

# Appalachia's Health Report

The national struggle to provide affordable healthcare and to address the social and environmental factors that contribute to health problems is felt acutely in the region.

By Molly Moore

It's a recurring sight at fairgrounds, camps and schools across the country. Scores of volunteers and medical professionals with the nonprofit organization Remote Area Medical erect a temporary, first-come, first-served clinic to provide free screenings and treatments, along with dental and vision care, to hundreds — even thousands — of area residents over two or three days. Patients often spend the night in nearby parking areas to ensure a spot.

But these periodic clinics are not enough. Mary Vance, executive director of Mountain Hope Good Shepherd Clinic in Sevier County, Tenn., says one of the most pressing needs is access to primary care providers who can help maintain residents' health on a regular basis.

Mountain Hope is one of Tennessee's 55 safety net clinics — a term for clinics that serve uninsured and underinsured residents. Mountain Hope in particular only treats clients who live or work in Sevier County and do not have other forms of healthcare. The clinic received 9,600 visits in 2016 alone.

The most common ailments they see in-

clude diabetes, hypertension, musculoskeletal issues such as arthritis, and oral care, according to Vance. "Bad teeth can severely affect overall health and wellbeing," she says.

As a standalone nonprofit organization, Mountain Hope is primarily supported by the community through volunteers and donations from residents, churches, local government and businesses. But while the clinic does not directly receive federal funding, changes in federal policy that reduce eligibility for programs like Medicaid would have a trickle-down effect by driving even more people to safety net clinics.

"There's so many aspects to healthcare, not just primary care and clinics like ours," Vance says. "It's dental needs, behavioral health, coordinated school health, rural hospitals, it just goes on and on and on. If you don't have adequate funding to take care of those in need, those [services] go away but the people don't go away."

During three July days in Wise County, Va., 2,249 patients sought treatment from the temporary clinic hosted by Remote Area Medi-

cal. Another six such events will be held in Central Appalachia before the end of 2017.

At the Wise County clinic, Melody Reeves volunteered at an informational booth for We Care, a local, grassroots, non-partisan organization working to achieve affordable healthcare for all. Reeves and other We Care volunteers handed cards to attendees with their legislative representatives' contact information.

"What we told them is, we are encouraging people to stand up for their right to healthcare and to urge their representatives not to push anyone off of healthcare," Reeves says.

We Care aims to educate the public and legislators about how health policies manifest in the real world. The group has also handed out lists of the types of care that private insurers are required to provide under the Affordable Care Act, and asked that people compare that list to any new policy proposals.

"You can't have coverage for all and have it all be based on profit because then the sickest people will be pushed out of the market because it's not profitable," Reeves says.



Mountain Hope Good Shepherd Clinic is one of the many nonprofit clinics that provide health services to uninsured residents. Photo courtesy of Mountain Hope

Developing a plan that works for all requires lawmakers who are aware of the issues — something that Vance says is demonstrated by a Tennessee state senator who volunteers at the Mountain Hope reception desk once per year. "He doesn't say he's a senator but greets patients and gets to see who these patients are and what their needs are when they come through the door," she says.

Reeves suggests that legislators work with constituents in their areas to develop educational forums to help the public understand the issues and receive feedback from residents.

"Even though it's complicated, if we don't make the effort to have a public conversation about this, I don't think we can solve it," she says. "It's not one side against the other — we all need healthcare." u

## Severe Black Lung Disease Makes A Deadly Resurgence

After years of decline, the crippling disease is rebounding, worse than before

By Dan Radmacher

"There is an epidemic here in Southwest Virginia, in Eastern Kentucky, in Southern West Virginia," says Ron Carson, director of the Black Lung Program at Virginia's Stone Mountain Health Services. "Miners are getting sicker and dying at a much younger age. A lot of people are going to be shocked when they see the numbers."

Carson has been working with researchers from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health to put hard numbers to this deadly resurgence, and he says they have been astounded by the number of cases Carson's clinic is seeing of progressive massive fibrosis cases, the most serious form of black lung disease.

In a report from similar research released last December, NIOSH researchers found a cluster of 60 such cases from one Eastern Kentucky radiology practice over a nine-month period — three times the number of cases the national Coal Workers' Health Surveillance Program found from 2011 to 2016.

Around the same time the NIOSH report was released, an NPR investigation by Howard Berkes aired that identified more than 1,000 cases of progressive massive fibrosis during the past decade — 10 times the number officially recognized by the federal government.

