



**Interdisciplinary Perspectives
on Women's Wellness**

Conference Program 2026

2900 Menomonee River Pkwy, Milwaukee, WI 53222 Mount Mary University

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The MS in Professional Counseling Program at Mount Mary University is an NBCC - Approved Continuing Education Provider (ACEP), provider number: 4529, and may offer NBCC approved log hours for events that meet NBCC requirements. The ACEP is solely responsible for all aspects of the program. Individuals attending this event who need continuing education credits for disciplines other than counseling will receive a certificate of attendance that can be submitted to their professional licensing board.

Introduction

At Mount Mary University, we are committed to empowering women and advancing equity through education, leadership, and holistic wellness. Rooted in our mission to foster competence, community, compassion, and commitment, this conference brings together practitioners, scholars, and advocates to explore multifaceted approaches to women's health and well-being.

This year's our Interdisciplinary Perspective of Women's Wellness Conference focuses on connections and relationships as foundations of well-being across the female lifespan seeks to bridge disciplines, integrating perspectives from counseling, art therapy, occupational therapy, social work, and dietetics to address the complex realities of women's health. Through expert-led sessions, interactive discussions, and evidence-based strategies, attendees will engage in critical conversations that promote integrative approaches to wellness.

As the conference keynote speaker, Dr. Shilvock-Cinefro will examine the vital role of friendship and human connection in overall well-being, highlighting how meaningful relationships can help address the growing epidemic of loneliness. Additionally, eight different sessions will offer deep explorations into connections and relationships as foundations of well-being, providing attendees with knowledge to enhance professional practice. A panel discussion will further examine women's health & wellness, emphasizing collaborative strategies to improve health outcomes and promote holistic care.

Beyond professional development, this event fosters community-building and advocacy, recognizing that women's wellness is deeply connected to social justice, accessibility, and empowerment. By engaging in interdisciplinary dialogue, we aim to challenge barriers, uplift women's voices, and advance holistic care practices that benefit women and children alike.

We invite you to learn, connect, and collaborate as we work toward a future where women's health is prioritized, understood, and supported across disciplines.

Welcome to a day of insight, innovation, and impact—let's shape the future of women's wellness together!

Welcome

Welcome Letter – Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Women’s Wellness
Mount Mary University | June 19, 2026

Dear Esteemed Colleagues,

On behalf of the School of Graduate Health & Professional Programs at Mount Mary University, we are honored to welcome you to the Second Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Women’s Wellness Summit. We are thrilled you’ve joined us for this free, in-person professional development event designed to foster meaningful dialogue and collaboration across counseling, art therapy, occupational therapy, social work, and dietetics.

This year’s gathering reflects the shared mission and powerful synergy between the Center for Women’s and Children’s Rights and the Center for Women’s Health and Wellness—two of the four Centers of Excellence within the Institute for the Advancement of Women & Children (IAWC), an initiative established under the leadership of our President, Dr. Isabelle Cherney. Together, these centers exemplify IAWC’s commitment to advancing the well-being, rights, and opportunities of women across the lifespan, while fostering innovative research, education, advocacy, and community engagement that elevate and inform our collective work.

Our program opens with a keynote address by Dr. Karen Shilvock-Cinefro, who will explore the profound impact of friendship and human connection on health and well-being. Drawing on clinical experience, research, and personal narratives, she will examine the far-reaching consequences of loneliness on individuals, families, and future generations, while highlighting how meaningful relationships can serve as a powerful antidote to one of today’s most pressing public health challenges.

Following the keynote, participants will engage in two rounds of breakout sessions led by expert practitioners and join a dynamic panel exploring connection and relationships as essential foundations of well-being. We are proud to host 14 distinguished speakers, each bringing unique expertise and valuable perspectives to this important conversation.

Thank you for your presence, your passion, and your commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration. We look forward to learning, connecting, and envisioning new possibilities for advancing women’s wellness together.

Warm regards,

Dr. Cheryl Bailey
Dean of the School of Graduate Health & Professional Programs
Mount Mary University

Conference Timeline

PROGRAM

8:30 – 9 a.m. | Check-in and Light Breakfast

Helpaer Hall, Caroline Hall

9 – 10 a.m. | [Keynote Presentation](#)

Dr. Karen Shilvock-Cinefro (she/her) DSW, LSW, NHA ***You Need a Friend Indeed***

Helpaer Hall, Caroline Hall

10 – 11 a.m. | Session 1

Counseling/ Art therapy

Heather Leigh, DAT, ATR-BC, LCPC. *Tree of Life: Community Building with Older Adults Using Art*
Notre Dame Hall, Room 137

Occupational Therapy

Cindy Steinert, OTD, OTR/L, CLT. *How did you sleep? An OT Approach to Women's Sleep Health and Participation*
Notre Dame Hall, Room 237. OT professionals will receive CEUs approved by WOTA

