

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Researchers Explore Collaboration on Innovative Skilled Nursing Model

Champaign County, IL - Researchers from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign gathered Thursday to explore a strategic partnership with Advocates for Aging Care (AAC), a local grassroots organization working to bring an innovative skilled nursing facility to Champaign County.

The workshop brought together university faculty, clinicians, and leaders to begin shaping how research, education, and clinical practice could align to strengthen person-directed aging care.

The guest speaker was Susan Ryan, CEO of Maryland-based AgingIN, whose Green House model is a finalist for the project.

Building an Innovative Model for Skilled Nursing Care

The overarching goal is to establish The Cottages as a quality, person-directed skilled nursing setting inspired by the Green House model. Through collaboration with the university, project leaders aim to embed research into practice, pilot new technologies, and create hands-on educational opportunities for students across disciplines.

The long-term vision is for The Cottages to serve as a flagship model for Illinois and the nation - distinguished not only by its design, but by its integration with a leading research university and its strengths in aging research, technology, design, and education.

Turning Shared Interests into Action

The workshop was designed to generate potential models for collaboration based on the mutual needs of university researchers, clinicians, educators, and students, as well as residents, families, caregivers, and staff at The Cottages. Insights gathered during the session will inform the formation of working groups to advance the partnership.

“AAC is pleased to welcome researchers from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign as we identify new ways to advance person-directed skilled nursing care,” said AAC Steering Committee member Lynne Barnes. “This unique Green House model can be strengthened by applying the latest research in aging technology, safety, environmental design, and innovative care practices. By partnering with the university, we aim to create a truly distinctive, high-quality care environment grounded in leading-edge research.”

Broad University Engagement

Interest across campus has been strong.

“The response from faculty and researchers across the university has been tremendous,” said Elizabeth Hsiao-Weckslar of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. “Nearly 100 have already expressed interest in being engaged with The Cottages. They represent a broad spectrum of areas, including The Grainger College of Engineering, the College of Applied Health Sciences, Carle Illinois College of

Medicine, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the School of Social Work, the College of Media, the College of Fine and Applied Arts, the Interdisciplinary Health Sciences Institute, the Beckman Institute, Illinois Extension, and UIC Nursing. We expect a long and fruitful relationship with Advocates for Aging Care, AgingIN, and The Cottages.”

Project leaders hope the Champaign County location will become a destination site for organizations seeking to implement innovative skilled nursing models - recognized not only for its Green House–inspired design, but also for its deep integration with university research, education, and community engagement.

Additional details about construction timelines and future collaborative initiatives will be shared as planning progresses.

Founded more than two years ago, Advocates for Aging Care is a volunteer-led organization dedicated to addressing the shortage of more than 300 skilled nursing beds in Champaign County. The group has engaged nearly 600 community advocates in support of the effort.