Complicated black lung is debilitating in the extreme, Carson says. "Some young miners come in to this clinic in wheelchairs because they don't have enough breath to walk," he says. "We have miners at age 28 with eight years of exposure to coal dust waiting for a lung transplant."

Progressive massive fibrosis, like other forms of black lung disease, cannot be cured and is eventually fatal. Carson says the clinic focuses on easing the miners' suffering. "We make every effort to give them a better quality of life," he says. "Therapists do pulmo-



Above, miners walk to a mobile health screening unit operated by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Photo courtesy of CDC-NIOSH. Ron Carson, at left, directs the Black Lung Program at Stone Mountain Health Services in Virginia. Photo courtesy of Stone Mountain Health Services.

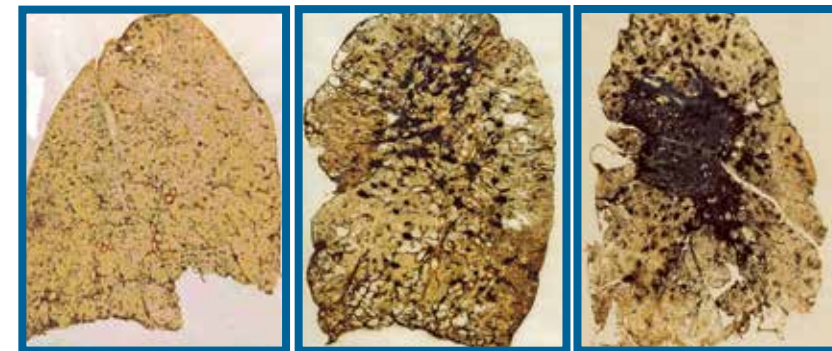
consensus that it's partially related to the thinner coal seams being mined these days in Appalachia.

"There's less coal and more rock," Hutchison says.

Carson agrees. "Some say all the easy coal is gone," he says. "There's a lot of rock and silicate now that you have to remove to get to the coal," he says. "Another thought is that the longer working hours and the type of machinery that's mining the coal produces much finer particles that respirators just don't capture."

Some wonder whether the decline of union mining is playing a role. Chuck Nelson, a retired miner with 30 years of experience, says the emphasis in non-union mines is on running coal, not worrying about coal dust or ventilation. "I know you heard how [non-union] Massey runs coal," says Nelson, who worked for Massey for seven years. "It was so dusty, I couldn't see. I had to turn the cap light off because all that dust just reflected light back in my eyes. That's the way they mined coal after Massey dissolved the union."

Carson acknowledged that the clinic sees a lot more non-union miners now, and said he has heard from miners that union mines did more to address dust retention. "I can only rely on what miners tell us," he says. "There must be some validity to it because you hear it so often: We have regulations in place, but those regulations are not being enforced."



From left to right: a basically normal human lung; a lung with coal workers' pneumoconiosis, also known as black lung disease; a lung with coal workers' pneumoconiosis and progressive massive fibrosis, also known as severe black lung disease. Photos courtesy of CDC-NIOSH

## Solving the Opioid Epidemic

### What's working and what isn't

By Kevin Ridder

Huntington, W.Va., a city located in Cabell County, has experienced a disturbing trend in the past few years. In 2015, Cabell County 911 received 944 total calls related to drug overdoses, compared to 272 calls in 2014. And in 2016, they received 1,476 calls — a 443 percent increase from 2014. The increase, according to the City of Huntington's Mayor's Office of Drug Control Policy, is due to the opioid epidemic.

People are overdosing on opioids — prescription drugs like oxycodone and illicit drugs like heroin — in cars, gas stations, libraries, homes, department stores and fast food restaurants in higher numbers than ever before. As Cabell County and other communities like Greensboro, N.C., attempt to adapt to an ever-worsening situation, they're learning that traditional ways of dealing with drug addiction are not effective.

"If you arrest somebody and put them in

jail, you are not really dealing with the dependency," Capt. Rich Culler, head of the vice/narcotics division in the Greensboro, N.C., police department, says. "You just can't arrest your way out of the problem."

The opioid crisis in America has gotten progressively worse in recent years. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, sales of prescription opioids in the United States "nearly quadrupled from 1999 to 2014," while the amount of pain Americans reported showed no significant change. The CDC also reports that "heroin-related deaths more than tripled between 2010 and 2015," with deaths related to synthetic opioids like fentanyl seeing a 173 percent increase from 2014 to 2015.

