



Alzheimer's and Cognition Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**

"Healthy Brain Aging Starts Here"

June 2025

Volume 7, Issue 1



CUACC in Focus: Community, Research, and Education

From community expos to collaborative research events, the past few months have been dynamic at the CU Alzheimer's and Cognition Center (CUACC).

Highlights include attending the Center for African American Health Expo alongside members of our Alzheimer's Community Advisory Council, hosting a genetic-focused webinar with the Alzheimer's Association, and welcoming visitors for a behind-the-scenes laboratory tour. We also shared our work at academic conferences and connected with the community through events like Creative Unwind for Lewy (see page 8).

We're proud to continue building bridges between research and community, and we hope the stories and images in this issue reflect that spirit.

**HEALTHY
BRAIN AGING**
- Starts Here -

In this newsletter you can expect:

Center Updates

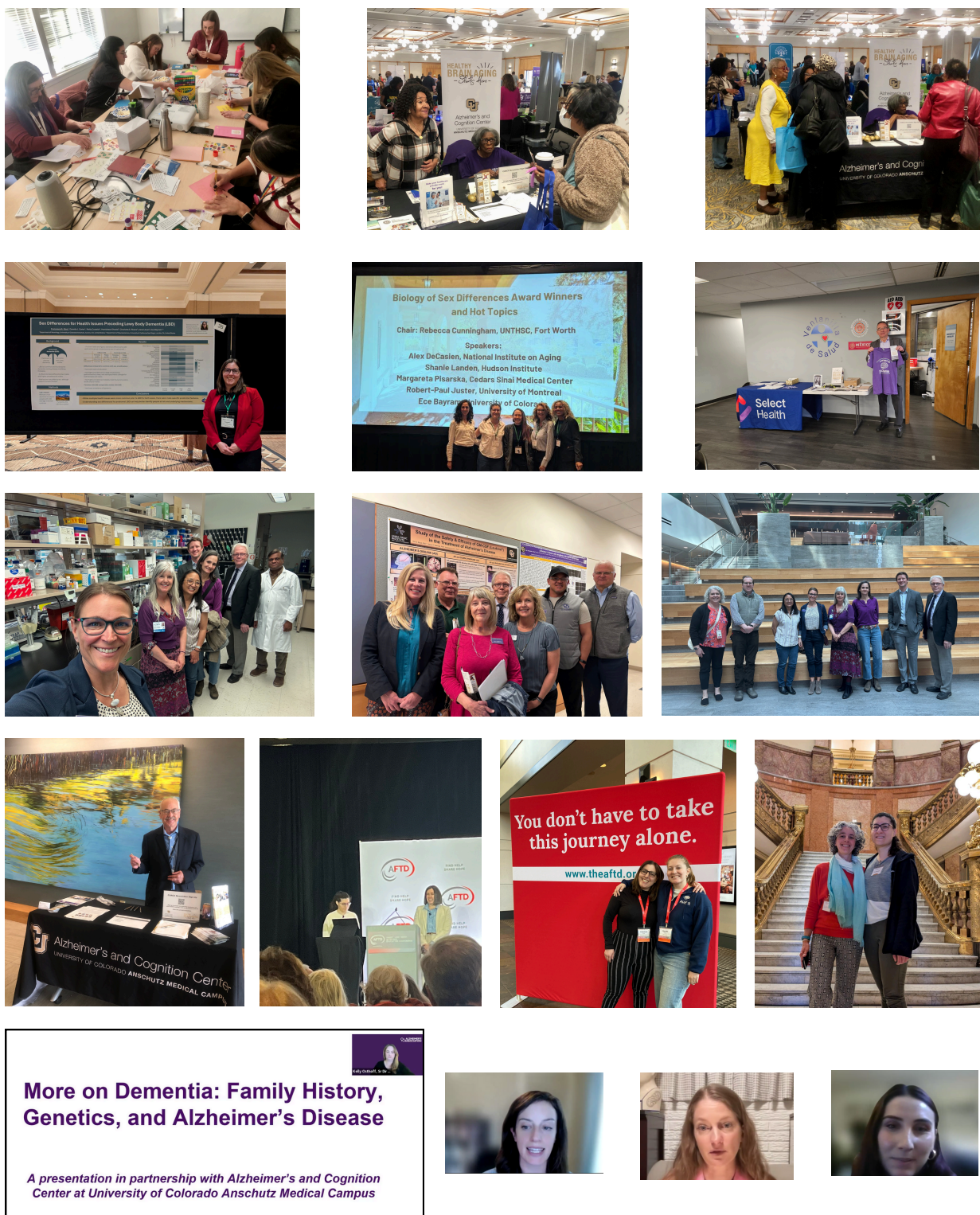
Celebrations!

