

Innovative approaches to mental well-being

The need to care for our mental well-being is more evident than ever, post-pandemic. More than half of Americans report COVID-19 has negatively impacted their mental health. Extension networks across the country are working to tackle this crisis, often employing new and innovative programming.

Here are a few examples of that work:

- In **Michigan**, the Mental Health First Aid program trains both youth and adults, through a five-step action plan, to support people who may be undergoing a mental health crisis and connect them to vital resources. The team expanded to its largest group ever and trained more than 500 people in 2023. Another program in the state leverages natural resources to foster healthy habits and reduce stress. Nearly 500 people have participated in public forest-therapy walks (“forest bathing”) at an outdoor Michigan State University property in suburban metro Detroit since the program began. *Michigan State University Extension; Smith-Lever* (See [full statement on MHFA](#) and [full statement on forest bathing](#)).
- Extension in **Montana** offers training to help people in crisis. In addition to Mental Health First Aid, Extension employs QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Gatekeeper Training, an evidence-based suicide prevention program. More than 100 people were trained on QPR in 2023; nearly 950 have gone through the Mental Health First Aid program since 2017. *Montana State University Extension; Smith-Lever* (See [full statement](#)).
- **Nevada’s** Healthy Living Sustainable Recovery Program teaches nutrition and physical activity at the intersection of mental health in women and girls at risk for substance use. The program also trains dietitians, clinical professionals and related providers to enhance capacity. Surveys show participants’ attitudes became more realistic about body image and self-perception. *University of Nevada Cooperative Extension; Other USDA capacity-Extension, County Funding* (See [full statement](#)).

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