

# Bringing Research to LIFE

## In brief

### Highest Honour

Three Faculty of Medicine professors—Allan Becker, Hani El-Gabalawy, and Leslie Roos—have been elected fellows of the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences (CAHS).

Election to Fellowship in the CAHS is considered one of the highest honours for individuals in the Canadian health sciences community. Fellows are elected by their peers in recognition of outstanding career accomplishments and exceptional leadership, creativity and commitment to advancing academic health sciences.

Becker (pediatrics/immunology) is among Canada's premier academic pediatric allergists. He is widely recognized for pioneering studies in pediatric medicine with a focus in early childhood asthma and allergies. He has made seminal contributions to allergy and asthma research and education, including an influential asthma education program across Canada, and highly cited research into gene-environment interactions.

El-Gabalawy (internal medicine) is an internationally-recognized leader in rheumatoid arthritis research. He has published landmark studies on synovial biology, the pathogenesis of early arthritis, and has recently established a unique First Nations cohort to study gene-environment interactions in the pre-clinical phase of arthritis. His research has been dedicated to understanding the mechanisms involved in initiating and sustaining rheumatoid arthritis and helping patients with this disorder.

Roos (community health sciences) cofounded the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy in the early 1990s and helped develop the Population Health Data Repository. This population-based system allows researchers to examine the social determinants of health and the efficacy of the healthcare system. A revolutionary concept that helped transform research using data routinely collected by multiple ministries, the repository continues to lead to important findings in health policy and prevention.

## Upcoming event

### Café Scientifique

### The New Wonder Vitamin: D

Monday, Oct. 25, 2010, at 7 p.m.

McNally Robinson, Grant Park

1120 Grant Ave.

**FREE ADMISSION  
EVERYONE WELCOME**

For more information:  
<http://www.umanitoba.ca/research/cafescientifique.html>

## Breaking Down Barriers

### Researcher makes it her mission to help communities become more age-friendly



Photo by Katie Chalmers-Brooks

Community health sciences professor Verena Menec, from the Faculty of Medicine, will talk about her quest to help seniors stay healthy into old age at an upcoming public presentation.

BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS

A treacherous sidewalk or a heavy door at the entrance to a public building might be no big deal for young people but they can be major hurdles for older folks.

Everyday obstacles like these can stop Manitoba seniors from getting out, being independent and staying healthy mentally and physically.

But making entire communities more age-friendly is no easy task. The toughest part is getting the rest of the population onboard, says Verena Menec, director of the Centre on Aging and an expert on barriers facing seniors.

"There is a misconception about seniors, that they are a burden on society, that they're going to bankrupt us. That's the biggest challenge that we need to counter," says Menec, who will share her research findings at an upcoming free public presentation on the Fort Garry campus.

"One way to do that is to say, no, seniors are not a burden. They actually contribute by taking care of grandchildren, by volunteering. They contribute financially to organizations. They're not all sick and in need of a lot of healthcare. They are active members of society, so how do we make communities support them and integrate them so they can stay that way?"

As Canada Research Chair in Healthy Aging, Menec has spent the last several years trying to find out what exactly is impeding Manitoba's seniors. It's a pressing issue, given Canada's population of seniors is expected to grow to 19 per cent by 2021.

For her research, Menec goes straight to the source, doing in-depth interviews, surveys and focus groups. Members of her team have hit the pavement in Winnipeg, making note of obstacles they come across in public spaces. Menec has even equipped seniors with pedometers to measure their activity levels or with cameras so they can record barriers in their own backyards.

Participants say they face a lack of affordable housing, poor access to public transportation, and little or no programming for seniors in their neighborhoods. If someone can no longer drive, but lives nowhere near a bus stop or can't get there because of icy pavement or snow drifts, their quality of life—and health—suffers, Menec explains. The little things are important and ultimately affect the bigger picture as the aging population grows; there's no easy fix, she notes.

"There is no simple solution, no one size fits all," Menec says.

She is involved with a provincial government initiative that has her reaching out to 66 Manitoba

communities to help them find ways to be more age-friendly.

"People say, 'This is overwhelming. Where do we start?' And I say start small, do something. Put in a crosswalk. Put in new housing," Menec says. "Communities have done different things. One held an age-friendly awareness day. And some have fixed sidewalks. That's good. It starts to put the spotlight on issues that older adults face."

She is also Manitoba's lead investigator with the groundbreaking Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging, one of the most comprehensive studies on aging ever undertaken. Researchers across the country are gathering information from 50,000 Canadians age 45 and older and will follow up with these individuals over the next couple of decades. They are collecting data about everything from genetics to lifestyle to nutrition and economics, in order to find out why some people stay healthy into old age and others don't. The university's Centre on Aging is one of 10 data collection centres across Canada. There are 3,000 study participants in Winnipeg.

Menec will discuss her healthy aging research Wednesday, Nov. 3, at 7 p.m. at the Robert B. Schultz Lecture Theatre in St. John's College as part of the Bringing Research to Life Speaker Series.

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