In Their Own
Words

Faculty
Spotlight

Research
Updates

Upcoming Events



From left to right:

Row 1: Staff craft cards for Lewy Body Dementia Awareness Day; Alzheimer's Community Advisory Council attends the 2025 Center for African American Health Expo.

Row 2: Francesca Dino presents and Ece Bayram is honored at OSSD 2025; Edgar Carreno shares resources at Denver's Mexican Consulate.

Row 3: Alzheimer's Association visitors tour CUACC labs.

Row 4: Richard McClintock joins a Ludeman Center event; ALLFTD team (Samantha Holden, Ece Bayram, Francesca Dino, and Ellie Carter) attends AFTD 2025; Ece Bayram and Isabel Buard present at STEM Poster Day at the Capitol.

Row 5: Emily Forbes, Tara Carlisle, and Marris Lafreniere lead a webinar on genetics and family history with the Alzheimer's Association.

Congratulations!



Samantha Holden, MD, MS, FAAN was recognized with the University of Colorado Health 2024 Clinical Quality & Patient Safety Award. Dr. Holden was acknowledged for our outpatient neurology clinic's improved access time, from nearly an 18-day wait in 2023 to 4 days in 2024.



Tara Carlisle, MD, PhD was recognized for her Distinguished Research Abstract, "*Characteristics of a Wide Catchment Area Anti-Amyloid Program*" at this year's NeuroNEXT, the Network for Excellence in Neuroscience Clinical Trials, 2025 annual meeting.



Lauren McCall, MS was selected for the Class of '25 Institute on Methods and Protocols for Advancement of Clinical Trials in ADRD (IMPACT-AD), a comprehensive training program in clinical trials for Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.



Christopher Filley, MD (Professor Emeritus of Neurology) was recognized by ScholarGPS with the 2024 Highly Ranked Scholar – Lifetime achievement in the specialties of Behavioral Neurology and White Matter.



Ece Bayram, MD, PhD was named The Society for Equity Neuroscience (SEQUINS) 2025 Bright Star Award Lecturer and presented at their Annual Meeting in Charleston, SC. In addition, Dr. Bayram was named a Biology of Sex Differences Hot Topics Award Winner at the 2025 annual conference of the Organization for the Study of Sex Differences (OSSD) held in Albuquerque, NM.



Christina Coughlan, PhD completed the December '24 NIH Entrepreneurship Bootcamp certificate course and was selected for the NIH Blueprint MedTech Pathways pilot program. Dr. Coughlan also was awarded the CU Innovation Spark Award for "*Exosome-associated biomarkers for early and accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer's and other neurologic conditions*".

In Their Own Words

In this newsletter, we are honored to share the second installment in a series of reflections from two individuals living with Alzheimer's disease, as told in their own words.

Living with early-stage Alzheimer's, Part 2 What is it about music? And cats!

Joni Beck Brewer

I live in a slightly different world now. I like to look at the grasshoppers on our morning walk with the dog, I try new things (like how do you take a rock from the ground and make it into an expression of something on my mind?). Then there are things I've always enjoyed, like singing with a choral group, or going to the Animal Shelter and talking to cats. Do these things take on new meaning? And I continue to write, even though I have to look up a lot of the words to remember how to make them.

To understand a little [more about the effects of music](#), I found this, from the Alzheimer Association:

"Music can be powerful. Studies have shown music may reduce agitation and improve behavioral issues that are common in the middle-stages of the disease. Even in the late-stages of Alzheimer's, a person may be able to tap a beat or sing lyrics to a song from childhood."