And Appalachia has seen the worst of it. According to Heroin.net, a resource that provides information to people suffering



Heroin Hearse, a nonprofit community action group in Huntington, W.Va., drives this hearse (right) to spread awareness of the opioid epidemic. One of their recent initiatives was to clean out a walking tunnel littered with used needles (above). Photos courtesy of Dwayne Woods/Heroin Hearse.

from drug addiction and connects them to treatment centers nationwide, Kentucky and West Virginia have been hit particularly hard. In Clay County, Ky., the average annual rate of opioid-related deaths per 100,000 residents from 1999-2013 was 115.1, compared to the national average of 5.6 deaths. In McDowell County, W.Va., the average death rate was 100.5 per 100,000 residents each year.

According to Kim Miller, the director of



corporate development with Prestera Center, the largest behavioral services provider in West Virginia, much of Appalachia's drug problem stems from pharmaceutical companies flooding the market with opioids in a region where injury-prone heavy industries like coal and timber were king.

She says that pharmaceutical companies saturated the state with drug salesmen

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### The Fight Against the Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast Pipelines Continues

As federal regulators continue to rubber-stamp the dangerous, inadequate plans for the Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast pipelines, we're continuing to fight back alongside residents and grassroots groups across Virginia, West Virginia, and North Carolina. Throughout the summer, our team has been driving turnout to state water quality permit hearings, challenging Virginia's inadequate review process, and sharing information about these un-

necessary projects far and wide. We've collected public comments for three federal agencies and are continuing to urge residents across North Carolina and Virginia to participate in the ongoing environmental reviews in their states. For regularly updated information on upcoming hearings, action opportunities and public comment periods, visit [appvoices.org/fracking/actions](http://appvoices.org/fracking/actions) and check our Events listings on Facebook.

Max Rooke served as our Virginia Grassroots Organizing Assistant this summer. Below is an excerpt of her reflections on this internship from our blog. Read more from our team at [appvoices.org/frontporchblog](http://appvoices.org/frontporchblog)

"The past two months have allowed me to learn skills I didn't realize were skills and hear stories from impacted landowners who I would never have met if not for this internship. ...

The most important thing I learned was how to draw people together around

a shared goal, which is the core of grassroots organizing. As I take on other challenges, I'm grateful to the wonderful Appalachian Voices team for helping me learn about how people can work together to protect their environment.

As summer ends, my time with Appalachian Voices is ending as well, but the fight against the Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast pipelines is as hot as ever. August brings five official public hearings regarding the pipelines as well as two informal meetings, and by the

end of the month, all three relevant public comment periods will have ended. Although I'll be in Hampton Roads far from the proposed construction, we're all downstream.

Come August 14, I will be driving two hours to Dinwiddie, Va., with a jar of water from the Chowan Watershed, which the Atlantic Coast Pipeline would snake through near the Virginia-North Carolina border. That night in Dinwiddie, the Virginia Depart-

ment of Environmental Quality will hold its last public hearing regarding either pipeline's impact on water quality in the state. I will join others in speaking out against the proposed pipelines and protecting our access to clean water from the mountains to my coastal marshes."



This summer, Max Rooke, left, and Lara Mack of our 9LUJLQLD WHDP VKDUHG QHZE DQG UHVRWFHV DERW WKH AKW against proposed pipelines at events across the state.

### Hello and Goodbyes

Help us in welcoming two new members to our Energy Savings team in Knoxville, Tenn!

Brianna Knisley joins as our Tennessee Outreach Coordinator, bringing her passion for rural solutions and economic and environmental equality to our work to bring energy efficiency to co-op members in the Volunteer State. Originally from Ohio, Bri has a B.A. in sustainable development from Wilmington College of Ohio.

Nina Levison joins us as our 2017-18 AmeriCorps OSMRE/VISTA associate with the Tennessee team. Nina hails from New England and holds a B.A. in environmental science and



Inset: Joe Payne. Above, from left to right: Lou Murrey, Brianna Knisley and Nina Levison.

policy from Hampshire College. Through a partnership with the organization We Own It, we are also welcoming Joe Payne, a member-owner of Powell-Valley Electric Cooperative, as our

Cooperative Energy Democracy Fellow. Joe has an MBA from Lincoln Memorial University, has worked as an energy auditor with the Tennessee Valley Authority, and is dedicated to addressing local environmental concerns.

We would also like to bid a fond farewell to Lou Murrey, who served as our 2016-17 OSMRE/VISTA in Knoxville (and is a phenomenal photographer!). We'll very much miss her enthusiasm and unwavering passion for social justice.