Social Work

Katherine Drechsler, DSW, LCSW-SA, SSW
Sarah Hessenauer, PhD, LCSW. *Wearing Two Hats: Navigating Dual Roles as Social Workers and Caregivers.* Notre Dame Hall, Room 250

Dietetics

Bethany Waala, RD, CD. *Connecting the Dots: How Eating Disorders Help Modern Adolescents Cope.* Notre Dame Hall, Room 255

12 – 12:45 p.m. | Lunch

Remain in your session room

1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. | [Panel Presentation](#)

Health & Wellness | Helpaer Hall, Caroline Hall

11 a.m. – 12 p.m. | Session 2

Counseling/ Art therapy

Chiến Bình Nhỏ Sơn, M.S. *Are we over-pathologizing transracial/transnational adoptees? The application of decolonial theory in clinical practice.*
Notre Dame Hall, Room 137

Occupational Therapy

Rita Burlingame-Toppen, PP-OTD, OTR/L. *Preventing Leaks: Exercise Modifications for Life Long Pelvic Health*
Gerhardinger Center Room, 211. OT professionals will receive CEUs approved by WOTA

Social Work

Colleen Galambos, PhD, ACSW, LCSW, FGSA, AASWSW.
Women, Anxiety, and Mood Disorders: A Lifespan Perspective.
Notre Dame Hall, Room 250

Dietetics

Kate Peterson, RD. *From 'Just Me' to 'Just Right': Rethinking Solo Eating Together.*
Notre Dame Hall, Room 245

Counseling - Claire Whetter, PhD, LPC, NCC
Occupational Therapy - Megan Bielinski, L.Ac., MSTOM
Social Work - Dr. Robyn Welk-Richards
Dietetics - Virginia Mull, RDN, CD

Keynote Speaker

You Need a Friend Indeed



Dr. Karen Shilvock-Cinefro

Dr. Karen Shilvock-Cinefro, DSW, LSW, NHA, is a social work educator, clinician, researcher, and author whose work explores the vital role of human connection in health and well-being across the lifespan. Drawing on decades of experience in healthcare, aging services, and higher education, she examines how relationships, friendship, belonging, and social support shape individual and community wellness. Her interdisciplinary perspective bridges research and practice, offering valuable insights into the growing challenges of loneliness and social isolation and the importance of fostering meaningful connections that promote resilience, healthy aging, and flourishing throughout life.

Throughout her career, Dr. Shilvock-Cinefro has worked across a broad range of settings, including hospitals, hospices, senior centers, nursing homes, community agencies, private counseling, and higher education. These experiences have informed her understanding of the profound impact that relationships and social environments have on health, coping, and quality of life. By integrating clinical insights with research and education, she encourages professionals to view connection and belonging not only as social needs, but as essential foundations of well-being for individuals, families, and communities.

Credentials and Academic Work

Dr. Shilvock-Cinefro holds degrees in Psychology, Sociology and Gerontology, and Clinical Social Work. As an educator and scholar-practitioner, her academic work integrates perspectives from the behavioral and social sciences to examine aging, quality of life, social connectedness, and well-being. Through teaching, research, writing, and professional presentations, she advances interdisciplinary dialogue on the ways relationships and a sense of belonging influence health outcomes across the lifespan.

Our Speakers

Counseling/Art Therapy

The MS in Professional Counseling Program at Mount Mary University is an NBCC - Approved Continuing Education Provider (ACEP), provider number: 4529, and may offer NBCC approved log hours for events that meet NBCC requirements. The ACEP is solely responsible for all aspects of the program. Individuals attending this event who need continuing education credits for disciplines other than counseling will receive a certificate of attendance that can be submitted to their professional licensing board.

Heather Leigh, DAT, ATR-BC, LCPC is associate professor of Art Therapy, Chair of the Art Therapy Department, and Program Director of Graduate Art Therapy at Mount Mary University. Her areas of expertise include Adlerian theory and art therapy, signature pedagogies for art therapy, art therapy with elders, and community building through art.



Presentation: Tree of Life: Community Building with Older Adults Using Art.

This session highlights an art-based community-building project with older adults in a skilled nursing facility. Using Adlerian principles and the Tree of Life framework, the project fostered connection, belonging, and meaning. The presentation will address challenges such as ageism, loss, loneliness, isolation, and existential concerns, while demonstrating how art therapy and expressive arts interventions can enhance quality of life, strengthen self-esteem, promote social connection, reduce isolation, and support reflection, resilience, and life review.

Chiến Bình **Nhỏ Sơn** holds an M.S. in Professional Counseling with a specialization in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. Her research focuses on critical adoption studies, racial and historical trauma, and disability justice. She has eight years of experience treating OCD and anxiety disorders across outpatient and higher levels of care.