There's even music therapy, which can have lots of good effects if you like music. If you are more interested in art, there are also benefits to that. Maybe even dancing to the music!

As for the cats (or dogs, I love them too!), when we moved to Colorado a couple of years ago, we moved to a neighborhood near an animal shelter and I decided that would be where I would do my volunteer work. One year later, I got my Alzheimer's diagnosis. I made the decision to let the person who oversees volunteers know about this, even though I was confident in my ability to carry out my tasks at this point (assisting people looking to adopt a cat on Wednesdays, and visiting under-socialized cats on Fridays.) I thought it would be helpful for her to be aware of the situation, and it has all worked out very well.

There's a feeling I get with the cats that is hard to describe. They warm up to me when I approach them quietly and give them time. If I miss a word here or there they don't care.

When they purr it feels so good. Even talking with the staff and the patrons feels good, and if I can't think of a word or two they just help me out and don't think much about it.

There is a lot that you can find online about how pets can be helpful for those of us with Alzheimer's at different stages.

So I go on, living, with my cats and my music and family and friends. I hope others in the early stage find the things that they still love or use this time to consider a new love!



Baylee



Larry & Lester

In Their Own Words

Continued

Yikes, Alzheimer's! Thank Goodness for Support from a Licensed Clinical Social Worker

Joan Hillebrand Alexander

In my last article, I shared my shock and initial non-acceptance of my Alzheimer's diagnosis. After the results of the spinal tap, I could no longer deny my diagnosis! Yes, the cognitive impairment symptoms were there. I could not remember conversations, the day of the week, or even my daily plans. At this early stage, I already lived by my daily "to do" list and calendar reminders.

As I have always been self-sufficient, the reality of my diagnosis hit me hard! How was I going to deal with my inevitable decline? In my [previous article](#), I shared the "[Kubler-Ross Change Curve](#)" Since then, I have moved past the anticipated phases of shock, denial, frustration, and depression! Now, I am certainly into experimentation and am moving forward.

In this article, I will share with you the just-in-time support that helped me move forward! Help came via a referral to a social worker. That was exactly what I needed!

After managing care for my mother who died just short of her 100th birthday, I had a preview of the help I might need. Mom had memory problems and was also a serious fall risk. I arranged for private 24/7 caregivers to watch over mom. As I have no children, I worry about my own inevitable decline! Who will look after me if my husband declines or dies before me?

I was offered support from a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, with the CU Outpatient Psychiatry Clinic. She listened to my many questions while I shared my worries and concerns, such as:

- How can I navigate my own shock of this diagnosis?
- If people know my diagnosis, will they disregard me?
- Who should I reveal my diagnosis to and how should I do that?
- My work provides me with meaning and purpose. I am worried that I may have to give up my work.

- How will this diagnosis and my decline change my relationship with my husband?
- How do I make plans for my future and the care I may need?

One early exercise was a worksheet on which I was to list all that was:

1) Out of My Control

2) Some Control

3) Within My Control

It was encouraging and reassuring to see that my "Within My Control" list was three times longer than each of the other two lists combined. That exercise helped me see a clear way forward, full of worthwhile options and future opportunities. As a result of that exercise, I had a list of things to put in place while I was still very capable.

I learned to set goals and create doable strategies. I started to feel back in control. I had roadmaps to follow.

Our sessions were productive and supportive. She helped me:

- Identify necessary planning
- Address my worries and stress
- Identify strategies for support
- Move forward productively

Initially, we met in person at her office, but as time went on, we switched to online sessions, which eliminated the need to drive and made it easy for my husband to join when helpful.

It has been 1.5 years since that early "Out of My Control, Some Control, Within My Control" exercise, and most of what I listed under "Some Control" and "Within My Control" has now been accomplished! I feel very much in control of my life and my health. I also know what I can do to stay healthy as long as possible (Continued on page 6).