Lastly, join us in saying a big THANK YOU to our amazing crop of summer interns (see our staff box on the opposite page for a list of names). Our interns add so much to our organization and we are forever grateful for their dedication and service.

The Voice team would like to issue a very special farewell to Maggie Sherwood, who first joined as our Graphic Design intern in summer 2015 and soon after became the primary designer for the publication while finishing her degree at Appalachian State University. We have greatly appreciated her design talents, positive attitude and passion for our mission. This issue is sadly her last, but we wish her much success in her new position at the University of North Carolina Charlotte!



### Making a Difference in East Tennessee

#### Member Spotlight Lucy and Rich Henighan

Rich and Lucy Henighan, members of Appalachian Voices since 1999, are making a difference in rural Tennessee.

After living in Southwest Virginia, they moved to Seymour, Tenn., in July 1977. They live on five acres in an old farmhouse where they raised two daughters, several dogs and now care for a small garden and orchard.

"We grow corn, tomatoes, black eyed peas, cucumbers, beans and apples," says Lucy. "We grow a lot of what we eat."

Rich and Lucy helped start the Seymour Farmer's Market in 2000 and have watched it grow from half a dozen vendors to much more. Lucy is on the board and explains that it is not just about the food — it has also proven to have a positive and lasting impact by connecting people within the community.

She has been president of The Friends of the Seymour Library for the last seven years. Each month, the group hosts a program where they share cultural aspects of the region. They also host a popular music series where musicians provide a free live concert outside of the library.

The couple are also members of Statewide Organizing for Community Empowerment, also known as SOCM. "They focus on statewide social, economic, and environmental justice issues," says Rich. Protecting clean air and water was a natural instinct for Lucy, as her family had always cared for the environment. "I can't imagine a time when I wasn't concerned," she says.

Rich became aware of environmental issues while growing up in the 1960s. "When we lived in Southwest Virginia, we saw the devastation of the strip mining and knew people who were active in opposing it," says Rich. "Those connections were important. I got more interested in natural history after living in a rural area."

The Henighans spend their time visiting state parks and searching for wildflowers, and try to stay away from the beaten path.



They frequent Pickett State Park on the Cumberland Plateau, near the Big South Fork River area. "There are a lot of rock houses, which are overhanging caves, and the park has the largest arches east of the Mississippi River," says Rich.

Developing a sustainable economy is crucial for the future of Appalachia, according to the Henighans.

"I'm encouraged by the number of young people of the region that have taken on the notion of protecting the history, crafts," says Rich. "And the food!" Lucy chimes in. "Building on those kinds of things are important," he adds.

When it comes to reading The Appalachian Voice, Rich likes to read natural history articles and stories about places to hike or boat where he has never been. Lucy said that reading the newspaper is encouraging and gives her a broader perspective.

The Henighans feel that Appalachia should be protected because it is unique. "There is something special about the mountains. The power of it is hard to put in words," says Rich.

"If you love nature, you don't need any other reason to protect it," he says.

### NC Counties Pass Resolutions in Favor of Energy Efficiency

In June, the Buncombe County, N.C., Board of Commissioners passed a resolution encouraging its local electric provider, French Broad Electric Membership Corp., to develop a tariffed on-bill financing program that would help the co-op's members afford home energy efficiency improvements.

Our Energy Savings team has been advocating for the Pay As You Save (PAYS) model of tariffed on-bill financing in Western North Carolina and East Tennessee since 2014, with the goal of reducing energy waste and improving comfort for people living in the many older and inefficient homes in our region.

Buncombe County follows Mitchell and Yancey counties in passing resolutions to support the co-op's



Buncombe County Board of Commissioners

development of this innovative program. If implemented, the program stands to help thousands of French Broad EMC members pay their energy bills and afford improvements to their homes that may otherwise be difficult to finance.

To learn more or get involved in our energy efficiency campaign, visit [appvoices.org/energysavings](http://appvoices.org/energysavings)



Appalachian Voices is committed to protecting the land, air and water of the central and southern Appalachian region. Our mission is to empower people to defend our regions rich natural and cultural heritage by providing them with tools and strategies for successful grassroots campaigns.

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*This detail from "Grasshopper Among the Mushrooms" by Linda Sipress Goodwin was captured in Cades Cove, Tenn., within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The image was a finalist in the Flora and Fauna category of the 14th Annual Appalachian Mountain Photography Competition. Submissions for the 15th annual competition are due by 5 p.m. on Nov. 17, 2017. Visit [appmntnphotocomp.org](http://appmntnphotocomp.org) for details.*

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