



American Heart Association  
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Office of Health



**JOURNEYS IN FILM**  
educating for global understanding



*Health*  
**HELP  
WANTED**

## **WEST VIRGINIA**

ADDRESSING HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE,  
DIABETES AND OBESITY

### **DISCUSSION GUIDE**

In West Virginia, diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and other heart attack and stroke risk factors are common. Combined with a shortfall of health care professionals, these conditions have led to a health crisis for residents, including shorter life expectancy and a higher incidence of mental health emergencies. The American Heart Association and its partners are working to expand health care access through team-based care while exploring new care delivery models. Community health care advocates, community gardens and nutrition classes help empower residents to take charge of their well-being.





## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the intersection of healthy food access, nutrition education and food security impact well-being in West Virginia's diverse communities? What educational strategies could best promote healthy eating habits across different age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds?
2. What approaches can health care professionals and community leaders take to emphasize the importance of preventive care in West Virginia? How can advocates improve residents' understanding of diabetes, blood pressure management, stroke symptoms and the role of obesity in overall health?
3. How do cultural factors and food traditions in West Virginia affect health outcomes? What strategies can address food-related stigmas and promote healthier eating habits while respecting local culture?
4. What role can community health workers and support groups play in improving health outcomes in West Virginia? How can policy or other initiatives, such as community gardens, support community-based health initiatives?
5. How can advocates empower West Virginia residents to take control of their health through lifestyle education? What motivational techniques and support systems could encourage regular medication adherence, attendance at checkups and adoption of healthy cooking practices?



## RESOURCES

- American Heart Association rural health portal: <https://www.heart.org/en/about-us/rural-health>
- Rural Health Information Hub: <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/west-virginia>
- Article explaining the difficulty accessing healthy food in rural West Virginia: <https://mountainstatespotlight.org/2023/01/26/wv-healthy-food-access-hunger/>
- West Virginia Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: <https://www.eatrightwv.org/public.php>
- West Virginia University Extension Service: <https://extension.wvu.edu/food-health/nutrition>
- Celebrating Healthy West Virginia: <https://celebratinghealthywv.com/>
- West Virginia Women Work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIAH9mTRtb0&t=2s>

- Life's Essential 8, the AHA's checklist for lifelong good health: <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-lifestyle/lifes-essential-8>
- Empowered to Serve Health Lessons and Toolkits that include 19 science-based toolkits covering topics such as lifesaving skills, advocacy, healthy living, risk factor management and substance abuse: <https://www.empoweredtoserve.org/en/community-resources/health-lessons>



## POTENTIAL PARTNERS

- Representatives from Williamson Health & Wellness Center to share the success and impact of their center's health care model
- Representatives from farmers' markets such as <https://farmfreshwv.com/wv-markets/williamson-farmers-market/> to explain how to use public assistance to buy fresh produce
- Representatives from the West Virginia University Extension Service to share details of the service's health-focused programming



## ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Invite local cooking experts to share easy recipe upgrades that improve healthfulness, especially for cultural foods.
- Invite a fitness expert to lead exercises that can be done without equipment. Include chair exercises for people with physical limitations. Consider creating a guide that can be distributed to rural residents.
- Distribute and review information about West Virginia hiking and nature areas.
- Demonstrate how to properly measure blood pressure: <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/understanding-blood-pressure-readings/monitoring-your-blood-pressure-at-home>