In Their Own Words

Continued

Joan Hillebrand Alexander

Finally, I will share my social worker's powerful suggestion: Create Your Own Mantra. What follows is what I created. I have it posted on my computer screen. I try to live by it each day:

“Trust the Unknown!

See where this road will take me.

It's always been serendipity, and it will be now too!”

CUACC Joins Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program



The CU Alzheimer's and Cognition Center is proud to be a local partner of the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program – an international initiative that helps individuals with non-visible disabilities discreetly signal that they may need extra time, support, or understanding in public spaces. Individuals wearing a green lanyard with sunflower symbols can be easily recognized by trained staff at participating locations, including [Denver International Airport](#). CUACC now has lanyards available to share with participants and community members who may benefit from this inclusive resource. If you are interested in picking one up email cualz@cuanschutz.edu for more information.

[Learn more about the organization](#) and [watch a video about how it works!](#)

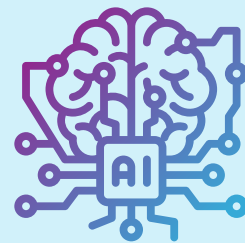
Publication Highlight

Ethics of Digital Phenotyping: Considerations Regarding Alzheimer's Disease, Speech, and Artificial Intelligence



Francesca Dino, BA, is a Research Services Professional. With this paper, she achieved the milestone of a first author paper. It is published in the Journal of Medical Ethics.

“This paper explores the promise of AI-based speech analysis for early Alzheimer's detection, while also addressing significant ethical challenges that arise when used outside clinical oversight. Given that cognitive impairment can compromise decision-making capacity, we need proactive safeguards—both technological and policy-driven—to protect patient autonomy and promote responsible use.”



Christina Coughlan, PhD

Christina Coughlan, PhD, is passionate about “bench to bedside” Alzheimer’s disease research. With a PhD in Neuropharmacology and a master’s in clinical sciences from CU Anschutz, Dr. Coughlan is dedicated to translating laboratory discoveries into tools that can help patients directly.



What inspired you to focus your research on Alzheimer’s disease?

As a Pharmacology student, I was drawn to the brain because it was more difficult to study than other organs. I am also fascinated by the fact that we can give the same information to 100 different people and essentially get 100 nuanced responses. In addition, the brain makes us who we are and when it becomes diseased or damaged, we can lose the essence of the person we once were. Dementias such as Alzheimer’s are devastating diseases that steal the person we once knew. We need better tools to help us study and understand this disease so we can design better therapeutics and monitor responses to the interventions we are currently prescribing.

Your latest work explores tiny particles in the body that might help us understand Alzheimer’s better. How would you explain this research in simple terms?

Right now, Alzheimer’s diagnostic tests involve PET scans and lumbar punctures, which are invasive, expensive, and inconvenient. This means that we are not testing enough people to truly understand the disease. My research focuses on brain-derived exosomes – tiny particles that are secreted into the blood – that act as windows into the brain and its cells. The goal is to develop a blood test that can be done during a routine annual primary care visit, allowing us to monitor brain health over time, just as we measure blood sugar and cholesterol levels. This would allow us to detect Alzheimer’s earlier, study more diverse populations, and set clear diagnostic cutoffs.

You recently received the CU Innovation SPARK Award – congratulations! What does this award allow you to do?

Thank you! I feel very honored to receive this award and a generous donation from an anonymous donor. These monies help us move

this work closer to patients. Currently this blood test works to distinguish people with Alzheimer’s from those with healthy brains or mild cognitive changes. We want to use this test in larger populations of people from different backgrounds and in both sexes so that we can ensure that this test detects even small changes in brain health and responses to therapeutics. This will help us understand the disease process, how current medications work, and provide us with the information to develop new approaches to halt/reverse this disease.

You also completed specialized training programs on research innovation. What did you take away from those experiences?

It was amazing. These programs support the innovative mindset and provide mentorship and guidance for bringing ideas to market. They help scientists bring their discoveries out of the lab and into the hands of doctors and patients, which is ultimately the goal of innovation.

What excites you most about the future of Alzheimer’s research?