Dr. Carrie L King Ph.D., LPC, NCC



Presentation: Are we over-pathologizing transracial/transnational adoptees?: The application of decolonial theory in clinical practice.

This session examines transracial and transnational adoption through a strengths-based, decolonial lens. Participants will explore the historical roots of adoption practices, the experiences of adoptees—including those who identify as LGBTQ+—and the role of decolonial praxis in counseling. A case study will illustrate how clinicians can challenge deficit-based narratives and reduce the over-pathologizing of adoptees while supporting identity development, resilience, belonging, and well-being.

Our Speakers

Occupational Therapy

Cynthia A. Steinert, OTD, MS, OTR/L, CLT is an Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy at Mount Mary University and a practicing clinician with nearly a decade of experience in acute care and school-based settings. Her background includes behavioral health, critical care, oncology, cardiology, neurological rehabilitation, and lymphedema management. A certified Ballroom Basics for Balance instructor, she focuses on fall prevention. Dr. Steinert's scholarly work centers on the development of leadership in occupational therapy practice and the connection between daily habits, routines, and health outcomes, particularly in women's health.



Presentation: How did you sleep? An OT approach to women's sleep health and participation

This session explores women's sleep health through an occupational therapy lens, examining how hormonal changes, caregiving responsibilities, stress, and life transitions affect sleep across the lifespan. Participants will learn evidence-informed strategies to address sleep dysfunction, support meaningful participation in daily activities, and promote overall health, well-being, and recovery.

Rita Burlingame-Toppen is an assistant professor in the occupational therapy department at Mount Mary University, specializing in adult physical rehabilitation. She is committed to fostering students' clinical excellence through evidence-based, client-centered care, with a focus on integrative health and wellness. She is a certified as a perinatal corrective exercise specialist, yoga and meditation teacher, Pilates instructor, and practitioner of myofascial release. Beyond academia, Rita offers wellness workshops both locally and online.



Presentation: Preventing Leaks: Exercise Modifications for Life Long Pelvic Health

This interactive workshop explores practical movement strategies to prevent and manage pelvic floor dysfunction, a condition affecting many women across the lifespan. Participants will learn evidence-based modifications using yoga, Pilates, functional movement, and strengthening exercises to improve pelvic health, core stability, mobility, and daily function. Accessible adaptations will be provided

Our Speakers

Social Work

Katherine Drechsler, DSW, MSW, LCSW-SA, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Utah and Emeritus Professor at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater. A Licensed Clinical Social Worker with more than 30 years of experience, her work spans child welfare, juvenile justice, school social work, and integrated treatment for individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders



Sarah Hessenauer, PhD, LCSW, MSW is an Assistant Professor of social work and MSW program coordinator at Mount Mary University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She earned her BSW degree in 1990 from the UW-Whitewater, her MSW in 1991 from UW-Milwaukee, and her PhD in 2011 from Loyola University of Chicago. She practiced social work in the fields of substance use disorders, eating disorders, and mental health concerns.



Presentation: Wearing Two Hats: Navigating Dual Roles as Social Workers and Caregivers with Dr. Dreschler and Hessenauer.



Colleen Galambos, PhD, LCSW, Helen Bader Endowed Chair in Applied Gerontology; Interim Head of School and Associate Dean, Helen Bader School of Social Welfare, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

Presentation: Women, Anxiety, and Mood Disorders: A Lifespan Perspective

This session examines anxiety and mood disorders in women through a lifespan perspective. Participants will explore how biological, social, and structural factors—including hormonal transitions, caregiving demands, economic inequality, and gender-based discrimination—contribute to mental health disparities. Strategies for reducing barriers and promoting equitable, women-centered mental healthcare will be discussed.

Our Speakers

Dietetics

Bethany Waala RD, CD has been a dietitian for nearly a decade. Previously, Bethany has worked as the Community Network Dietitian for the Hunger Task Force and as a Director of Dining Services with Chartwells K12 for two Lake Country school districts. Bethany currently works at Rogers Behavioral Health as a clinical float dietitian and has been in this setting for the past 2.5 years. She has a passion for helping those with disordered eating/eating disorders get back to living their values and she recently founded Root to Rise Nutrition Counseling, LLC to do just that in the outpatient setting. In her free time, she enjoys going on walks with her husband and toddler and baking sourdough goodies.



Presentation: Connecting the Dots: How Eating Disorders Help Modern Adolescents Cope

During this presentation, we will briefly define the most common eating disorders, share current eating disorder statistics, and explore developmental stages and social determinants of health specifically for the child/adolescent population. We will then focus on binge eating disorder (BED) in today's youth and take a closer look at diagnostic criteria for BED, medical consequences, and evidence-based intervention and prevention strategies using a weight inclusive and strengths-based approach.

