

Center for Healthy-Aging Initiatives *in Appalachia*

The Marshall University Center for Healthy-Aging Initiatives in Appalachia strives to improve the health, wellness, and quality of life of the senior citizens of Central Appalachia, especially those in rural and/or low-resource communities.

In 2022, the Marshall University Center for Healthy-Aging Initiatives in Appalachia (CHAIA) was established with institutional support to address the complex needs of seniors in Central Appalachia.

In 2021, West Virginia was the third oldest state in the nation, with 20.7 percent of its population aged 65 years or older. The prevalence of chronic diseases and health risks is much greater among the elderly in Central Appalachia, compared to the U.S., and these health risks affect the length as well as the quality of life. Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), such as poverty and geographic isolation, serve to exacerbate the negative effects of chronic disease conditions in the elderly, including dementias. Central Appalachia leads the nation in death by preventable diseases that plague the elderly, for example, heart disease, coronary artery disease, obesity, and diabetes.

Marshall University has the resources and commitment to working across disciplines and working with community partners to address the pressing needs of seniors in West Virginia and Central Appalachia. The Center for Healthy-Aging Initiatives in Appalachia is comprised of an interdisciplinary team of faculty members, who bring a wide array of expertise and skills to this work from the School of Medicine, School of Pharmacy, College of Health Professions, College of Liberal Arts, Lewis College of Business, College of Education and Professional Development, and College of Arts and Media. The Center is a catalyst for change for seniors in Appalachia and promotes a holistic approach to quality of life.

Marshall University faculty and staff are committed to optimizing the health and well-being of older residents of Central Appalachia. The Center will work to develop and validate culturally and resource-sensitive models of risk reduction and intervention that reduce the barriers to healthy aging created by SDOH. The Center will accomplish this through 1) interdisciplinary, collaborative research on healthy aging in rural and/or low-resource environments,



2) creating a culturally responsive workforce trained in integrative, holistic, collaborative models of care, and 3) active advocacy and community engagement that bring university resources to seniors and their families. Each of these areas of strategic importance will provide faculty with differing expertise to collaborate in a holistic manner to promote healthy aging and wellness.

Goals:

1. Foster interdisciplinary/interprofessional research regarding barriers to healthy aging.
2. Prepare the future workforce to work with older adults by providing multi-disciplinary graduate certificate and/or degree programs.
3. Provide interdisciplinary patient care and clinical outreach in Appalachian communities through partnerships with local health care providers.
4. Advocacy for the health and wellness of older adults, particularly those in rural and/or low-resource communities.
5. Foster collaboration and engagement with community organizations to work on behalf of older adults.