I’m excited about giving people answers. Right now, many primary care physicians don’t have accessible and affordable tools to assess brain health over the lifetime of their patients and/or when they have concerns about alterations in their memory. We want to change that. Making minimally invasive tests that are available and affordable to all allows earlier detection of Alzheimer’s, empowering both physicians and patients to take action.

Why is it important for the public to support basic laboratory science research, even if it doesn’t lead to immediate treatment?

Laboratory science was the birthplace of this test. It is where everything starts. We need to ask fundamental questions: Why do these tiny particles (exosomes) exist? Do they spread or rescue us from disease? Do they help cells communicate? Understanding the basics helps us figure out how to intervene. If we had never studied broken arms, we would not understand how to help them heal. Curiosity-driven science needs to stay at the forefront because it is what drives medical breakthroughs.

A Big Year for Lewy Body Dementia Research!

Read an update from Samantha Holden, MD, MS, FAAN:

It has been a big year for Lewy body dementia research, with two clinical trials reporting positive results early this year! The University of Colorado served as a site for both the **SHIMMER trial** and the **RewinD-LB trial** as part of our work through the Lewy Body Dementia Association Research Centers of Excellence network. Both drugs seem to be neuroprotective for people living with Lewy, meaning they help save brain cells and could slow down disease progression, rather than just treating the symptoms of the disease.

The SHIMMER trial showed that a new medication, called zervimesine, was safe and helped slow decline over time in thinking and memory, behavioral symptoms, and motor difficulty in people with Lewy body dementia who received the drug. Zervimesine works by preventing abnormal proteins from binding to and damaging brain cells.

The RewinD-LB trial showed that another drug, neflamapimod, was also safe and helped slow decline in cognition and independence, as well as decreased falls, in people with Lewy body dementia. There were some issues with the RewinD-LB trial results at first, which seem to be related to using old capsules for the study drug that were not releasing at the right levels into the participants' bloodstream. Getting new capsules to participants during the open label extension phase seemed to fix these issues. Neflamapimod works by decreasing inflammation and stress on brain cells, as well as by helping brain cells communicate better with each other.

Plans are underway to continue to Phase 3 studies for both medications, which would be followed by submission for FDA approval if also positive. If successful, these would be the first drugs ever approved specifically for Lewy body dementia.



The University of Colorado is a Lewy Body Dementia Association Research Center of Excellence

Creative Unwind for Lewy: A One-of-a-Kind Community Event

In March, we hosted Creative Unwind for Lewy, a unique event dedicated to Lewy body dementia (LBD).

Attendees participated in workshops led by engaging speakers, including mindfulness trainer Janine Camins, music therapist Anastasia Canfield, improv comedy educator Josh Nicols, and clinical social worker Mary O'Hara. Fun additions included a craft station and a decades-themed photo booth!

"It felt very safe to come with my LBD family member because I knew the community was supportive. Thus, it made it a relaxing event for me, the caregiver. LOVED the coffee and pastries (a nice treat)."

We're so grateful to everyone who attended and contributed to the success of this event!



**View our calendar of
[upcoming events](#)**



Bio-AD Study Update

To our research community:

Due to unforeseen circumstances and recent challenges with funding, we are saddened to announce that we will be ending Bio-AD study visits. Bio-AD began in 2016 and has been a tremendous contribution to the Alzheimer's Disease research field. Results from this study have been published in numerous publications and informed several successful grants. We will continue to analyze and publish results based on the data we have collected thus far, but we unfortunately do not have the resources to continue with new research visits.

We want to thank you all for your support and dedication to the study – we could not have accomplished this work without your help and participation. We will continue to update you on results from the study, and we will notify the community if funding circumstances change in the future.



With gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Brianne Bettcher, the CUACC, and the Bio-AD team

Contact us

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Follow us



Give to Research

If you are interested in donating to the CUACC please contact Marti Laule at 720-202-7845

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Interested in a Research Study?

Contact Neurology Research Partners at 303-724-4644 or fill out a research inquiry form at www.cumemoryresearch.org to learn more about our ongoing research studies!

Thank you for reading!

Alzheimer's Clinical Trial



Do you have mild-to-moderate Alzheimer's disease?

