELLA

ASU



**THE PILLARS
OF PROSPECT PARK**

Age-Friendly University Takeover: Insights & Brightspots from MTSU and SDSU

Tuesday, October 14, 2025

[Click here to view!](#)

This webinar features Jocelyn Protopappas and Steve Hornberger from SDSU and Dr. Deborah Lee and Dr. Brandon Grubbs from Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), who are advancing the Age-Friendly University (AFU) movement through innovative programs and partnerships. Together, they are championing inclusive, intergenerational learning environments that celebrate the value of learners at every stage of life.

Panelists discuss how their campuses are expanding opportunities for engagement, reimagining lifelong learning, and cultivating a culture that supports students, faculty, and community members of all ages.



SDSU

Center for Excellence
in Aging & Longevity



**MIDDLE
TENNESSEE**
STATE UNIVERSITY



Multidisciplinary
Center on Aging
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Making Your Built Environment Age-Friendly

Tuesday, October 21, 2025

[Click here to view](#)

Jodi Waterhouse, MHA, Director of Strategic Partnerships & Programs at the CU Anschutz Multidisciplinary Center on Aging, shares insights from a research project examining how the built environment of a university campus influences engagement, accessibility, and belonging across generations.

The discussion highlights how thoughtful design and inclusive spaces can foster connection, movement, and learning environments that welcome all ages.



The Road to Age-Friendly Universities: Challenges & Opportunities of an Intergenerational Psychology of Aging Course

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

[Click here to view!](#)

Dr. Elizabeth Russell from Trent University explores the challenges and opportunities of designing an Intergenerational Psychology of Aging course, highlighting how innovative approaches can foster meaningful intergenerational learning and strengthen the global Age-Friendly University movement.



Age-Friendly SDSU: Celebrating Age Diversity in our Community

Wednesday, October 15 2025

[Click here to view](#)



In a special presentation hosted in collaboration with SDSU's Center for Inclusive Excellence, CEAL's Director Steve Hornberger and Manager of Special Projects Jocelyn Protopappas discussed the impacts of ageism on higher education. They explored its roots, how it appears in campus culture, and the impact of shifting student demographics. They concluded with practical strategies for fostering a more age-inclusive and supportive campus community. This served as the first of an ongoing series to bring light to the importance of age-diversity and the AFU movement at SDSU.

Intergenerational Movie Night

CEAL in collaboration with the SDSU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, hosted an intergenerational movie night with a screening of “Join or Die,” a documentary that highlights the power of civic engagement and community connection. The event brought students, older adults, and community members together to talk about rebuilding social capital and the role of intergenerational relationships in strengthening communities. It was intentionally held on October 9, **Ageism Awareness Day**, to spark deeper reflection on how all generations can work together to create a more connected and inclusive society.



Both of these intergenerational events inspired CEAL and Osher to establish a year-round series of Intergenerational Coffee Meet-ups and movie club, providing consistent opportunities for students and older adults to meet, share experiences, and build meaningful relationships.

Spill the Tea: Intergenerational Coffee

CEAL and Osher collaborated again for an intergenerational coffee designed to foster dialogue between students, community members, and older adults. Over coffee and light refreshments, participants engaged in meaningful conversations about shared interests, hobbies, and life stories. The relaxed environment allowed for natural relationship-building and highlighted the positive energy that emerges when generations come together outside of structured programming.

Caregiver Resource Fair

In mid-October, CEAL collaborated with the SDSU Women's Resource Center to host a Caregiver Resource Fair for students, faculty, and staff who care for others across the lifespan, including older adults and children. The event included campus and community partners, who provided resources, care navigation and support. A highlight of the even was a student caregiver panel. Panelists shared their experiences as parents, sibling caregivers, and caregivers for aging family members, along with suggestions for how the university can better support caregivers.



What's Next?

What a month.

October affirmed the power of collaboration, creativity, and community in advancing the Age-Friendly University mission at SDSU. From campus-wide events to new partnerships and national visibility, this month demonstrated how deeply SDSU is committed to fostering an age-inclusive environment.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the month, we heard from many students, staff, and faculty who were surprised to learn that SDSU has been an Age-Friendly University for more than four years. This highlighted that visibility and awareness remain ongoing opportunities for growth. In conversations with other universities, we learned that these challenges are common across AFU campuses, underscoring the importance of continued outreach and communication.

These discussions also surfaced thoughtful observations about where we can strengthen our age-friendly efforts across SDSU. At the same time, the month brought several meaningful insights. We saw the value of meeting people where they are, offering multiple pathways for engagement, and creating intentional spaces for intergenerational connection. We also learned that sustained momentum depends on clear communication, shared ownership, and ongoing opportunities for students, faculty, older adults, and community partners to participate in meaningful ways.

How can you get involved?

Being an AFU means bringing people from all walks, majors, and disciplines of the University together, as aging and belonging on campus impact EVERYONE. To stay engaged, here are a few ideas:

- Integrate age-friendly principles into courses, programs, and campus initiatives.
- Invite older adults to participate in learning, research, and volunteer opportunities.
- Promote events and resources that foster intergenerational engagement
- Collaborate on aging-related research or grant projects
- Share AFU successes within your networks to broaden awareness and impact
- Join the Age-Friendly University Workgroup & Steering Committee
- Follow CEAL on LinkedIn for ongoing events & volunteer opportunities

Together, we can continue building an SDSU community where people of all ages feel welcomed, valued, and empowered.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SDSU'S AFU MOVEMENT, VISIT [CEAL.SDSU.EDU](https://ceal.sdsu.edu)

A Special Thank You!

This effort was supported by SDSU's **Age-Friendly University Steering Committee and Workgroup**, whose leadership and collaboration made it possible to bring the month to life and engage the campus community in a deeper understanding of age inclusivity.

AFU Steering Committee & Workgroup



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Manager of Special Projects and Age-Friendly University Initiatives
SDSU CEAL



Steve Hornberger
Director
SDSU CEAL



Young-Shin Lee
Associate Professor
School of Nursing



Michelle Matter
Chief Operating Officer
SDSU CEAL



Dina Helbig
Employment Specialist
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Elzbeth Islas
Director
SDSU Women's
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Lee A. Taylor
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Ashley Woo
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