

COOK COUNTY MWCCS Newsletter



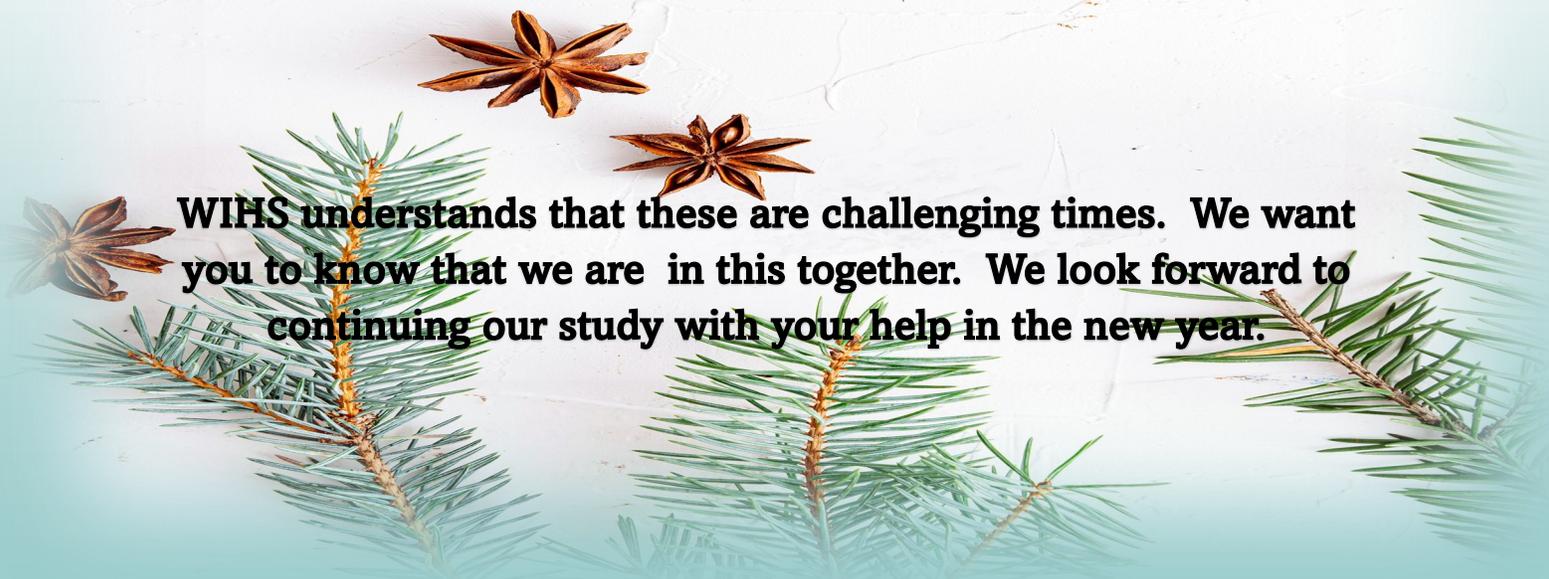
MACS/WIHS COMBINED COHORT

Winter 2025/2026

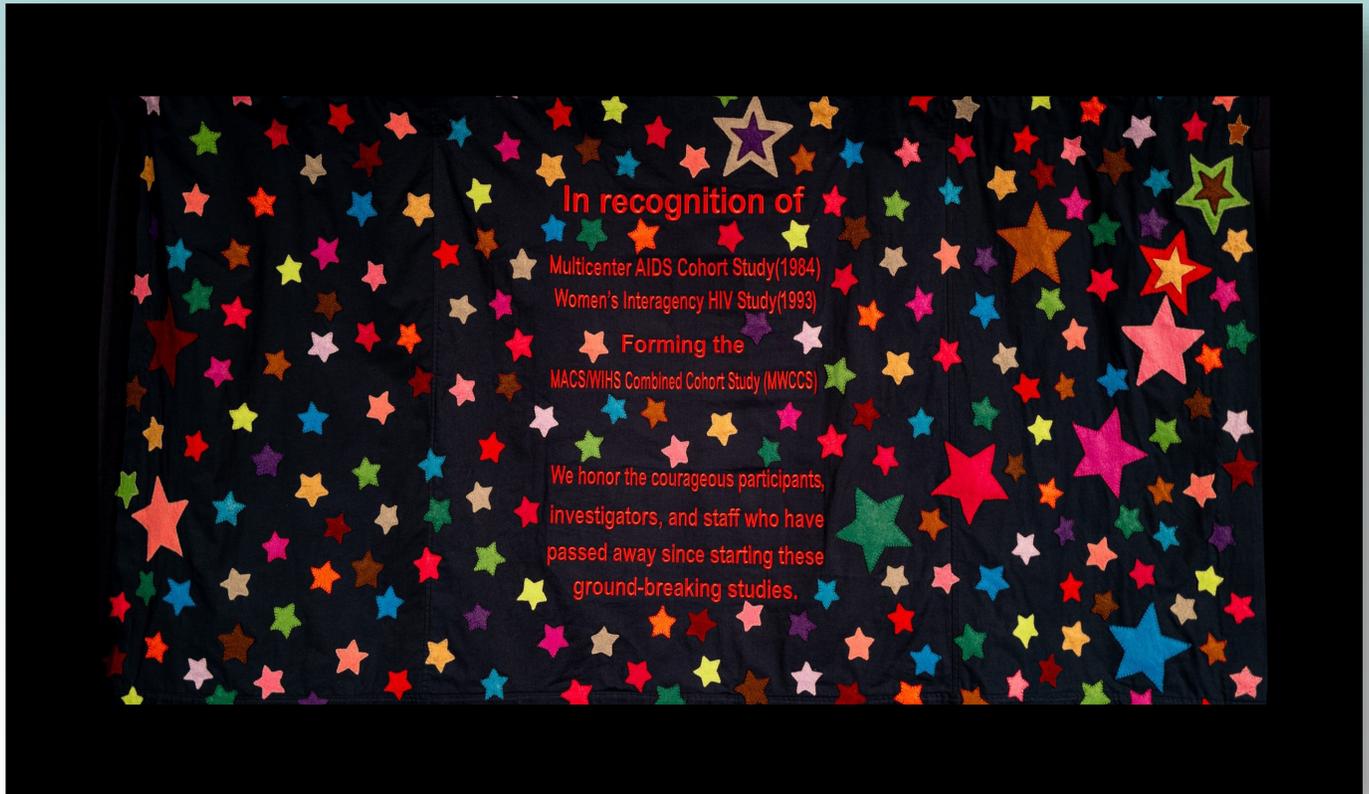
We Are In This Together



WIHS understands that these are challenging times. We want you to know that we are in this together. We look forward to continuing our study with your help in the new year.



MACS/WIHS Anniversary Quilt



The MWCCS (WIHS) held the In Remembrance and Gratitude Luncheon to honor those who have passed on and their dedication to the study. Their participation efforts live on through groundbreaking research.

The luncheon also held a display of the MWCCS Anniversary Quilt panel, specially designed in honor of the courageous participants and staff from the past 40 years.

The MWCCS 2024 Anniversary Quilt panel was designed by Miriam N. Omura - a Birmingham, Alabama textile and mixed media artist - in collaboration with study participants and investigative staff. She recently described her process in creating the quilt.

"The idea of the panel is to represent the participants as stars shining against a dark night sky. The light of stars reaches us long after they have lived their lives, but we still get to enjoy their beauty in the night sky. The light of these participants has a lasting impact on all those involved in MWCCS.

Despite the anonymity of the participants remembered in this panel, they still hold their individuality and their humanity to those who knew them. While we cannot acknowledge people by name, I hope this panel and design is reflective of the group of individuals as a whole. Each core site is represented on the panel by a larger star than those representing the participants. Those stars will appear in that site's approximate geographic location on the panel." —Miriam N. Omura.

Visit the link below to learn more about the memorial panel.
<https://statepi.jhsph.edu/mwccs/memoriam/>

Winter Blues? You Might Be S.A.D.

Do the short days and cloudy skies of winter make you feel out of sorts? Feeling down when it's time to turn back the clocks may have made you SAD. Not just traditional sadness, but something called seasonal affective disorder or SAD. It commonly affects people in the late fall and early winter and goes away during the spring and summer.