You may be eligible for a clinical trial for an investigational drug for the treatment of mild-to-moderate Alzheimer's disease. Participants will be asked to participate in weekly visits for 24 weeks, as well as screening and follow-up visits.

In order to qualify you must:

- be between 60-85 years old
- meet criteria for mild-to-moderate Alzheimer's disease
- complete PET scans (or optional lumbar punctures) before and after study completion and receive weekly blood draws
- have a study partner willing to give daily injections after training

Check your eligibility
at www.cumemoryresearch.org

Location

After initial screenings at the CU Anschutz campus in Aurora, CO, participants will be able to have weekly home nursing visits. Occasional visits to campus during the study will be required for procedures that cannot be done at home.

Participants will receive:

- study related care and medication at no cost
- stipend to defray some costs of participation

To learn more please call: 303-724-4644

You can also email NeuroResearch@cuanschutz.edu or visit our website at:

www.cumemoryresearch.org

Health insurance is not needed for this study.



Alzheimer's and Cognition Center
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

COMIRB# 19-2727 PI: Huntington Potter, PhD v30May2024

The TRAC-PCA Study

TRIAL READINESS AND ASSESSMENTS
OF CLINICAL AND BIOMARKER
OUTCOMES FOR POSTERIOR CORTICAL
ATROPHY

WHAT TO EXPECT

We are looking for people with a diagnosis of **Posterior Cortical Atrophy syndrome** for a 12-month observational research study. We will be assessing changes in visual processing and perception, as well as activities of daily living, during a 12-month time period.

Open for Recruitment

October 5th 2024

ELIGIBILITY

- Between ages of 45-85
- Have a study partner willing to attend visits
- Able to attend in person visits

JOIN US

PI: Dr. Victoria Pelak, MD

+1(303) 724-4644 📞

NeuroResearch@CUAnschutz.edu ✉️



University of Colorado
Anschutz Medical Campus





Talk with a DOC

The medical landscape of dementia care is rapidly changing. If you are concerned about your brain health or the cognition of a loved one, join us to learn directly from medical experts and leaders in clinical care and research. Topics will include:

- Dementia symptoms and warning signs,
- Working with your doctor for screening and diagnosis,
- Advances in treatments,
- Opportunities to engage in clinical research right here in Colorado.

The event will include a lecture, followed by audience Q&A with the doctors. It is designed to be informative and no individual medical advice will be provided. We encourage participants to work directly with their doctors for medical care.

**Wednesday, June 25, 2025
3:00 - 4:30 pm**

**Sam Gary Branch Library
2961 Roslyn St.
Denver, CO 80238**

**Free, but registration
required. Register by
clicking here or by calling
800.272.3900.**



Alzheimer's and Cognition Center
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS**



Colorado Chapter



Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders:

Research Education & Appreciation Event:

Focus on Posterior Cortical Atrophy

- Webinar: Understating Dementias
- Learn about PCA research findings
- Hear from our team about ongoing studies
- Engage in a discussion about what outcomes matter most to you in clinical trials
- Socialize with fellow attendees over refreshments

Date: June 23rd 2025

Time: Webinar 12-12:45pm or In person Lunch 12-1pm

Program In person or Zoom 1-4pm

Location: Krugman Conference Hall, CU Anschutz Medical Campus

RSVP and Program Details:

<https://neurologyevent.ucdenver.edu/pcasupport/providers>





JOIN US FOR A BRIEF RESEARCH
UPDATE FOLLOWED BY A SHOWING
OF MRS. DOUBTFIRE TO HONOR
ROBIN WILLIAMS



MOVIE MATINEE

HOSTED BY
CU LEWY BODY DEMENTIA
ASSOCIATION RESEARCH
CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

DATE
2:00 PM - 4:30 PM
JULY 11, 2025

LOCATION
ANSCHUTZ HEALTH SCIENCES BUILDING
1890 N REVERE CT, AURORA, CO 80045

MOVIE
MRS. DOUBTFIRE

REGISTER & MORE INFO



POPCORN PROVIDED!