Kate Peterson, RD is a registered dietitian, recipe development expert and regular solo-eater (if you don't count her dog begging for bites). She focuses on a food freedom and all foods fit approach to diet and cooking. She is passionate about sharing ways to eat the foods you love free from the guilt and making cooking simple and fun.



Presentation: From 'Just Me' to 'Just Right': Rethinking Solo Eating Together

We'll explore how to reframe eating alone as an opportunity for nourishment, autonomy, and enjoyment, rather than loneliness. This presentation takes a dive into the latest research on social connection, food behaviors and well-being and blends practical nutrition strategies with behavior and mindset shifts to help individuals build satisfying and low-effort (but highly satisfying!) meals. Attendees will leave with simple, actionable ideas to make solo eating feel intentional, enjoyable and truly "just right."

Our Speakers

Panel Discussion

Women's health and Wellness



Claire Whetter, PhD, LPC, NCC is an assistant professor in the Professional Counseling program at Mount Mary University. She received her PhD in Counselor Education and Supervision from Mount Mary University and is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Wisconsin. She is trained as a mental health counselor and her clinical focus areas include perinatal mental health, mood

disorders, and interpersonal trauma. Her current research focuses on perinatal mental health, life satisfaction, social support, and sense of belonging in higher education settings.



Megan Bielinski, L.Ac., MSTOM first experienced the benefits of acupuncture as a patient seeking relief from severe migraines when Western treatments fell short. Her success led her to pursue a master's degree in Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine at Pacific College of Health Sciences in Chicago. During clinical training at the Chicago Women's Health Center and Wellspring Acupuncture, she

developed a strong commitment to women's health. Since 2015, Megan has practiced at Milwaukee Community Acupuncture, a nonprofit clinic dedicated to accessible care. She is deeply committed to advocacy, serving as past president and leader within the Wisconsin Society of Acupuncturists.



Dr. Robyn Welk-Richards is a Certified Eating Disorder Specialist (CEDS) with more than a decade of experience treating eating disorders and complex mental health concerns. Her work focuses on recovery-oriented, relationship-based psychotherapy for individuals navigating eating disorders, mood and anxiety disorders, low self-esteem, and personality disorders. She is committed to supporting clients in building

authentic, meaningful lives through compassionate and long-term therapeutic care.



Virginia Mull, RDN, CD, is a healthcare nutrition leader with extensive experience in clinical dietetics, foodservice management, and team development across long-term care, rehabilitation, and hospitality settings. With a strong foundation in both nutrition science and business management, she is known for building high-performing teams, improving operational efficiency, and advancing patient-centered care.

Virginia earned her Bachelor of Science in Dietetics from Mount Mary University and an Associate degree in Business Management from Milwaukee Area Technical College. She currently serves as Treasurer for the Wisconsin Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Virginia brings a unique blend of clinical expertise, operational leadership, and passion for improving lives through nutrition.

Q&A

Q: Is the event free to attend?

A: Yes! This is a free in-person professional development conference open to certified, credentialed, and licensed professionals in occupational therapy, counseling, art therapy, dietetics, and social work.

Q: Will lunch be provided?

A: Yes! A complimentary breakfast and lunch are included with event registration. Attendees will remain in their session rooms for lunch.

Q: Is parking available on-site?

A: Yes, free parking is available. We recommend entering from 92nd Street. Please follow the link for the campus map and directions.

<https://mtmary.edu/campuslife/getting-around-campus/campus-map.html>

Q: Who should I contact with special accessibility needs?

A: Please email Dr. Vanessa Varela, assistant professor at varelav@mtmay.edu as early as possible to ensure accommodations can be arranged.

Q: Are CEUs available?

A: Yes! Attendees can earn up to 4.25 continuing education hours at no cost. CEUs are offered for professionals in the fields listed above.

Q: How do I earn CEUs at the event?

A: To be eligible for CEU credits, attendees must:

- Check in upon arrival and sign in at the keynote session and panel discussion
- Attend and complete sign-in sheet at scheduled sessions

- Submit a completed evaluation form at the end of the day

Q: How are CEU hours verified?

A: Each department will review attendance records and evaluation forms to determine the total number of CEU hours earned.

Q: When and how will I receive my certificate?

A: Certificates will be issued and emailed directly by each department after CEU verification is complete. Please allow time for processing.

Q: Will session recordings?

A: No, CEUs require live attendance—recordings do not count toward credit.

Q: Can I attend only part of the conference?

A: Yes, but CEU hours will only reflect the sessions you attended and signed in for.

Program created and designed by Dr. Vanessa Varela, Assistant Professor of Education and Lead of the Center for Women and Children's Rights at the Institute for the Advancement of Women & Children, Mount Mary University.

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