In addition to typical depression symptoms, such as having low energy, feeling hopeless or worthless, and feeling sluggish or agitated, SAD sufferers may have specific symptoms. They include:

- Oversleeping (hypersomnia) or difficulty sleeping (insomnia)

- Overeating, particularly with a craving for carbohydrates

- Weight gain

- Social withdrawal (feeling like hibernating)



Another potential complication for SAD sufferers is holiday stress. While many of us look forward to gatherings with family and friends, some feel particularly lonely this time of year. Especially those who are living far from family or those who have lost loved ones around the holidays.

SAD is also more likely to affect women than men and is more common in northern climates, like Chicago, where there are shorter daylight hours in the winter. While the causes of SAD are not fully known, studies suggest that sufferers have lower levels of a brain chemical called serotonin, which regulates mood. Sunlight may help to keep serotonin levels normal.



Winter Blues? You Might Be S.A.D. (cont...)

So, what can those with SAD do during the long winter to feel better?

Light Therapy

Sitting in front of a bright light box (10,000 lux) 30-45 minutes first thing in the morning has shown to help some SAD sufferers. Light therapy lamps are easy to find at your local retailer or online for a minimal cost. However, if buying a therapy lamp is not an option, open the blinds and shades as much as possible on sunnier days.

Talk Therapy

Cognitive behavioral therapy for SAD (CBT-SAD) can help people learn to cope. It typically involves weekly group sessions focusing on replacing negative thoughts about wintertime with more positive ones. If you cannot make therapy sessions, a helpful technique to remember is to reframe your thoughts around winter. Remind yourself that winter is only temporary and warmer weather and longer days will return. Making future plans for the warm weather may encourage positive thoughts during this time as well.

