



The
John A. Hartford
Foundation

Aging in America: Survive or Thrive



Discussion Guide for Professionals in Aging

Aging in America: Survive or Thrive is a documentary narrated by Martin Sheen that celebrates advances in longevity while addressing challenges related to aging, including gaps in public policy.

The 56-minute film, available on PBS and other platforms, features personal stories of older adults and family caregivers, along with insights from experts in health care, aging and policymaking. It helps viewers understand the multifaceted experience of aging in America and the collective efforts needed to ensure that older adults not only survive but thrive in their later years.

Learn more about the film at AgingInAmericaSurviveOrThrive.com.

This discussion guide can help professionals in the aging sector reflect on the film's insights and continue the conversation about solutions to the challenges faced by older adults and caregivers, as well as the implications for policy, health care and equity.

1. Initial Reflections: Take a moment to reflect on the film.

- What was your initial reaction?
- Did a particular story or concept stand out?
- Were you familiar with Dr. Robert Butler and his work? If not, what did you learn from the film about his impact on the field of aging?

2. Connection to Your Work: People in America are living longer than ever, with the average person now living to 77 years old.

- In what ways will the growing population of older adults affect your work?
- What about America's approach to aging most needs to change to accommodate these leaps in longevity?

- 3. Attitudes Toward Aging:** Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) toward others or oneself based on age.
- How have societal views on aging evolved over the years?
 - How have your own personal views on aging evolved over the years?
 - What connections do you see between ageism and the systemic issues older adults face today?
- 4. The Health Care and Long-Term Care Landscape:** America's health care system was designed to treat the acute medical needs of younger people, rather than the complex, chronic needs of many older adults. The nation's long-term care system of nursing homes and home- and community-based services is highly variable in affordability, accessibility and quality.
- How have health care and long-term care for older adults evolved over the course of your career?
 - What changes are most needed to resolve the health, health care and long-term care issues featured in the film?
 - In the film, several experts suggest, "We are spending money in the wrong places." Where do you see a shift in resources being beneficial?
- 5. Access and Equity:** From neighborhoods in Manhattan to rural Wyoming, where people live and the financial resources available to them have profound impacts on how they age.
- What barriers, both systemic and societal, prevent older adults from accessing the care and support they need?
 - How can America's health care and social safety net systems better serve the diverse needs of an aging population?
- 6. Public Policies and Programs:** The film highlights Alzheimer's disease research funded through the National Institute on Aging, Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE) financed by Medicare and Medicaid, and congregate meal programs supported by the Older Americans Act.
- Are these programs adequate to meet the needs of an aging population?
 - How could they be strengthened?
 - What are other public policies and programs at the federal, state and local levels that should be developed or strengthened to support older adults and family caregivers?
- 7. Opportunities for Action:** Despite challenges, longer life expectancy offers older people new opportunities for reimagining later years of life.
- What about the film gave you the most hope for the future?
 - What signs do you see in your own organization that further progress is being made to support a positive aging experience for everyone? What can you do to support or strengthen that progress?
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Resources

Longevity and the Future of Aging:

- [Milken Institute Health: Future of Aging](#)
- [The John A. Hartford Foundation \(JAHF\): Meeting the Growing Demand for Age-Friendly Care: Health Care at the Crossroads](#)
- [National Academy for State Health Policy: An Aging America: Priorities and Policy Innovations](#)
- [Stanford Center on Longevity: The New Map of Life](#)

Ageism:

- [American Society on Aging: Ageism Fact Sheet](#)
- [Gerontological Society of America: Ageism First Aid](#)

Age-Friendly Care:

- [JAHF: About Age-Friendly Care](#)
- [Institute for Healthcare Improvement \(IHI\): My Health Checklist](#)
- [IHI: Age-Friendly Health Systems Movement](#)

Other Initiatives and Programs Relevant to the Film's Topics:

- [Administration for Community Living: Eldercare Locator](#)
- [National PACE Association: Locate a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly](#)
- [Family Caregiver Alliance: Best Programs for Caregiving: Dementia Care Programs](#)
- [AARP: Caregiving Resources](#)
- [Center for Medicare Advocacy: Discover CMA's Impact](#)
- [Justice in Aging: Fighting Senior Poverty Through the Law](#)
- [Medicare Rights Center: Getting Medicare Right](#)
- [Moving Forward Nursing Home Quality Coalition: Join a Conversation](#)
- [Age-Friendly Public Health Systems](#)

The John A. Hartford Foundation, a national philanthropy dedicated to improving the care of older adults, is proud to support *Aging in America: Survive or Thrive*. Learn more at JohnAHartford.org.