



# WAISMAN CENTER FACT SHEET

## MISSION

The Waisman Center is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge about human development, developmental disabilities, and neurodegenerative diseases throughout the lifespan. The center is one of nine national facilities that includes a Eunice Kennedy Shriver Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center and a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

## OBJECTIVES

- Research in behavioral and biomedical sciences relevant to human development, developmental disabilities, and neuro-degenerative diseases
- Scientific training in fields related to the study of human development, developmental disabilities, and neuro-degenerative diseases
- Clinical training in the delivery of clinical, educational, and support services to people with developmental disabilities
- A broad range of services for people with developmental disabilities and their families
- Outreach, continuing education, and technical assistance programs

## HISTORY

The precursor to the Waisman Center was the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Laboratories at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, which received funding from the Kennedy Foundation in 1961 to support research on mental retardation. In that same year, a presidential panel called for the establishment of broad-based, multi-disciplinary centers to further the understanding, treatment, and prevention of mental retardation and other developmental disabilities. UW-Madison was chosen as one of the early sites because of its outstanding research in the neurosciences and clinical capabilities related to developmental disabilities. The UW-Madison center opened in 1973 in a new building located in the west area of campus. The center's name honors the late Harry A. Waisman, a pediatrician, biochemist, and pioneer in mental retardation research. He was a driving force in the enactment of legislation mandating testing of all newborns for the metabolic condition phenylketonuria (PKU), which results in mental retardation if undetected and untreated.

## THE FACILITY

The Waisman Center is a 251,773 square-foot complex, encompassing an eight-story tower, a one-story annex, and a six-story addition completed in 2001. Housed in this complex are 60 laboratories for biomedical and behavioral research, a brain imaging center, a clinical bio-manufacturing facility, 10 specialty clinics for people with developmental disabilities and their families, numerous early intervention and outreach programs, and a model pre-school with a developmentally diverse enrollment.

## SELECTED ACTIVITIES

- Basic research on how the nervous system develops
- Research on brain-behavior relationships through neuroimaging
- Research on the genetic basis of inherited disease
- Research on the development of speech, language, and communication processes
- Research on the development of sensory and perceptual processes in children
- Research on family and social processes in families with a child with a developmental disability
- Development of new technologies in gene therapy and stem cell therapy
- Basic biological research on stem cells
- The production of phase I pharmaceuticals for use in human clinical trials
- Specialized clinical services for people with developmental disabilities
- Early intervention and educational programs for children birth to age six
- Maintenance of the Family Village, an Internet resource for families of children with developmental disabilities

## SCOPE

- Fifty-five faculty representing 25 academic departments of the University of Wisconsin-Madison and 300 staff work at the Waisman Center.
- Scientists at the Waisman Center publish more than 250 scientific papers and books a year.
- Waisman Center clinics and support programs serve more than 2,500 people a year from throughout the world.
- More than 250 graduate and post-graduate students receive training at the Waisman Center each year.

## DIRECTOR

Marsha Mailick Seltzer, PhD, Vaughan Bascom Professor, School of Social Work, Department of Pediatrics, was appointed director of the Waisman Center in September 2002. She received her BA in psychology and sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her PhD in social welfare from Brandeis University. She spent 10 years on the faculty of Boston University before coming to the Waisman Center in 1988. An international authority on families of people with developmental disabilities, Seltzer's research focuses on life course impacts of disability on the well-being of parents and siblings of individuals with disabilities, including autism, Down syndrome, and schizophrenia. She has authored more than 130 scientific papers and has received many honors and awards, including the 2001 Distinguished Research Award of The Arc and the 2000 Research Award of the Down Syndrome Congress. Currently she is chair of the Developmental Disabilities Research Centers Association.

## FUNDING

Funding originates from federal, state, and private sources. Federal sources include the National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, National Science Foundation, Department of Education, and the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. Other funding sources include the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Dane County Department of Human Services, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis Association, FRAXA Research Foundation, Michael J. Fox Foundation, National Down Syndrome Society, and the Myelin Project.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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