



The
John A. Hartford
Foundation

Aging in America: Survive or Thrive

Discussion Guide

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 viewers reflect on their own aging journey by thinking about the stories and themes presented in the film.

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

- What is your initial reaction?
- Did a particular story or concept stand out?
- What is something new or surprising you learned?

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

- What is most important to you as you age?
- What do you look forward to later in life?
- Is there something you worry about not being able to do as you age?



- 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.
- What commercials, films, TV shows, books or other forms of media have you seen recently that portray aging in either a positive or negative light?
 - How would you describe people's attitudes toward older adults in America today? Is that changing?
 - How has your own view of growing older changed over time?
- 4. The Health 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.
- In what ways does the health care system in America meet—or not meet—your health care needs?
 - What would make you feel more in control of your health care?
 - The film highlights an age-friendly emergency room. Have you seen any innovations to better serve older adults?
- 5. Economic Security:** More than 17 million people 65 or older in the United States are economically insecure, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Do you have concerns about your finances as you age?
 - Are there steps you can take now to increase your financial stability?
 - Do you think America's financial safety net is adequate or does it need to be strengthened?
- 6. Caregiving:** Family caregivers provide vital support to older adults, but they also need support to thrive.
- Have you been or are you currently a family caregiver, someone who provides unpaid care and support to a family member or friend who needs help with daily tasks due to illness, disability or aging? If so, how has that affected your life?
 - Who do you see as your family caregiver, now or in the future? Have you spoken with them about this role?
- 7. Long-Term Care:** Long-term services and support help us safely maintain our quality of life when we need assistance with daily activities and functioning.
- What kind of help do you envision needing as you age?
 - If you cannot live independently now or in the future, what kind of care and living arrangement would you prefer?
 - Do you have a plan for your long-term care needs? What would help you feel that you are prepared if you need long-term care?

- 8. Public Policies and Programs:** The film highlights Alzheimer’s disease research funding 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.
- Do you think most people are familiar with these policies and programs? If not, why?
 - What are other public policies and programs at the federal, state and local levels that you would want to see developed or strengthened to support older adults and family caregivers?
- 9. Aging on Your Own Terms:** Despite challenges, longer life expectancy offers older people new opportunities for reimagining later life.
- What matters most to you as you age?
 - How can you bring more joy, purpose and vitality to your daily life?
 - Have you or someone you know found purpose later in life? What does that look like?
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Resources

- [The John A. Hartford Foundation: About Age-Friendly Care](#)
- [Institute for Healthcare Improvement: My Health Checklist](#)
- [Patient Priorities Care: My Health Priorities](#)
- [WebMD: Take Control of Your Health](#)
- [Support Caregiving: Resource Guide for Family Caregivers](#)
- [Administration for Community Living: Eldercare Locator](#)
- [National PACE Association: Locate a Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly](#)
- [Best Programs for Caregiving: Dementia Care Programs](#)
- [AARP: Caregiving Resources](#)
- [Medicare Rights Center: Medicare Interactive](#)
- [Center for Medicare Advocacy: Self-Help and Advocacy Tools](#)

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.