



IMPACT 2026

Through Extension programs across the nation, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Educators provide a multitude of Educational opportunities to meet the needs of diverse audiences.

Community Health and Wellness

Overview and Program Reach

The collective efforts across the Community Health and Wellness program area demonstrate a massive, multi-state impact. Cumulatively, these programs were offered 26,242 times across 563 lesson series. By leveraging a strong network of 1,206 community partners, these initiatives successfully engaged 310,591 in-person participants and an astounding 1,282,932 virtual participants. While the list of impactful programs is extensive, the following focuses on substantial state-specific outreach efforts.

State-Specific Highlights

- **Arkansas:** The *Immunity in AR Community* program reached 123 individuals directly, with 143,000 engaged virtually. This health and prevention initiative addressed rural vaccine hesitancy and access gaps, resulting in improved public confidence and a strong intent among participants to discuss vaccinations with their medical providers.
- **Iowa:** The *Mental Health First Aid* program trained 982 individuals face-to-face, with 514,370 participating virtually. This initiative significantly strengthened community mental health networks, with 98.2% of participants reporting increased confidence and readiness to have supportive conversations with individuals facing mental health or substance use challenges.
- **Oklahoma:** The *Stay Strong, Stay Healthy* program reached 2,646 older adults, with 17,829 engaged virtually. This senior wellness initiative focused on fall prevention, yielding measured improvements in participants' leg strength, endurance, and lower body flexibility to support long-term physical independence.
- **Texas:** The *Promoting Early Education Quality* program supported the child care workforce by reaching 90,714 early childhood educators. This youth

wellness initiative facilitated the completion of over 404,000 online courses, enabling educators to meet state-mandated requirements and implement healthy best practices in early childhood settings.

- **Wisconsin:** The *Covering Wisconsin* program reached 24,156 individuals in-person, with an additional 553,424 engaged virtually. This health literacy initiative provided critical, impartial education and enrollment assistance, empowering residents to successfully navigate complex health insurance applications and access essential care.

"I was rear-ended at 50 MPH. My son was in the back seat and he wasn't injured. You are the reason he was in that seat. I'll never be able to repay you for that."



-Iowa's Mental Health First Aid program

Participant Outcomes and Areas of Impact

Extension programs addressed critical localized needs across seven core subthemes: Community Empowerment, Health Literacy, Health and Prevention, Mental Health, Physical Activity, Senior Wellness, and Youth Wellness.

The most expansive of these areas yielded profound collective outcomes. The points below discuss cumulative efforts under the major subthemes reported by national NEAFCS peers.

- **Lifespan Wellness (141,833 in-person; 19,321 virtual):** Extension engaged older adults in fall prevention and cognitive health (21,366 participants), while investing heavily in early youth intervention through developmental screenings and passenger safety education (120,467 participants).

“Before this class I felt hopeless, like I did not have anything to look forward to in my life. This class has made me excited and hopeful again, like I have something to live for.”

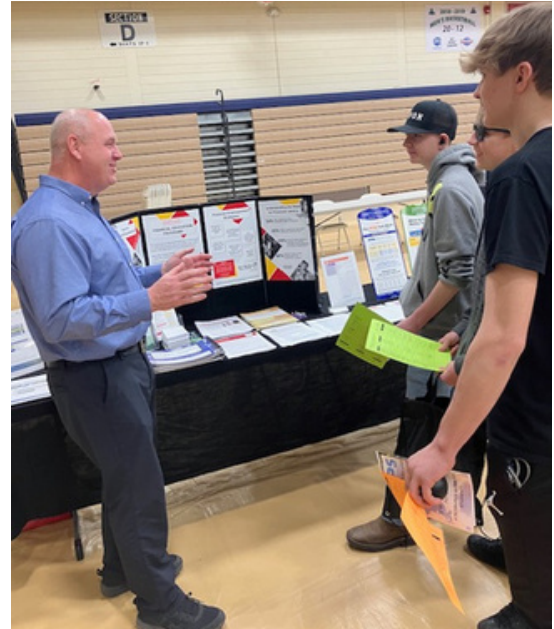
- **Physical Activity (89,194 in-person; 40,994 virtual):** Movement-based programs effectively combated sedentary lifestyles. Participants consistently reported improved cardiovascular fitness, mobility, better sleep, and reduced chronic pain.
- **Mental Health (40,452 in-person; 515,096 virtual):** Combating rising community stress and suicide rates, skill-building programs like Mental Health First Aid and QPR equipped individuals to confidently intervene and support those in crisis.
- **Prevention and Health (14,127 in-person; 154,005 virtual):** Nutrition and chronic disease interventions resulted in highly tangible improvements—such as over 1,000 pounds lost in Colorado—and robust environmental enhancements in local food pantries.

“It’s wonderful to have been given tools, knowledge, and resources to manage chronic illness instead of feeling stuck in cycles of defeat.”



Community Collaboration and Future Direction

The Community Health and Wellness programs have played a vital role in educating and empowering individuals to lead healthier lives. By reaching 310,591 participants in person and 1,282,932 virtually, these programs have demonstrated their value in improving public health. Continued investment in community health education, strengthening partnerships, and integrating virtual resources will keep these initiatives central to public well-being.



Maryland’s Smart Choice, Smart Use

This report was written by Dr. Dhruti Patel, NEAFCS Vice President for Public Affairs and compiled by Dylan Gentry (University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension). For more information, please email dhrutip@umd.edu.

This document was generated with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology. The authors of this report have thoroughly reviewed the AI generated information to ensure the highest level of accuracy, bias, and ethical standards.

Raising kids, Eating right, Spending smart



National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (NEAFCS) provides professional development for Extension professionals who improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities and provide education in the areas of: Childhood Obesity Prevention; Community Health and Wellness; Diabetes Prevention and Management; Financial Management; Food and Nutrition; Food Safety; Healthy Homes and the Environment; Improving Children’s Lives; and Protecting our Resources – Family Life.