Vitamin D

People with SAD often have a vitamin D deficiency -- the vitamin that your body uses for normal bone development and maintenance -- due to lack of sun exposure. Talking to your health care provider about checking your vitamin D levels may help improve your mood.

Medication

SAD is a form of depression and some SAD patients benefit from a prescription of antidepressants known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs).

And for holiday specific symptoms, try to give yourself some grace. Worried about hosting a big meal? Suggest a potluck instead. Missing loved ones on special days? Group Zoom like it's 2020 again!

If you need more help, talk to your provider about the symptoms listed above or any significant changes in your mood during this season.



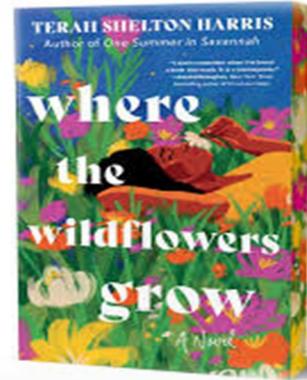
READ/WATCH/LISTEN (Staff Picks)

Wintertime is harsh outdoors but cozy indoors. As always, your WIHS staff is here with recommendations for what to do when the weather outside is frightful.

What to Read (Books/Magazine Articles) Our Pick!

Where the Wildflowers Grow: a novel by Terah Shelton Harris

Leigh, the last member of her family, escapes a deadly prison transport bus crash. Suddenly free, Leigh finds sanctuary on a rural flower farm and solace with the farm's owner. Is redemption on the horizon? Or will her past come back to haunt her?
(available in hardcover/paperback/Kindle/Audible)

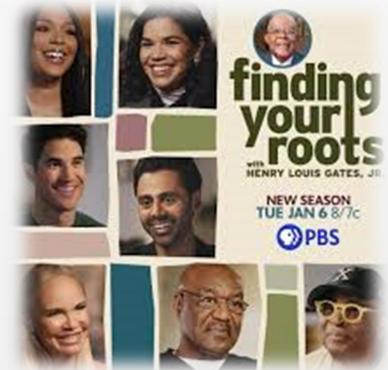


What to Watch (TV/Movies/Online) Our Pick!

Finding Your Roots: with Henry Louis Gates Jr

The intriguing series hosted by Harvard's genial Dr. Gates uses genetic data and historical records to discover the sometimes shocking ancestry of gob-smacked celebrities. Guests this season include Spike Lee, America Ferrea and Lizzo.

(available on multiple platforms including PBS, Prime and Apple TV)



Have a Listen (Music/Podcast) Our Pick!

Cultivating H.E.R. Space: podcast

Cultivating H.E.R. (Healing, Empowerment, Resilience) hosts Dr. Dominique Broussard and motivational speaker Terri Lomax create safe spaces for authentic conversations on their weekly podcast. Get inspired!
(available on iTunes, Spotify)



MWCCS RESOURCES PAGE

Food scarcity has become an unfortunate reality for many individuals and families. Community Food Banks are helping people with meals, groceries and other services during these challenging times. Here are some ways to search for Food Banks in your area:

- The Greater Chicago Food Depository - <https://www.chicagosfoodbank.org/find-food-2/>
- Feeding Illinois - <https://www.feedingillinois.org/food-resources-illinois>
- Feeding America - <https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank>
- A list of Food Pantries in the greater Chicago is available at the WIHS office

Mental Health and Wellness:



pinnacle counseling

THE SAFE ROOM: A PLACE FOR POLITICAL REFUGE

A group for POC and minorities who are seeking support and resources during this current political climate

In this group, you will find:

- Emotional and mental support amongst like-minded peers
- Information on local resources and businesses
- Community and safety in a relaxed, virtual space

Where: Virtual via Zoom
When: Mondays, 6-7 P.M. starting 12/1/2025
Cost: \$20 per session
Facilitator: Bria Jennings;
bria@pinnaclecounselingchicago.com

Register Here!

Websites or contact information listed above have not been endorsed by MWCSS staff.



MWCCS Survey What Do YOU Say?

You have a voice in your MWCCS health study!

Visit 105 ran from October 2024 through September 2025. As part of your Core visits, study staff asked for your feedback. We've compiled your answers to our questions about your study experiences during V105.

We are grateful so many of you said, for the third year in a row, that interacting with staff is your favorite part of your study visit. A majority of participants also said they had no serious complaints about the study.

Here are the questions we asked and your top answers:

*What do you like **best** about your study visit?*

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------|
| Staff | 41.5% |
| Free healthcare | 12.8% |
| Everything | 9.3% |
| Compensation / Informative (tie) | 6.9% |

*What do you like **least** about your study visit?*

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| Nothing | 55.7% |
| Blood work/Needles | 10.4% |
| Length of visit | 9.9% |
| Interview/Questions/Redundancy | 7.1% |

*What could we do to **improve** your study visit?*

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Nothing | 69.1% |
| Split visits with interview on phone | 2.7% |
| Shorter length of visit | 2.3% |
| Compensation/More money | 1.8% |

Visit 106 has begun. We will continue to elicit your feedback going forward. As we compile your answers, know that your voice is shaping your MWCCS study.

